

**Textual Criticism
Of the Old Testament:
Principles and Practice**

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גִּבּוֹר עֲלֵינוּ

חֲסִדוֹ

וְאַמֶּת־יְהוָה

לְעוֹלָם

הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה:

Psalm 117:2

This is a part of one chapter of *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, pages 91-106. It is a fairly technical study, requiring the use of several languages. But anyone can scan the article to appreciate Luther's key role in this area of scholarship. It is a sample of one of the technical academic studies on wartburgproject.org.

EARLY LUTHERAN VIEWS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

A prerequisite for the renewal of real textual criticism of the Old Testament was, of course, a renewed knowledge of the Hebrew text. A Psalter in Hebrew had been printed at Bologna, Italy already in 1477. Further installments came out between 1482 and 1486, and the entire Hebrew Old Testament was published at Soncino,¹ Italy in 1488, well before the printing of the first New Testaments. A great advance in the form of the printed Hebrew text was made with the two editions of *Biblia Rabbinica* (Hebrew = *Mikraot Gedolot*) published at Venice by the print house of Daniel Bomberg, a wealthy Christian publisher from Antwerp. The first, a folio² edition of the entire Bible, which included the leading rabbinic commentaries around its margins, came off the press in 1516-17. Pope Leo's imprimatur was sought and granted. To appeal to Jewish customers Bomberg soon published a quarto edition without any identification of the editor, the sponsor, or the papal endorsement. Six years later in 1524, his second Rabbinic Bible appeared. This time Bomberg emphasized that his printers were pious Jews, as was his scholarly editor, Jacob ben Hayyim (aka, ben Chayyim).³ The Ben Hayyim/Bomberg second edition (B, RB₂), produced by a Christian publisher, Daniel Bomberg, and a Jewish editor, Jacob ben Hayyim, who subsequently converted to Christianity, remained the standard printed edition of the Masoretic Text for 400 years. The second Bomberg Bible marked a major advance in the quality of the Hebrew text since full pointing and the masora of Ben Asher were included, and the text was corrected from the masora. In time, more than two hundred Hebrew books including the Talmud came off the Bomberg press, volumes of scholarly merit and typographical excellence. The house of Bomberg is certainly one of the more intriguing stories of Bible publishing.

¹ A source of confusion is the fact that Soncino is the name both of a city in Italy and of the Jewish family that had a print shop there. Adding to the confusion is that fact that the Soncino family printing shop moved around to other towns in Italy, including Brescia and Naples.

² A folio is 12x15 inches. A quarto 9 ½ x12 inches. An octavo 6x9 inches.

³ There has been much speculation as to why Bomberg, a wealthy Christian originally from Antwerp, specialized in the publication of Jewish books, surpassing even the great Hebrew publisher Gershom Soncino. Bomberg's motives do not seem to have been missionary. It has been suggested that he wanted to read the Old Testament in the original Hebrew, an activity that might have raised the Inquisition's suspicions of crypto-Lutheran tendencies on his part if it was undertaken for non-profit reasons. The papal imprimatur of the first edition casts doubt on this explanation. The economic interest of appealing to two markets, first Christian humanists, then Jews, seems to be the simpler explanation.

Another tool useful for textual criticism that began to appear at this time were polyglot Bibles, which compared versions of the Bible in different languages. The first great polyglot, the *Complutensian Polyglott* (1513-1520), was a Catholic work produced in Alcalá, Spain, by Cardinal Ximenes, who was the priest confessor of Isabella of Aragon and a fierce opponent of vernacular translations. The Complutensian⁴ text included the Hebrew Old Testament, the Targum of Onkelos on the Pentateuch, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate, plus Latin translations of both the Targum and the Septuagint. This was the first printed Septuagint, but its value was diminished by the editors' tampering with the Greek text to make it agree more closely with the Vulgate. Numerous other polyglots appeared in the following century and a half: the eight-volume Antwerp Polyglot, funded by Philip II of Spain; the Paris Polyglot, published in ten volumes between 1629 and 1645; and four Protestant polyglots: the Heidelberg Polyglotta sanctandreae, the Hamburg Polyglot, the Nürnberg Polyglot by Elias Hutter, and the great London Polyglot prepared by an array of scholarly stars including John Lightfoot and James Ussher.⁵ A point of departure for these polyglots was the replacement or correction of the Vulgate with another Latin version and the inclusion of Luther's German Bibles and other vernacular versions.

A side effect of the publication of the London Polyglot was that it helped set off the first round of "textual criticism wars" in the Protestant church. In his prolegomena to the edition, Brian Walton, lead editor of the project, made a case for the necessity of textual criticism of the biblical text. His view was attacked by John Owen in *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew Text of the Scriptures, with Considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the late "Biblia Polyglotta"*. Owen suggested that Walton dishonored Scripture and gave aid and comfort to skeptics by his attempts to correct the biblical text. Walton defended textual criticism in *The Considerator Considered* (1659). The debate was undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that Walton belonged to the bishops' party and Owen belonged to the non-conformists. Both men had a valid point. Walton aimed to show the validity of textual criticism of the Old Testament. Owen was trying to guard against the Catholic misuse of this fact to discredit Scripture (in the same way that critics today allege "thousands of errors" in the manuscripts to cast doubt on the Bible). Both men were guilty of overstatement and could have conducted the dispute in a more edifying manner. Some of the points in this battle were echoed in the Lutheran discussion of textual criticism which is summarized below.

Luther

Although Luther did little systematic work in Old Testament textual criticism, he may justly be regarded as a pioneer (maybe the pioneer) of Old Testament textual criticism among Christian translators. He understood the issues and the proper procedures quite clearly, even though he had very limited textual resources to work with (largely the Vulgate and LXX) compared to the many resources available to textual scholars today, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Samaritan Pentateuch.

⁴ So called from Complutum, the Latin name of Alcalá.

⁵ Brian Walton's polyglot and the reaction to it deserve a study of their own. The book itself came out in six great folios from 1654 to 1657. See more information under Walton in the bibliography.

