

Ezra: The Teacher of God's Word and Agent of Revival

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Introduction

When the exiles returned from Babylon in 539 B.C., Israel (including the remnants of the northern kingdom and Judah) was spiritually stronger than it was a generation earlier when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. Idolatry, the act of treason that brought God's judgment, was now burned out of the Israelite soul. The initial leadership of the exiles, including Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Zechariah, further strengthened Israel spiritually by rebuilding the temple and restoring Israel's worship. As time passed, however, Israel's devotion to God declined and waned. Once again, Israel began foreshadowing a path that, unless arrested, would lead back to idolatry, as it did with the Jewish remnant in Egypt (Jer 44:24-30).¹ Approximately, eighty years after Cyrus's decree for the Jews to return from Babylon, God called Israel back to her covenantal obligations by a new generation of leaders: Malachi, the prophet, Nehemiah, the governor, and Ezra, the priest and scribe.

When arriving in Jerusalem in 458 B.C., about sixty years after the completion of the temple, Ezra found the spiritual condition of the people deplorable. Externally, there was opposition of every sort, both political and religious. Internally, the people were worldly and largely ignorant of God's word. Most problematic, of course, the people were intermarrying with foreigners and adopting their lifestyle. Israel was again on course to experience the judgment of God.

To pull Israel back from impending apostasy and to revive them spiritually, God sent Ezra from Babylon to Israel. Serving in the dual offices of priest and scribe, Ezra, by the good hand of God, taught the people the word of God, thereby bringing revival to Israel.

Ezra: The Teacher of God's Word Priest

As part of their mediatorial office, priests were custodians and teachers of the word of God.² Moses entrusted his great work, the law (the Pentateuch), to the priests (Deut 31:10) and commanded that they teach it to Israel (Deut 33:10). As caretakers they preserved the law, and every seven years at the feast of booths, they would bring out the law to read it to the people (Deut 31:9-13). Along with this reading of the law there came priestly instruction and application (Lev 10:10-11). At times, Moses and the priests "co-taught" the law of God to the people (Deut 27:9-10). By directly applying God's word to the people, the priests judged the people according to the law of Moses (Deut 17:8-13; 21:5; 2 Chr 19:5-11). During times of God's blessing in the national life of Israel, the priests faithfully taught the law to the people and even to the king, as in the case of Jehoiada's instruction of Jehoash, who remained faithful to God only under Jehoiada's instruction (2 Kgs 12:2; 17:24-33). During times of spiritual decline, however, the priests spurned the law, as did Eli's sons and, to an extent,

Eli himself (1 Sam 2:12-17, 22-36). There was, of course, often a cause-and-effect relationship: As the priests faithfully proclaimed God's word, the people were faithful to the Lord God. When they failed in their responsibility, the nation suffered spiritually. Though they did not always live up to their calling, the priests, along with the prophets, were to be the backbone of religious instruction in Israel.

Ezra, in contrast to many priests before him, faithfully performed his teaching responsibilities. First, he set his heart to study the law of the Lord (Ezra 7:10). The faithful proclamation of God's word takes effort and diligent study. Ezra, a workman that was not ashamed, exemplified this in his ministry. Indeed, this ardent desire to study God's word indicated, at least partially, God's call on his life. Ezra went beyond just a desire to study—he also set his heart to do God's word. Ezra's study was not an academic exercise, nor was it an exercise in creativity and novelty in dealing with the text, but it was a sanctified study that causes one to tremble reverently at God's word (Ezra 9:4) and that generates the fear of God in the soul (Deut 17:19). His study was unto obedience, and, as is true of all godly study of God's word, it was unto holiness, for truth always leads to holiness. His study would be vain without obedience—a faith without works. His godly study and obedience resulted in outward acts of faith: seeing God's good hand in his own life, praying for guidance and protection, and praising God for His acts of mercy and deliverance (Ezra 7:6, 27-28). Finally, Ezra set his mind to teach in Israel the decree and the statute, an awesome responsibility, stimulating an even greater desire to study God's word because souls are at stake. To Ezra and to every God-called minister, the ministry

is a solemn call to sanctified study and reverent obedience.

Scribe

Ezra's role of scribe weaves seamlessly with his role as priest. The priests, as the custodians of the law, were obligated to keep the manuscripts of the law from corruption, including physical deterioration, and to provide new copies when older manuscripts became worn and brittle. Many priests, therefore, became scribes as a part of their sacred duty.

