

Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd edition, revised and expanded. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012.

Author Information¹

Born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Emanuel Tov emigrated to Israel in 1961. He studied Bible and Greek literature at the Hebrew University and continued his studies at the Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at Harvard University between 1967 and 1969. He obtained his Ph.D. degree at the Hebrew University in 1973.

Since 1986 Emanuel Tov has been a professor in the Dept. of Bible of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (since 1990 he holds the J. L. Magnes chair), from which he retired in 2009. He has been a guest professor at various Universities in Europe, the USA, Japan, Australia, and South Africa. He received several research awards, among them the Humboldt Research Prize, Germany and the Emet Prize in Biblical Research (2004) and the Israel Prize (2009). In 2006 he was appointed Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy and in 2012 he was appointed member of the Israel Academy of Sciences. In 2010 he received the Samaritan Medal for Humanitarian Achievement from the High Priest on Mt. Gerizim.

Emanuel Tov is involved in several research projects, but since 1990, most of his energy is invested in directing the Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project. Under his guidance thirty-three volumes appeared in 1992-2010 in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series, including an overall concordance. Emanuel Tov is involved in several research projects, but since 1990, most of his energy is invested in directing the Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project. Under his guidance thirty-three volumes appeared in 1992-2010 in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series, including an overall concordance.

Thesis/Purpose

In the preface, Tov updates the reader on the changes he has made since the second edition of the book. According to Tov and his recent reviewers, the changes are extensive. Of the changes made, the addition of a glossary and a didactic guide are the most helpful to the student that is a novice in the textual criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures. The didactic guide, which follows the preface, informs the novice of the structure of the book. It is in this section that the reader is told that the work is a “handbook to the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible” (lvii). This designation of “handbook” is important for the reader to keep in mind when attempting to parse through the incredible amount of information found in the book. The matter of textual criticism is complex. Tov, recognizing that complexity, makes the “intrinsic correctness of the presentation rather than the attractiveness” the “primary goal” of his book (lvii). This means that while the book follows the “internal logic” of “textual criticism,” it is not written in a “didactic

¹ Author information taken in full from short-bio on <http://www.emanueltov.info/>. Accessed December 4, 2014.

way with a gradually increasing level of difficulty” (lvii). This book, then, serves the purpose of providing an in-depth reference resource for a wide audience, but does not attempt (or claim) to be a step-by-step guide for textual criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Outline of the Book

As mentioned above, the book begins with a preface detailing the changes that Tov made since the second edition of his book. In the next section, the didactic guide, the author details how the book is arranged and suggests a course of study for the beginner that might not be familiar with textual criticism. He suggests that the novice student should consider some of the examples of “textual diversity” in the book, then “start from the beginning” with some sections being saved until a time when a second reading is possible (lviii).

Following the didactic guide, Chapter 1 argues for the practice of textual criticism of the Hebrew – Aramaic Scriptures. In this chapter, several examples of differences among the textual witnesses are detailed. In addition to dealing with the differences in the textual witnesses, Tov further outlines reasons for the practice of textual criticism on the basis of “mistakes, corrections, and changes in the text,” the fact that the Masoretic text does not reflect the original text, and differences between ‘Inner-Biblical parallel texts’ even in the Masoretic text” (9-17). In the next section of chapter 1, Tov addresses the need for a modern approach to textual criticism in light of the discovery of Hebrew and Aramaic texts in the Judean desert in 1947. Tov states that “the discovery in the Judean desert of many Hebrew–Aramaic texts dating from two millennia ago has considerably advanced our knowledge of the early witnesses in the procedure of the copying and transmitting of the text” (17). The chapter concludes with brief discussions of “a modern approach to textual criticism” that takes the recent discoveries into account, the rise of text critical practices, and how matters of canonicity and “sacred status” impact textual criticism.