It appears that for the early editions of the Old Testament Luther used the small-format Soncino Bible printed at Brescia in 1494. He apparently also used the 1516-1517 Bomberg Rabbinic Bible. This gave him access to the Targum and Jewish commentators. He also used the Vulgate, an early German translation of the Vulgate, and Santes Pagnini's new Latin translation. His Septuagint was probably the Complutensian version or the Venice Septuagint of 1518. He also used the works of other contemporary scholars.⁶

After completing the first edition of his New Testament during his stay at the Wartburg, Luther very quickly began work on the Old Testament. The Pentateuch appeared already in 1523. Joshua-Esther followed in 1524, and Job-Ecclesiastes appeared in the same year. Major distractions such as the Peasants War, the Saxon Visitation, the Sacramentarian Controversy, preparing catechisms and liturgies, and illnesses delayed the project, and the major and minor prophets did not appear till 1532, thus completing the first Lutheran edition of the Old Testament (provisional editions of some of the prophets had appeared in the interim). The Apocrypha was ready by 1534. Luther about revising and improving his translations. By 1531 he was already on his third revision of Psalms. As he worked on the revisions Luther became more aware of textual issues. The most detailed presentation of his views and his practice of textual criticism are set forth in his one comprehensive study of a textual problem.

This pioneering study was a comparison of 2 Samuel 23:8 and 1 Chronicles 11:11, which he presented in a letter to George Rörer, an editor/corrector of Luther's German Bible, written in 1540. This study enabled him to correct the Vulgate and to provide a solid foundation for his German translation. It also provides an example of Luther's principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture since, in this case, the historical accounts of David's life and the clearer text in 1 Chronicles 11:11 gave Luther considerable help in unraveling the errors in the more obscure Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 23:8. Luther had more than conjecture to go on when he emended the Hebrew text. In his letter Luther asks Rörer to share his "divinations" on the text with Matthew Aurogallus (Goldhahn), who was Luther's go-to guy in the Wittenberg study group when questions about the Old Testament text were involved. Since the two parallel texts contradict each other, Luther starts with the assumption that one of them has become corrupted in transmission. Luther starts with parallel Latin translations to identify the issues.

2 Rg 23 (i.e. 2 Sa)

Haec sint nomina fortium David
Yoseb Basebeth Thachmoni
caput inter tres.
Ipse Adino Haezniv
super octigentos caesos vice una

1 Par. 11

Hic est numerus fortium David
Yasebeam filius Hazmoni
caput inter triginta.
Ipse leuauit hastam suam
super trecentos caesos vice una

2 Sa 23

These are the names of David's mighty men:
Yoseb Basebeth the Thachmonite,
the head among three.
This is Adino the Eznite
over 800 killed at one time

1 Chr 11

This is the number of David's mighty men:
Yasebeam son of Hachmon,
The head among thirty.
He raised his spear
over 300 killed at one time,

⁶ For a summary see Barthelemy, *SITTOTOT*, Volume 3, p. 162-169 and the introductions to Luther, WA, DB 11 2.

Luther asked Aurogallos to compare the two texts in unpointed Hebrew in order to figure out what had gone wrong during the process of copying the text. (Luther had already done this and had pretty much figured out the solution by himself.) If Aurogallus after his study agreed with Luther's solution, Röer is to get third and fourth opinions from the Hebraists Bernhard Cigler (Ziegler) of Leipzig and Johann Fuerster (Forster) of Tübingen. Luther admits that the ancient versions, such as the Septuagint and Vulgate renderings of 2 Samuel 23, support the same apparently erroneous reading as the Hebrew text, but the antiquity of the error did not deter Luther from trying to fix the Hebrew text since "it is nothing new to copy disfigured and badly written letters." The error apparently took place very early in the transmission of the Hebrew text, before the Septuagint and the Vulgate branched off from it. In his efforts to unravel this very difficult text Luther looked for sight errors, transpositions, and faulty word division as possible sources and explanations of the corruption of the text since various Hebrew manuscripts and the versions offered him little help in fixing the problem. Luther mentions various potential causes of copying errors in Hebrew texts, such as the confusion of ד , ר , ו , ה . In other words, Luther understood the basic mechanics of textual transmission. Luther concluded that the Samuel text was badly damaged very early in its transmission and that the Chronicles text was essentially correct, so he made this the basis of his correction.⁷

Luther incorporated the results of his textual study into his translation of 2 Samuel 23:8 in the Latin and German versions which he was editing. These translations, thus, were based on his correction of the Hebrew text, rather than on a rendering of the Hebrew text as it stands. The translation of 2 Samuel 23:8 was essentially the same in Latin and German. In the later printed editions of the *Lutherbibel* it is:

Dies sind die Namen der Helden Davids: Jasobeam, der Sohn Hachmonis, ein Vornehmster unter den Rittern; er hob seinen Spieß auf und schlug achthundert auf einmal.

The English equivalent is:

These are the names of the mighty men of David, Yasbeam the son of Hachmon, leader among the knights, who lifted up his spear and killed 800 at once.

Compare this with the rendering with which he had started:

These are the names of the mighty men of David: Yoseb Basebeth the Thachmonite leader among three, he was Adino the Eznite, against 800 killed at once.

His two main corrections were to the first and second names (Yoseb Basebeth and Adino—the second of which was actually not a name). He did not correct the number 800 to agree with the 300 in Chronicles. The question whether Jasobeam was head of three or thirty is resolved by

⁷The letter is preserved in Flacius Illyricus, *Regulae et tractatus de sermone sacrarum litterarum*, Magdeburg, 1551, p. 161 and WA, Br 9, p. 166-167, Letter 3508. See Barthelemy, *SITTOTOT*, p. 10-11 for a translation. See the *Lutheran Scholar*, January 1947 for a discussion.

saying that he was the head of the knights.⁸ Compare Luther's efforts with those of other translators who followed.

KJV These [be] the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same [was] Adino the Eznite: [he lifted up his spear] against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time.

This translation does not correct the text in Samuel but conflates it with Chronicles.

NIV These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

This translation does not repair the first name as Luther did. It repairs the second name.

