

PREFACE

The recovery of the original text of the Old Testament (OT) is an impossible task. All the original manuscripts (mss) have long been destroyed, as have the first, second, third, and many subsequent generations of copies. The oldest more or less complete witnesses to the original text are translations into other languages, and the oldest Hebrew mss of any significant size date from more than three centuries after the authors put down their pens. Of the witnesses that survive, none present satisfactory readings in every location, and there are some crucial places throughout the witnesses where none have convincing readings. There is even good reason to question the existence of an “original text.” If, as many scholars believe, the text of most OT books grew over time through the work of redactors and scribes (not to mention earlier written sources used by the primary authors), more than one “original text” may exist for many books.

In spite of the problems, however, the task of textual criticism is of continuing importance. The greatest advances in the field of textual criticism of biblical books have come in the New Testament (NT) field, beginning with the late nineteenth century work of people like Tischendorf, Westcott, and Hort.¹ Several factors have led to more textual work being done in the NT than in the OT: the availability of multiple early mss in the original language; the chronological proximity of many of these mss to the autographs; the diversity of readings among these mss; the existence of several versions and patristic witnesses to the text within five hundred years of the autographs; the relative simplicity of composition of many NT books in comparison with OT books (the gospels excepted); ms discoveries and acquisitions in the late nineteenth century, including Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Bezae, Egyptian papyri, and the Gnostic mss from Nag Hammadi; and theologically motivated decisions by Christian scholars to do NT work. The difficulties of doing textual criticism on the OT, however, do not suggest the impossibility of progress,

¹Pier Giorgio Borbone, “La critica del testo e l’Antico Testamento ebraico,” review of *Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament*, vol. 1, *Josué, Juges, Ruth, Samuel, Rois, Chroniques, Esdras, Néhémie, Esther*, by Dominique Barthélemy, in *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 20 (1984): 251, decries the retarded development of textual criticism of the Old Testament as compared with that of the New Testament, especially the lack of a critical Hebrew text (italics original):

Il Nuovo Testamento è studiato e letto in edizioni critiche, condotte con metodo filologico; anzi, si può dire che proprio l’approfondimento dei problemi relativi all’edizione dei testi neotestamentari ha promosso in maniera determinante lo sviluppo del metodo della filologia classica. Diversa è invece la situazione dell’AT: mentre esistono edizioni critiche delle tradizioni greca e latina (i LXX e la Vulgata), ed il “Peshitta Institute” di Leida sta lavorando ad un’edizione della tradizione siriana che, se proprio non si può dir ‘critica’ in senso tecnico, è un importante passo avanti rispetto alla situazione precedente, per il testo ebraico ci si accontenta di stampare un *textus receptus*.

and renewed interest in the text of the OT has surfaced in the last forty years or so, especially since the discovery of the mss in the Judean desert. Impetus for further study has also come from the discoveries of texts from Ugarit and Ebla and from methodological advances proposed in the past twenty or thirty years, particularly by members of groups like the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies and the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament. It is in the light of this newfound interest in the text of the OT and in the belief that methodologies exist or can be found to illuminate more fully previous states of the text that this study is undertaken.

The present work is a combination and slight revision of my Ph.D. dissertation, undertaken at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (“A Methodology for Determining the Textual Variants Which Are Relevant for Reconstructing the Original Text of the Old Testament: A Case Study of 1 Samuel 3”), and my M.A. thesis from the University of Stellenbosch (“Reconstructing 1 Samuel Chapter 3”). This work was largely finished in 1992, and few revisions to the bibliography have been made, other than to note my own studies which grew out of this one but were published later.

The process of combining and revising my dissertation and thesis has been an on-again, off-again affair, and the calls of job, family life, and other academic interests have turned what I once thought would be a quick process into a five-year odyssey. I have been encouraged along the way by many people, without whom this book might not have seen the light of day. Special thanks go to Johann Cook of the University of Stellenbosch, who encouraged both my work on this book and my dream of creating an electronic journal, *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, on whose editorial board he has served since the journal’s inception in 1996. My wife Rosa has been very supportive of my efforts to produce this book, and my daughters Danielle and Elise are a constant joy, tangible reminders of the goodness of God. Finally, my education, my interest in learning, and even my very survival I owe to my parents, Rob and Vela Adair. Though they don’t read Hebrew or Greek, they keep a copy of my dissertation on a coffee table in their living room to show to friends who visit. When I see it there, I’m reminded of how much of who I am is due to them. It is to them that this book is dedicated.