Chapter 2 is the most substantial chapter in the entire book. It is in this chapter that Tov identifies the key textual witnesses that need to be considered in the practice of textual criticism. He begins with the Hebrew witnesses. The first section of chapter 2 details the proto-Masoretic text and the Masoretic text, which is often understood as a group of text. Accordingly, Tov writes, “The name Masoretic text refers to a group of manuscripts (the M group) that are closely related to one another. Many of the elements of these manuscripts, including their final form, were determined in the early Middle Ages, but they continue a much earlier tradition” (24). Of the textual witnesses discussed in Chapter 2, it is this section that gets the most attention. Tov gives attention to what he calls “the consonantal framework of the proto-Masoretic text” and the Masoretic text, vocalization (which is related to the diacritical signs added to the consonantal framework of the Masoretic text), para-textual elements such as text divisions, section divisions, inverted *nunim*, and extraordinary points (particularly in relationship to issues like doubtful letters, suspended letters, and special letters), accentuation, and the Masorah. Of particular interest to the student is Tov’s discussion of the *Ketib-Qere* (see 54-59), which is a para-textual element unique to the Masoretic text, and the apparatus of the Masorah (see 65-70). After dealing with these elements of the Masoretic text, Tov moves on to address Pre-Samaritan texts and the Samaritan Pentateuch. By way of distinction, on page 91, Tov writes, “the pre-Samaritan text are not Samaritan documents, as they lack the specifically Samaritan readings, but they share with the Samaritan Pentateuch it’s a major features.” One such feature is found in the way that

Pre-Samaritan texts were written in the square Hebrew script. The third section of chapter 2 deals with the biblical texts that were found in the Judean desert in 1947. On page 94, Tov writes, “The main find site of biblical manuscripts in the Judean desert area is Qumran, some 15 km south of Jericho near the Dead Sea, where remnants of 930 biblical and non-biblical scrolls, once complete were found in 11 caves.” After providing a background on these manuscripts, Tov deals with the evidence found in Qumran, which “consist of 210-212 biblical scrolls representing 224-226 copies of biblical books” (95). The rest of the section details matters of dating, their publication, how they were written (Qumran Scribal Practice), the different variants in the Qumran scrolls, and how they are classified according to their textual character. He concludes this section with a discussion regarding the contribution that these scrolls make to biblical research of the Hebrew text. The fourth section in this chapter briefly considers additional Hebrew witnesses before moving on to the ancient translations and their use in textual criticism. Tov's work on the ancient translations is thorough and well documented in this section. Chapter 2 closes with each ancient translation being briefly evaluated for their text critical value in the work of textual criticism.

Chapter 3, entitled history of the biblical text, addresses the matter of the relationship between the text in research before 1947 and after 1947. After briefly considering the various approaches from these time periods, Tov suggests a “new approach” to defining these relationships among the text. In particular, Tov suggests that instead of perceiving “a tripartite division of the textual witnesses” (which is a generally accepted theory among text critical scholars) one should view the textual witnesses as being a part of a larger number of text (158). Tov goes on to clarify on page 159 that his view “challenges the characterization of the textual witnesses as text types and recensions.” Instead, Tov believes that they are “just text.” Tov continues stating that “the employment of the terms text types and recensions requires that the text differ from one another typologically, that is, that each of them be characterized by distinctive textual features, such as expansionistic, abbreviating, or harmonizing. However, this claim cannot be made regarding two of the witnesses under discussion even though each of them does reflect typological features in small units” (159). After noting the central position of Masoretic text both in research and in tradition, the author moves on to address the importance for scholars to “accept a view on the original text” (161). Tov suggests that there are essential two options (See 163-169):

- Multiple pristine text – This option, which is argued for in various ways by different scholars, suggests that a multiplicity of “equally authoritative” pristine text existed in the past, and there was no “one” original text.
- Original text or a series of determinative text – This option, which is accepted by most scholars, focuses on the written text or editions that contained the finished literary product that stood at the beginning of the textual transmission process.

In the third section of the third chapter, Tov addresses the development of the biblical text by investigating different “textual theories,” debunking an assumption regarding the stabilization of the biblical text, and by postulating a new description of how the text has developed over time. Tov's description attempts to be based on “the manuscript evidence itself” (180). His description is broken up into two periods of time: the early period until c. 250 B.C.E. and the period from c. 250 B.C.E. until 132 – 135 C.E.