Luther thus made significant changes to the text of 2 Samuel 23:8, changes that go beyond those made in many recent translations. Luther was interested not only in the *buchstäbliche Sinn* of a passage but also with the correct *Buchstabe*. However, he sometimes marked changes that he had made to the text by preserving the MT reading in a marginal note in his translation. Notes on this particular textual change were included in the German Bible of 1545 as a marginal gloss. Notes to this effect are already included in Luther's notations to his first version of the Old Testament in 1528.⁹

Luther also makes occasional comments about the quality of the Hebrew text in his biblical commentaries, for example, in his comments on Genesis 36 and 47. In his comments on Genesis 36 he argues for the identity of the biblical Job and the Jobab mentioned in Genesis 36, in spite of the fact that in Hebrew the name Job begins with *aleph* and Jobab begins with a *yod*. He bases his argument on a supposed common interchange of *yod* and *aleph* in Hebrew texts. Luther makes a number of critical comments about the lack of quality in the copying of the Hebrew Bible and about the ambiguity of the pointing of the present text, which he correctly does not regard as part of the original form of the text.¹⁰

A key principle of Luther's approach to the text was to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Another was to give precedence to the interpretation or reading that pointed to Christ. This is reflected in directions he gave to his Hebrew consultants Ziegler and Forster:

Whenever equivocal words or constructions occur, that option that agrees with the New Testament must be taken (without, however, doing injustice to the grammar). Sometimes a sentence seems to be in conflict with the whole message of the Bible. So the rabbis have greatly corrupted all the Scriptures with their glosses and relate everything only to the coming of the Messiah, that is, to his supplying us with food and drink and to his dying afterwards. This is rubbish. Accordingly we simply throw it

⁸ "Knights" is apparently based on the reading הַשְּׁלִישִׁים . In some of the editions in his own lifetime of

Luther retains the reading "three." See the study in chapter 5 for more discussion of the issues.

⁹ *Weimarer Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel* 1, p. 137. See also DB 3, p. 414-415 for the 1545 gloss.

¹⁰ *American Edition*, Vol 6, p. 307; Vol 8, p. 141-142; Vol 35, p. 213.

out, and we have taken many sentences like this from Forster. When he said, “Oh, the rabbis interpret it this way,” I said, “Could your grammar and points allow you to render the sentence so that it agrees with the New Testament?” He answered, “Yes.” I said, “Then take it that way.”¹¹

A key example of this principle is provided by Psalm 8. Verses 4-6 are the key verses of this psalm, which are recognized by the letter to the Hebrews and by traditional Lutheran interpretation as an important prophecy of Christ. The minutes of the committee assembled by Luther to revise his translation of Psalms indicate Luther’s understanding of this psalm.

The whole psalm is a prophecy concerning Christ. It is not a general statement about creation, as the Jews foolishly claim. It speaks about the gospel and about the subject and object of the gospel: Christ has suffered and has been raised to life. The Epistle to the Hebrews alleges that it is wholly or directly (*prorsus*) about Christ.¹²

Luther is so strongly influenced by the New Testament portrait of Christ that he sees the psalm almost entirely in terms of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation. Luther believed that the psalms “predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:11). This is reflected most strongly in his interpretation of verse 5. The Hebrew says, “You made him lack little from *elohim*.” There are several renderings of the verse which can fit the dictionary meanings of *elohim*. During Jesus’ state of humiliation God “made him a little lower than the heavenly beings”, or “a little lower than the angels,”¹³ or “a little lower than God,” or “you made him lack apart from God for a while”. The angels ministered to Jesus during his temptation and at Gethsemane. In spite of this fact and the clear reference to angels in the LXX and in the New Testament, Luther sees the passage in terms of the relationship of Christ and his Father during Jesus’ humiliation. In his first efforts at translation from the 1520’s, the Messianic focus is most striking. In verse 5 he has:

Was ist [diser] mensch das du seyn gedenkest.¹⁴

The *dieser*, “this man,” which was dropped in later revisions, points very directly to Christ. In verse 6 Luther’s translation points clearly to Jesus’ humiliation.

Du wirst yhn eyn wenig lassen mangeln an Gott.
“You let him lack a little from God.”

In the 1531 and 1545 revisions of Psalms he has:

Du wirst in lassen eine kleine zeit von Gott verlassen sein.
“You made him be forsaken for a little time by God.”

Other interpretations that Luther considered during his revision work were “you will be left uncomforted and forsaken for a while” and “he will have no God for a while.”¹⁵ What is striking

¹¹ See LW AE, 54, p. 446. WA TR 5, p218. No. 5533.

¹² *Revisionsprotokolle* in WA, DB3, p. XXXIV. Translation jb. Another version is on p. 12 of WA, DB3.

¹³ This use of *elohim* as a name for angels would, however, be very unusual. Angels are usually called “sons of God” not “gods”.

¹⁴ Creative spelling and capitalization is the rule in the early publications of Luther’s works, and it will in most cases be retained in this work.

¹⁵ WA, DB3, p. xxxiv. Translation jb. WA, DB 3, p. 12. DB 10 1, 122-123.

here is that although Luther is usually strongly drawn to the New Testament use of Old Testament texts, in this case he stays with “God” not “angels” because this more strongly makes the connection with Jesus’ humiliation. In his 1529 revision of the Vulgate, however, he retains “angels”: *minuisti paulominus ab angelis*, but he has the very interesting marginal note, *derelictum eum fecisti a deo et angelis*, “apart from God and angels.”¹⁶ The two approaches to the text have been conflated in the note. This seems to be a technique which Luther uses sometimes when he must choose between two variants. Though this specific problem is more an issue of translation than text, it is, nonetheless, very instructive of the way in which Luther’s theology influenced his approach to textual issues.

The next example, Psalm 22:16/17, involves similar interpretive issues, but this time it is specifically textual.¹⁷ In speaking of the Messiah’s suffering the MT says,

כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרָעִים הִקִּיפוּנִי כְּאַרְיֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי:
 For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me,
 like a lion my hands and my feet.

The MT is almost alone in this reading. This is not even the unanimous reading of the Hebrew manuscripts. The readings כָּרַו and כָּאָרוּ, found in a few Hebrew manuscripts including one of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Nahal Hever, are 3rd plural perfects apparently from the verbal root כָּאָר or כָּוַר. The Lutherans were aware of Hebrew manuscripts which had this reading as a verb. Such a manuscript was later in the possession of the Jena library. The versions known to Luther uniformly follow the reading as a verb, though they show some uncertainty about its meaning. The Septuagint reading ὤρυσξαν means “they pierce” or “they dig.” The Vulgate has *foderunt* (they dig). Jerome supports the reading as a verb in his *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos*, which reads *vinxerunt* (they bind). An alternate reading in Jerome’s *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* is *fixerunt* (they fasten [to the cross]). What did Luther do with this evidence? In his first attempts in the 1520s he has “*sie haben meyne hende und fusse durchgraben*”. The only changes in subsequent editions are spelling and capitalization.¹⁸ His Latin version of 1529 retains the Vulgate’s *foderunt* (they dig).¹⁹ In these versions Luther makes no comment on the variant, but he does record the variant *sicut leo* on the margin of one of his psalters. In his expositions of Psalms from 1521 and 1530 Luther sharply attacks the Jews for corrupting the text. “The Jews have badly corrupted this and relying on the strength of the letters they do not say ‘dig’ but ‘like a lion, my hands and my feet’”. This however is an obvious calumny. It says ‘dig’.²⁰ Luther offers a thorough discussion of the linguistic arguments against taking כָּאָר as a verb. He argues, however, that since the pointing of the text is a relatively recent addition to the text, the pointing cannot be decisive. For Luther the context of Scripture which points to Christ as the crucified Savior is the decisive factor in determining the correct reading and its significance.²¹ Though we

¹⁶ DB 10 2, p. 196.

¹⁷ See the more detailed study of the textual issues and the theological significance of this variant in chapter 5, p. 162t. Here we are interested only in Luther’s approach to the issue.

¹⁸ DB 10 1, p. 166-167.

¹⁹ DB 10 2, p. 204.

²⁰ DB 10 2, p. 333-334. DB at this point has an extensive note on the variants available to Luther and points to Luther’s polemical comments on the variant elsewhere in his writings.

²¹ *Luthers Psalmen Auslegung* assembled and edited by C. G. Eberle, Stuttgart, 1873, Vol 1, p. 392-394.

may disagree with the MT's reading here, there is little evidence to support the claim that the Jews deliberately tried to corrupt the text.²² Luther seems to be overly suspicious of the Jews' handling of the text. It was their interpretation of the text, not their stewardship of the text, which was the problem.

A final example is found in Luther's comments on Isaiah 9:5. Rabbinic commentators such as Rashi interpreted the verse: the Wonderful, Counselor, God, Hero, eternal God will call the name of the Messiah "Prince of Peace." Luther responds, "We reject their points and their constructions, and we read the text as we read it [in my 1527-28 Isaiah course], because the grammar of the letters readily allows this meaning, so that we read אֲרֹאָרָא (it will be called) instead of אֲרֹאָרָא (he will call) and all the names can remain in the nominative."²³ Luther here is following the reading of the Vulgate (*vocabitur*) rather than the pointing of the Masoretic text. The Septuagint is similar (καλεῖται). There is, however, no real problem with either reading since the qal with an impersonal subject may be the equivalent of the passive. Luther is, however, correct that the niph'al does not allow the rabbinic interpretation whereas the qal does.

The following additional examples of Luther's work as a textual critic have been gathered from the minutes (protocols) of his translation revision committee, from the various printed editions of Luther's Bible, and from his own handwritten notes in his Latin and German Bibles. The main written sources for a study of Luther as a textual critic are the materials collected in *Weimarer Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel*, Volumes 1-12. These volumes provide extensive documentation of Luther's reflection on the Hebrew text and of his use of textual variants in his successive editions of the Old Testament. These volumes also have useful introductory articles which summarize the origin and the nature of the resources contained in these twelve volumes.

Volumes 1 and 2 include Luther's notations to his first edition of the Old Testament.

Volumes 3 and 4 include notes which Luther entered into his personal Bibles and the minutes (protocols) of his "Sanhedrin," the committee that assisted him in the revisions of his Bibles. These two volumes are the primary source of the examples below.

Volume 5 is Luther's revised Vulgate.

Volumes 6 and 7 are printed texts of various editions of the New Testament with notations.

Volumes 8 through 12, bound as six volumes, enumerated as eight, are printed texts of various editions of the German Old Testament with notations.²⁴

Although these documents deal primarily with Luther's attempts to improve the quality of his German translation, they can also be mined for examples of Luther's theory and practice of textual criticism. There are very many instances in which the revised editions of his translation are adjusted away from the readings and renderings of the Vulgate toward a more literal rendering of the Hebrew. We will not cite these changes to any degree since we are interested for the most part in cases in which Luther and his colleagues were interacting with variants in the

²² See further discussion at pages 83t and 88t.

²³ See WA 31 2, p. 71. WA 53, 646-647. *Von Shem Hamphoras*.

²⁴ For a fuller listing of the materials in German see the bibliography, p. 201t.

Hebrew text or in the presumed Hebrew *Vorlage*²⁵ of the Septuagint and Vulgate. There are also many notes which record instances in which a variant or revision of the translation was discussed by the committee, but Luther's old reading was retained. We will not make note of these unless they involve a discussion of special significance. What follows is an attempt to collect a small but representative sample of textual issues which Luther dealt with. I have attempted to group them by categories, but many passages fit into more than one category. In the handwritten materials not all the entries are in Luther's own handwriting, but for our purposes here I will not try to sort them out unless there is specific attribution of the comment to another member of the Sanhedrin.

In a number of cases Luther specifically states that he thinks the Hebrew text is wrong.

In Luther's notations on 1 Kings 16 three notes call attention to perceived errors in the text.²⁶ The text of 1 Kings 16:15 says, "In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah." Luther's note says that the text is false. The next verse, 1 Kings 16:16, says that Omri became king at this time, the twenty-seventh year of Asa. 1 Kings 16:23 says, "In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for twelve years; six years he reigned in Tirzah." A note says that the text is false. 1 Kings 16:29 says, "In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel." Again a note says that the text is false. Luther and his colleagues noticed the mathematical discrepancies in the calculations of the kings' reigns and thought that textual errors were involved. They did not recognize the principles of coregencies and different methods of reckoning regnal years which were first thoroughly explained by Thiele in the mid-20th century.²⁷ Luther's observations do not seem well grounded in this case, but they do illustrate one of his key principles. He assumes that apparent errors in Scripture are due to the copyists, and he will attempt to use parallel texts to correct them.