In chapter 4, Tov addresses the matter of the copying and transmitting of the biblical text until the time of the Middle Ages (191). After introducing the chapter in the first section, Tov addresses topics like the types of material used in the copying of the text, the different writing practices of the scribes (including the different types of scripts they used), orthographic matters (spelling), and the different traditions of the scribal schools that contributed to the manuscript evidence. In the third section of chapter 4, Tov deals with a matter of textual transmission. This section is particularly important because it helps the student gain a better understanding of the types of variant that exist in the text and how they most likely originated. To outline this section of the chapter would be to essentially rewrite it. This material is rich with illustration and explanation. It is one of the most important sections of the book for the student of the Hebrew bible.

Chapter 5 is the shortest chapter in the entire book, but its brevity should not cause the reader to quickly pass over it. In this chapter, Tov introduces the reader to the “essence and aims” of textual criticism. On page 264 Tov writes, “As a rule, textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible aims neither at the compositions written by the biblical authors, nor at previous oral stages, if such existed, but only at that stage (those stages) of the composition(s) that is (are) attested in the textual evidence. The very assumption of earlier stages is based merely on logical deductions and cannot be proven.” With this understanding of textual criticism established, Tov writes (265),

The study of the biblical text involves an investigation of its development, copying and transmission, and of the creation of readings over the centuries. In the course of this procedure, textual critics collect from Hebrew and translated texts all the details (readings) in which these texts differ from one another. Some of these readings were created during the textual transmission, while others derive from an earlier stage, that of the literary growth. Scholars try to isolate and evaluate the readings that were created during the textual transmission by comparing them with other textual data, especially the Masoretic text, while treating readings created at earlier stages (literary readings) separately. The difficulty in distinguishing between readings of these two types complicates the textual evaluation to such an extent that some scholars avoid textual evaluation altogether most scholars believe that this evaluation involves a reconstruction of elements included in the original or the term of text of the Bible.

In the second section of chapter 5, Tov considers what textual praxis consists of in terms of “the textual data and their use in biblical exegesis” (265). Specifically, Tov has in mind two sets of data: 1) the biblical text as found in Hebrew sources and reflected in the ancient translations; and 2) the conjectural emendation of the biblical text involved when neither the Hebrew manuscripts nor the ancient versions preserve satisfactory evidence (265). Tov continues, stating, “Textual criticism proper is subdivided into two stages: 1) collecting Hebrew readings and reconstructing them from the ancient versions; and 2) evaluation of these readings” (265). Chapter 5 concludes with a brief discussion of the different types of variants that one might encounter within textual criticism. These variants are broken up into two categories: variants to be evaluated and variants to be disregarded.

Variants that need to be evaluated are as follows (267):

1. Orthographic Variants
2. Linguistic Variants
3. Content Variants

Variants that do not need to be evaluated and thus can be disregarded are as follows (268):

1. Synonymous readings
2. Differences Created in the Course of the Literary Growth

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are inextricably related to the theory and praxis of textual criticism presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6, entitled “Evaluation of Readings,” provides guidelines for assessing the validity of variants on the basis of external and internal criteria. Before addressing the guidelines, though, Tov suggests, “that common sense should be the textual critic's main guide when attempting to locate the most contextually appropriate reading” (270). In terms of the external criteria, Tov discusses the unequal status of textual sources, the preference typically given for the Masoretic text, the matter of broad attestation, and the factor that the age (and geographical location) of the textual witness plays in the evaluation of readings (See pages 271-274). Internal criteria is typically concerned with *Lectio Difficilior Praeferenda / Praevlet / Praestat* (which refers to the rule that states “the more difficult reading is to be preferred”), *Lectio Brevior (Brevis) Potior* (which refers to the rule that states “the shorter reading is to be preferred”), harmonization, and interpretive modifications (See pages 275-281). Tov concludes this section with some “general reflections on the nature of textual evaluation in the use of guidelines within that framework” (280). Tov finds the guidelines to be helpful but ultimately lacking. His suggestion is that the “preferable reading” be the one that is “most contextually appropriate” (281). Tov admits, “This procedure is as subjective as can be. Common sense, rather than textual theories is the main guide, although abstract rules are sometimes also helpful” (281).