In a note on 1 Kings 5:1, "Solomon also had 70,000 burden-bearers and 80,000 stonecutters," the numbers are questioned with a note "*forte Iudei corruerunt textum*".²⁸ Nothing in the text

²⁵The *vorlage* is the text or the texts which "lay before" a translator of the Bible. In some cases we may know what that text is. Luther used versions of the Textus Receptus and the Masoretic Text as the basis for his German Bible, but he did not always follow them. At times he followed readings from the Septuagint or Vulgate. So it would be something of an oversimplification to call the MT the *vorlage* of Luther's Old Testament. It is even more problematic to identify the *vorlage* of the ancient Greek versions of the Old Testament which play a prominent role in the textual criticism of the Old Testament. In no case do we have direct knowledge of any of the Hebrew manuscripts which the LXX translators used. In that sense, the *vorlage* of the Septuagint is not extant and is to a considerable degree unknowable. Attempts are made to reconstruct the LXX *vorlage* by retro-translation from Greek to Hebrew. In some cases readings in the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Samaritan Pentateuch may support some of these reconstructions. Such reconstructions are often used with great confidence to establish the original text of the Hebrew Bible, but this reconstructed *vorlage* may be quite uncertain due to inability to distinguish differences due to different readings in different Hebrew manuscripts from those differences due to the translation technique.

²⁶ DB 1, p. 181-182.

²⁷ See Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, p. 62-64.

²⁸ DB 3, p. 419, line 11.

or the parallels justifies this note. It seems to flow from Luther's strong suspicion of the Jews' stewardship of the text.²⁹

Luther was aware of the *kethiv* and *qere* variants and at times made use of the *qere*.

In Proverbs 17:21 Luther switched from the *kethiv* (רָקִי) (“cool in spirit”), which is followed by LXX, to the *qere* (רָקִי) (“rich in spirit”) which is followed by the Vulgate.³⁰

In Ezekiel 16:43 the *kethiv* אֲנִי־זָכֵר is first singular, “I remember”. The *qere* אַתְּ־זָכֵר is second singular feminine, “you [Israel] remember”. Luther follows the *qere*. Later in the same verse the same switch of persons occurs again with LXX and Q having second person feminine singular (ἐποίησας), and Vg and K having first person singular (*feci*). Here Luther switched from the second singular Q in 1532 to the first person K in 1545. In his final version of 1545 he rendered: “*Darum daß du nicht gedacht hast (Q) an die Zeit deiner Jugend, sondern mich mit diesem allem gereizt, darum will ich auch dir all dein Tun auf den Kopf legen, spricht der HERR HERR, wiewohl ich damit nicht getan habe (K) nach dem Laster in deinen Greueln.*” NIV says: Because you did not remember (Q) the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add (Q) lewdness to all your other detestable practices?³¹

In Ezekiel 25:7 בָּנִי ”food” “*Speise*” is the *kethiv*, and בָּנִי ”booty” “*Beute*” is the *qere*. Luther switched to the *qere* in 1545.³²

Luther was well aware of the fact that variants were accidentally created by the similar appearance of certain letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

In Exodus 17:16 Luther apparently initially read the problematic word אֶת־כַּף as אֶת־כַּף so that it would correspond to the expression “the Lord is my banner” which occurs in verse 15. The Hebrew text of verse 16 has אֶת־כַּף עַל־כַּף יָהּ (“for a hand on the throne of Yah”). If the word אֶת־כַּף actually is “throne” (“throne” is usually spelled אֶת־כַּף), the verse would mean that Moses' hand was extended to the throne of God. The LXX read the same letters, אֶת־כַּף, but it apparently understood them as a verbal adjective and read “with a secret hand.” Many contemporary scholars have assumed with Luther that אֶת־כַּף should be emended to אֶת־כַּף to correspond to the name of the Lord in the previous verse. This phrase would then mean, “My hand on the banner of Yah.” This emendation was apparently Luther's first inclination, but he did not stick with this in his last revision of 1545 which has “by the throne of the Lord” (*bei dem Stuhl des HERRN*).³³

In Jeremiah 16:7 MT has אֲלֵהֶם ”to them”. LXX an

²⁹ See for example, LW AE 54, p. 446; LW AE 15, p. 268-270; LW AE 47, p. 191-192; WA 53, p. 646-647 (*Shem Hamphoras*). See the summary in Barthelemy, *SITTOTOT*, p. 7-10.

³⁰ DB 4, p. 15, note 3. Compare DB 10 2, p. 58-59, both have *theur*, *rich*.

³¹ DB 4, p. 141, note 6. DB 11, p. 452-453.

³² DB4, p. 151, note 5. DB 11, p. 488-489.

³³ DB 3, p. 250, note 1.

Vg seem to have read לֶחֶם “bread” in addition to לָהֶם “to them” (ἄρτος ἐν πένθει αὐτῶν *inter eos lugenti panem*). In 1532 Luther has “*man wird auch nicht brod austeilen*”. In 1545 Luther has “*man wird auch nicht unter sie austeilen*” in the main text and “*Brot / speise / oder der gleichen*” in a marginal note.³⁴

In Jeremiah 48:6 recent translations render כְּעֵרֹד as “like a bush” (NIV and HCSB have the city name Aroer as a footnote). LXX has ὠσπερ ὄνος ἄγριος=like a wild donkey=כְּעֵרֹד, reading one *resh* as a *dalet*. Vg has *quasi myricæ*=like tamarisk or juniper=כְּעֵרֹד, with a different pointing and no vowel letter. In his first edition (*Herde inn der Wüsten*) Luther may have misread the word as a form of רעה (this is what the WA note says), or perhaps he may have mis-written *Herde* for *Heide* (that seems more likely to me).³⁵

In Ezekiel 1:7, “The bottoms of their feet were like the bottoms of a calf’s feet.” LXX has the strange reading “their feet were winged.” Luther changed from “calf” (*ochsen*) (עֲגֹל) in 1532 to “round” (*runde*) (עֲגֹל) in 1545. The 1545 version has a marginal note explaining that Luther had adopted the reading “round” because round feet allowed the creatures to go in any direction without turning.³⁶ This is an interesting suggestion, but this change of direction is the function of the wheels of the chariot not the feet of the cherubim.

In Psalm 54:3/5 in his later revision Luther prefers the reading of Targum and some manuscripts יְדִי (the proud, *stoltze*) to the reading of MT יְרִי (strangers, *fremde*), which he had followed in his original translation.³⁷

In Ezekiel 18:17 Hebrew and the Vulgate say “he keeps his hands from the oppressed” (מִצַּעֲרֵי). Luther followed this in 1532 (*den elenden*). LXX says “he keeps his hand from evil” (ἀπ’ ἀδικίας) (reflecting a reading of מִצַּעֲרֵי according to BHS, or better in my opinion, from מִצַּעֲרֵי which is what Luther suggests). *Luther Bibel 1545* has “*der seine Hand vom Unrechten kehrt*.”³⁸

In Genesis 45:7 Luther in his first edition seems to read פליאה ”wonder” instead of פליטה “delivery” but this may just be free translation.³⁹

In 2 Kings 5:24 Luther changes from his original translation of עפל as “hill” or “citadel” (*Hügel*) to *gen Ophel*, apparently intended as a place name. This seemingly follows LXX and Vg in reading the text as if the word were derived from אפל, meaning “darkness”. At this point of his notes Luther has an extensive comment on different meanings of עפל.⁴⁰

³⁴ DB 11, p. 246, 247.

³⁵ DB 4, p. 121, note 1. DB 11, p. 346, 347.

³⁶ DB 4, p. 130, note 5. DB 11, p. 410, 411.

³⁷ DB 3, p. 56 note 5. DB 10 1, p. 273-274.

³⁸ DB 11, p. 460-461.

³⁹ DB 3, p. 221, note 2.

⁴⁰ DB 3, p. 436, notes 1 and 2.

In 1 Chronicles 4:22 Luther switched to reading שׁבִי as a personal name, “Jashubi”, instead of reading it as a form of the verb יָשַׁב or שׁוּב (יָשַׁבוּ) as LXX and Vg did, and as Luther himself had done in his first edition. The Hebrew text reads:

אַשְׁרֵי־בָּעֵלּוּ לְמוֹאָב וַיֵּשְׁבִי לָהֶם וְהַדְּבָרִים עֲתִיקִים:

Luther 1545: *die Hausväter worden in Moab / und Jasubi zu Lahem / wie die alte rede lautet.*

He earlier had translated the last words as a proper name, *Hadebarin Athtikim* as LXX does.⁴¹

NIV has: who ruled in Moab and Jashubi Lehem. (These records are from ancient times.)

ESV has: who ruled in Moab and returned to Lehem (now the records are ancient).

HCSB has: who married Moabites and returned to Lehem. These names are from ancient records.

Luther believed (correctly) that the vowel pointing in the Hebrew manuscripts was not a part of the original text. He felt a considerable degree of freedom to repoint the Hebrew text. At times Luther’s revisions reflect a change of the pointing of the Hebrew from that of MT.

In Proverbs 6:16 “these six the Lord hates” (שֵׁשׁ־הַגְּנָה שֹׂנְאָה יְהוָה) Luther in 1524 read הַגְּנָה “behold” “*sihe*” instead of הַגְּנָה “these” “*diese*” as he does in 1545. He may have been influenced by LXX which does not have the number “six”, but reads “he rejoices in everything the Lord hates.”⁴²

In Isaiah 14:21 Luther switched from “enemies” (עֲרֵי LXX) in his 1528 version to “cities” (עִירֵי Vg) in 1545.⁴³ This, of course, could be classified either as a variant of pointing or as a difference of letters since pointing and vowel letters are linked together.

In 1Kings 8:62 Luther switched from “with him” (עִמּוֹ) to “his people” (עַמּוֹ).⁴⁴

In Genesis 29:1, “Jacob lifted up his feet,” Luther first read as a singular “foot” (רַגְלוֹ). Luther switched to a plural (רַגְלָיו) which is the only reading in BHS.⁴⁵

In Deuteronomy 34:7 there is uncertainty between whether to read “jaw” לְחִי (Vg “teeth”) or לֶחַי “juice” or “vigor”. Luther switched from the reading of Vg and LXX (לְחִי) to the reading of the Hebrew (לֶחַי).⁴⁶

In Genesis 38:12 Luther debates whether Hirah was Judah’s friend (רַעְיָהוּ) or his shepherd (רוֹעֵהוּ). Luther preferred “shepherd”, but he noted the objections of the Hebraists to his reading

⁴¹ DB 3, p. 448, note 2, lines 25-28. Though there are a lot of complications here, this is basically a *vav / yod* variant.

⁴² DB 4, p. 5, note 7. DB 10 2, p. 22-23.

⁴³ DB 11, p. 60-61.

⁴⁴ DB 3, p. 422.

⁴⁵ DB 3, p. 197, note 3.

⁴⁶ DB 3, p. 337, note 2.

רוּעָהוּ and yielded, though he did not really seem to have been convinced.⁴⁷ The Hebrew text offers no support to Luther, but LXX and Targum do (BHS has no note on this). This seems to be a case in which Luther follow LXX against the Hebrew.

In Genesis 26:12 instead of MT's "one-hundred-fold" (מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים) Luther reads מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים *gersten hundertfeltig*, "barley a hundredfold" (= LXX ἑκατοστεύουσας κριθῆν). Vulgate agrees with MT (*centuplum* = hundredfold).⁴⁸

In Isaiah 25:8, where the Hebrew has an active verb, בְּלַע הַמָּוֶת לְנֶצַח, (he will swallow death forever or in victory) Luther in 1528 read בלע as a passive verb בְּלָע (der tod wird verschlungen warden, "death will be swallowed up") in agreement with Paul's rendering in 1 Corinthians 15:54 ("death is swallowed up in victory"). In 1545, however, Luther translates בלע as an active verb, "Er wird den Tod verschlingen" and he comments on Paul's translation in a marginal note. LXX, κατέπιεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας, "death, having prevailed, swallowed them up" appears to be corrupt here. Luther in his reviser's comments makes note of LXX's reading, "70= *devorabunt mortem praevalens*". The editor's footnote in DB 4 is "der text ist offenbar verderbt" (the text is obviously corrupt). Luther wavered between *in finem* (*ewiglich*) and *in victoriam* (*sieg*) for לְנֶצַח.