Chapter 7 addresses the relationship between textual criticism and literary criticism as it relates to what Tov calls “literary or editorial variants” (284). These variants contribute to the students understanding of the literary development of certain books in the Hebrew Bible (284). This chapter is one of the most technically rigorous portions of the book. One could summarize its main point as follows: Tov wants his readers to be aware of the need to distinguish between the literary growth of a source prior to its final form and actual variants that appear during the process of textual transmission (324). Elements of literary growth should not be evaluated by text critical methods.

Chapter 8 addresses the matter of conjectural emendation. Tov begins the chapter by correcting common misunderstandings of this topic. Tov writes, “a conjectural emendation is an invented reading from which all other readings, or at least one of them, presumably developed” (328). Tov continues, saying “a proposed emendation is always a reading that is not documented in the known text” (328). In the second section of the chapter, Tov briefly outlines the “three main types of emendations” (331).

They are as follows:

- Contextual Emendations, which “derive from a specific understanding of the context” (331)
- Linguistic Emendations, which are rooted in attempts to correct “uncommon forms” in light of “a formal grammatical approach” (334)
- Emendations for Metrical Reasons, which are proposed in light of theories on issues like “accentuation in biblical poetry” (339)

The two final chapters of the book, chapters 9 and 10, address the resources available to the student in the form of printed editions (critical and non-critical) of the Hebrew-Aramaic Scriptures and computer-assisted tools up until 2011. Chapter 9 gives cursory evaluations of the different editions of the Hebrew Scriptures. Tov’s discussion of the BHS and the BHQ critical editions is particularly important for students with some experience using with them. Chapter 10 briefly considers the advantages and disadvantages of technology in text critical studies without going into details on how to use the technology itself beyond the basic features that they provide to students.

Critique

It would be hard to overstate the importance or the quality of this book. The author is brilliant, fair, critical, and intellectually honest. His attention to detail, his ability to explain difficult concepts, and his concise writing style makes this book an indispensable resource for all students of the Hebrew Bible. In terms of its helpfulness for the student of hermeneutics, the work is invaluable for demonstrating what goes into the work of establishing the text. The author’s inclusion of a glossary, a didactic guide, 32 “plates” of manuscripts, his discussion of matters like the apparatus of the Masorah and the significance of translations in textual criticism, his presentation of the essence and aims of textual criticism, and his gratuitous use of examples make this work one of the most complete handbooks for critical study ever published. It is the standard in its field.

If a weakness must be identified in Tov’s work, this reviewer would suggest that it could be found in his presupposition of source critical conclusions regarding the composition of the text. Understandably, text critics struggle to define what is meant by the terms “original text.” Furthermore, Tov’s weakness in this area may not be unique to his work. The author’s footnote on page 167 is illustrative of the difficulty all text critics face. It reads, “The task of the textual critic is not to restore the text of the sources, nor even of some earlier state of the composite work, but only the form in which it left the hand of the last redactor.” The difficulty at this point is somewhat obvious. How is one to determine when the text left the hand of the last redactor? To what extent is redaction criticism to be employed in the work of textual criticism? This reviewer is not suggesting that the author’s presuppositions are necessarily wrong, but rather that they make the defined end of textual criticism particularly elusive. To be fair, Tov himself suggested that determining where literary growth ends and transmissional variants begin is a subjective matter.

Another possible weakness of the book would be its attempt to discuss computer-assisted tools. While the principles remain somewhat unchanged, the rapidly changing enterprise of computer-assisted textual study threatens any author with the possibility of being out of date shortly after the time of publication. One suggestion would be for the author to create a website that would provide updates (similar to a state of research document) that informs the interested student of the latest advances in the area of computer-assisted tools.

All in all, this reviewer found Tov's work to be an exceedingly informative and helpful guide for students and scholars with an interest in textual criticism.