Luther has additional comments on the נָצַח issue in connection with נֶצְחָם in Isaiah 63: 3,6.⁴⁹

In Proverbs 12:2 (אִישׁ מְזַמְּזֵם יִרְשָׁע) the Hebrew reads the verb as a hiphil (יִרְשָׁע) "a scheming man he condemns." Luther read the verb as a passive (hophal?) "wird verworfen" or "wird verdampft werden". This corresponds to the LXX, which has "a lawless person will be passed over in silence." Vulgate has an active verb, "qui autem confidit cogitationibus suis impie agit" "he that trusts in his own devices does wickedly." In 1545 Luther rendered "ein Ruchloser verdampft sich selbst," "a blasphemer condemns himself."⁵⁰

In Proverbs 13:23 Luther corrects his translation from the Vulgate's understanding of the verb "it is gathered without judgment" to the LXX's "the unjust will be swept away".⁵¹ This is more a matter of recognizing another meaning of the verb סָפַח, which sometimes equals סָפַח, rather than a true variant in the Hebrew.

In his revision of Psalm 35:14, Luther switched to MT's reading "like one mourning a mother" (כְּאִמֶּה לֹלֵאִים) from "like a mourning mother" (כְּאִמֶּה לֹלֵאִים)(literally, "like the mourning of a mother). This may be a changing understanding of the text by Luther rather than clear evidence of different pointing. Neither LXX nor Vg reflect either of these readings.⁵²

⁴⁷ DB 3, p. 211, note 2, lines 15-19.

⁴⁸ DB 3, p. 195, note 1.

⁴⁹ DB 4, p. 55, notes 4-6, lengthy comment. DB 4, p. 80-83, extensive discussion. DB 11, p. 82-83.

⁵⁰ DB 4, p. 11, note 2. DB 10 2, p. 38-39.

⁵¹ DB 4, p. 12, note 4. DB 10 2, p. 44-45 including notes.

⁵² DB 10 1, p. 206-207.

In Exodus 20:5 Luther at first was unsure whether to read אֱלֹ as “mighty” in agreement with Vg (*fortis zelotes*) or as “God” (θεὸς ζηλωτής) in agreement with LXX.⁵³

In notes to Genesis 12:1 Luther and Melanchthon discuss the textual discrepancy with Acts 7 concerning the location of God’s appearance to Abraham. Melanchthon refers to a “casual error”.⁵⁴

Luther recognizes addition or omission of letters or words as another source of variants.

In Psalm 19:5 Luther stays with the reading of the MT קוֹ “line” in spite of the fact that Romans 10:18 follows the interpretation of the Septuagint which reflects the reading קוֹל “voice”.⁵⁵

In Exodus 2:22 Luther’s Vulgate text had some words about Moses’ second son Eliezer which are missing from the Hebrew text. Luther included these words, which are found in Exodus 18:4, in his German text in brackets.⁵⁶ (The Clementine version of the Vulgate has these words. Some versions of the Vulgate do not. The Rahlfs version the LXX does not. These words are not in the 1545 *Luther Bibel*.)

Variants are sometimes caused by different division or joining of words.

In Isaiah 51:6 כְּמוֹן can be read in three different ways: 1) כְּמוֹ “like so”: thus Vg, LXX, Luther, ESV; 2) כְּמוֹ כַּן “like a gnat”: thus NIV, HCSB; 3) כְּמוֹכֵן “like a locust”: thus BHS apparatus. The occurrence of the singular for “gnat” would be unusual. In the 1545 edition Luther retains “like so” (*wie Das*). The world will vanish “just like that” in the snap of a finger.⁵⁷

In Psalm 11:1, נוֹדוּ הַרְכָּם צְפוֹר, (literally, “flee (plural) - your mountain- bird). Some suggest the *kaph-mem* should be detached from “mountain” and attached to “bird” to create the reading “like (כְּמוֹ) a bird”. Luther has the reading “*wie ein vogel*” but he seems to be simply supplying the needed preposition by sense since he also has “*auf eure Berge*”.⁵⁸

Variants arise because of inversion of letters (metathesis). I found relatively few of these in Luther’s discussions.

In Exodus 29:43 the committee seems to be reading a form of יָדַע ”know” instead of עָרַךְ “meet” which is in the Hebrew text.⁵⁹

⁵³ DB 3, p. 251, note 3.

⁵⁴ DB 3, p. 179, line 20.

⁵⁵ DB 10 1, p. 156-157.

⁵⁶ DB 3, p. 236, note 2.

⁵⁷ DB 11, p. 153.

⁵⁸ DB 10 1, p. 132-133.

⁵⁹ DB 3, p. 260, note 2.

Sometimes it is not clear whether notes discussing variants refer to real variants.

In Psalm 22:24/25 the Hebrew has “those who call to him”. Luther’s Latin has “who call to God” and the editor provides a note about the variant. This is probably just a typo in the 1529 Psalter or an interpretive translation.⁶⁰

The *domino/ deo* (Lord/God) variant in Psalm 98:4 is not reflected in the apparatus of BHS. Luther’s reading of “Lord” in his Latin psalter follows the Hebrew and some versions of Vg, rather than LXX and some other versions of Vg which have “God”.⁶¹ Thus, another problem of evaluating Luther’s textual resources is sorting out different readings within LXX and Vg.

In Psalm 35:26 Luther’s reading *magna* agrees with MT, LXX, and the Vulgate versions I checked, but apparently some of his Latin sources had *maligna*. This led to a discussion of a variant in this verse.⁶²

Sometimes Luther’s evaluation of the text is somewhat speculative.

In a marginal note to the 1545 edition of 1 Chronicles 23:3 concerning the age of Levites when they took office, Luther comments, “It appears that the Hebrew Bible here is false.”⁶³ Perhaps the issue is that the age of service, which is here thirty, is elsewhere twenty-five (Nu 8:24).

In Psalm 50:1 in 1524 Luther translated the three divine names which begin the psalm (הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) as “*der Herr der mechtige Gott*,” “the Lord the mighty God.” He wants to place אֱלֹהֵינוּ later in the clause and to translate אֱלֹהֵינוּ adjectivally. In his translator’s note he justifies this as hysteron proteron.⁶⁴ In subsequent revisions he translates, “*Gott, der Herr, der mechtige*.”⁶⁵ It appears that in both cases he is trying to avoid the phrase “God of gods” which is followed by LXX and Vg. The Masoretic accents support Luther, and the NIV and ESV are similar to Luther.

In Hosea 11:8 in the 1545 edition Luther interprets the verb מָגַן as if it is derived from the same root as the noun “shield” (*schuetzen*). The verbal root מָגַן, however, means “hand over” (in 1532 Luther had rendered *plagen*). Luther was following the lead of LXX and Vg in his 1545 interpretation. In his 1545 marginal note he seems to be conflating both ideas, “*Es hilft weder straffen noch gnade*,” “neither punishment nor grace help. I must send Christ, who shall make it

⁶⁰ DB 10 2, p. 204.

⁶¹ DB 10 2, p. 249.

⁶² DB 10 2, p. 211, note 1. DB 3, p. 28. See Delitzsch, Ps II, p. 425. The sources reflect some discrepancies concerning the readings but in any case Luther’s interaction with the text would be the same.

⁶³ DB 9 2, p. 161. 1 Chr 23:3 in English is 24:3 in Luther’s German Bible.

⁶⁴ DB 3, p. 50, line 28, notes 2 and 3.

⁶⁵ DB 10 1, p. 258-259.

good.”⁶⁶ Perhaps more evidence is needed, but it appears that Luther sometimes acknowledged variants by incorporating both readings into his interpretation in the margin.

In Amos 5:26 the text causes a lot of difficulties for all interpreters.

וּנְשֵׂאתֶם אֶת סִבְוֹת מַלְכְּכֶם וְאֶת כִּיּוּן צַלְמֵיכֶם כּוֹכַב אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Heb You have lifted up Siccuth your king, the pedestal of your images, the star of your god

ESV You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun your star-god—your images

HCSB You have taken up Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god, images....

NIV You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god

LXX και ἀνελάβετε τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μολοχ καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν Ραιφαν, τοὺς τύπους αὐτῶν

Vg portastis tabernaculum Moloch vestro et imaginem idolorum vestrorum sidus dei vestri

Luther 1532: Ir truget die Hütten ewrs Molochs, die Götzen ewr bilder, den Stern ewr Götter

Luther 1545: Ir truget den Siccuth ewrn König, Chiun, ewer Bilder, den Stern ewr Götter

In 1545 Luther changes two of the objects (Hütten=shrine, Götzen=idols) to god’s names (Siccuth, Chiun), and Moloch to “king”. He has an extensive marginal note on Siccuth and Chiun.⁶⁷

The basic question is which words are gods’ names and which are shrines or images of some sort. The Hebrew term סִבְוֹת apparently refers to Sakkuth, a Mesopotamian star god identified with Ninurta. The name is vocalized in the Hebrew text after the pattern of שְׂקוּץ (detestable thing) and גִּלּוּל (dung god). Some English versions follow the LXX and translate as “tent” or “shrine,” pointing the term as סִבְוֹת. LXX, Vulgate, and Acts 7:43 read “Moloch” as the name of an idol rather than “king”. The Hebrew term כִּיּוּן apparently refers to the Mesopotamian god Kayamanu, or Saturn. The name, like “Sikkuth” in the previous line, is vocalized in the Hebrew text after the pattern of שְׂקוּץ. Some versions translate as “pedestal”, relating the term to the root כּוּן. Raifan appears to be a copying mistake in the Greek. An additional problem is the location of the word “images” in the text.

The results of Luther’s textual studies appear in many places in his Old Testament translation. It appears that Luther wanted textual notes based on his studies to be included in a list at the end of his Bible. Unfortunately, after his death this was not done by his publishers.

Luther’s Successors

Unfortunately, the theologians who followed Luther did not build on what he had begun. Most of the dogmaticians of the 17th century underestimated the textual problems of the Masoretic Text. Their overzealous defense of the Masoretic Text was motivated by a desire to counter Rome’s attacks on the Hebrew text, which were intended to exalt the Vulgate as the superior text. The dogmaticians went so far as to argue that the vowel points were an original part of the Hebrew text, although they knew that Luther had accepted the view of prominent Hebraists that the points were a late addition to the written form of the text. Unfortunately, their arguments were too often based on a logical counterattack against the sophistries of the Jesuits rather than on a careful study of the available evidence. Nevertheless, the writings of the

⁶⁶ DB 11 2, p. 204-205.

⁶⁷ DB 4, p. 237-238. Note 5 and extensive comment. DB 11 2, p. 240-241.

dogmaticians do show that they had a thorough knowledge of the textual variants in the LXX and other versions.^{68 69}

Among confessional Lutherans the practice of the principles of Old Testament textual criticism pioneered by Luther lay largely dormant till the second half of the 20th century.

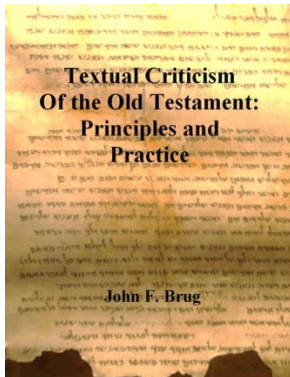
⁶⁸ R. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* I, p. 306-309.

R. Preus, *The Doctrine of Inspiration*, p. 47-49, 140-146.

⁶⁹ In the book *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament* pages 106-116 provided a more detailed description of the views of Luther's successors.

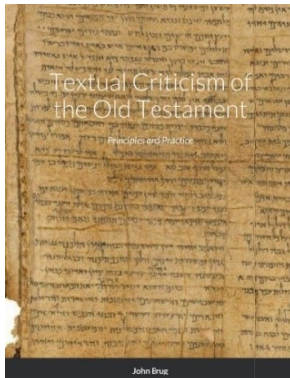
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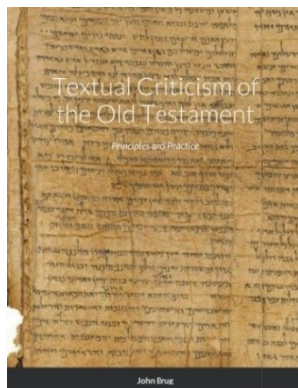
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