Ezra excelled as a scribe. Scripture declares that as a scribe he was "quick in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), that is, a highly skilled, expertly trained scribe. As such, he mastered the contents and meaning of Scripture. Undoubtedly, like many scribes of the past, Ezra memorized the entire Old Testament. Though the Scriptures emphasize his knowledge of the law of Moses, he also demonstrates knowledge of the book of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1), quotes from a Psalm (Ezra 3:11; Ps 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 108:1; 131:1), and recounts biblical history from Genesis to his day (Nehemiah 9). In the Old Testament, scribes are usually associated with the royal court (2 Sam 8:17), though once a scribe is associated with a prophet, namely, Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah. In many ways, however, Ezra was more like a New Testament scribe—or, stated more accurately, post-Old Testament scribes were more like Ezra than the Old Testament scribes of the royal court. Ezra is the great scribe of the Old Testament, as Moses is its great prophet, and as David is its great psalmist and king.

Because he lived at the end of the Old Testament era, Ezra's role as scribe took on even greater significance. With him and his generation, the Old Testament canon

closed—or in the words of the Rabbis, “the spirit of prophesy departed Israel.”³ At the close of Old Testament revelation, God raised up and prepared Ezra as the final priest and scribe of the Old Testament. Ezra’s role as the final “editor” of Scripture, therefore, is not merely tradition, but is virtually demanded by the context of Scriptures. Indeed, the Rabbis viewed him as the final scribe of all Scripture: “Moses received the law from Sinai, and he delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets they delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue.”⁴ The men of the Great Synagogue consisted of Ezra, its leader, and a hundred and twenty spiritual leaders of the exile. As the final priest and scribe of the Old Testament, Ezra was both curator and expert of the Old Testament, its text and its interpretation.

Interpreting the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, however, involves more issues than a typical English text. Ancient Hebrew texts, unlike English texts (but similar to modern Arabic texts), are written with few vowel indicators. For instance, a word without written vowels, such as “mss” may be read or interpreted as miss, mass, mess, moss, or muss. Context decides—hopefully. Furthermore, ancient Hebrew texts are without punctuation. The grouping of words within sentences, the grouping of sentences within paragraphs, or the grouping of paragraphs within larger literary units is frequently a matter of interpretation. Once these issues are addressed and settled, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament can be interpreted similar to an English text.

Ezra, to be sure, had to deal with these issues, but there were other issues as well. The Jews were now less comfortable with Hebrew because during and after the exile

they spoke Aramaic, the Semitic language spoken throughout the Middle East until the spread of Arabic with the rise of Islam. Moreover, the people seemed ignorant of the word of God, which, being time-consuming and expensive to copy, was not readily available. Finally, the people, especially the leaders, appeared lax, even disinterested, in the word of God (Ezra 9:2). Some leaders even resisted Ezra’s reforms and God’s word (Ezra 10:15).

In spite of all these issues and resistance to his efforts, Ezra set his heart to teach the people. About fifteen years after Ezra returned to Israel and after Nehemiah returned in 444 B.C., the people gathered to hear Ezra read and proclaim the word of God, “They (Ezra and the leaders) read in the scroll, in the law of God, (which was) explained, and (they) gave insight, and they gave understanding in the reading” (Neh 8:8). Ezra, with the men of the Great Synagogue, gave insight and exposition as they read the law of God. This exposition of the law probably included an Aramaic interpretation since many would understand the Aramaic exposition better than the reading of the Hebrew text (Neh 13:24). Perhaps, as the Rabbis assert, this was the first targumic (an Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament) interpretation of the text.⁵ If so, this interpretation or explanation was probably a literal translation and exposition of the Pentateuch similar to Targum Onqelos of the Pentateuch, the “official” Jewish Targum of the Pentateuch dated to the early centuries of the Christian era. The second half of Neh 8:8 refers to Ezra and his men furnishing “insight and giving understanding *in the reading.*” This may refer to general exposition, but it certainly refers to the vocalizing of a Hebrew text without written vowels. Without vocal-

izing the implied vowels, a Hebrew text (without vowels) cannot be read, cannot have “understanding.” In addition, in his reading, Ezra would group words (similar to the Masoretic accents⁶) and sections of text, thus providing “punctuation” to the sacred text and bringing more “understanding” to the text.

This “understanding” or teaching of Ezra has probably been preserved, at least partially, by his successors: the Sopherim, Naqdanim, and finally the Masoretes. The Rabbis teach that Ezra created a traditional teaching or understanding of the text—“Has not Rabbi Iqa said in the name of Rabbi Hananel who had it from Rab: What is meant by the text, (Neh 8:8) ‘And they read in the book, in the law of God, with an interpretation, and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading? And they read in the book, in the law’: this indicates the Bible; ‘with an interpretation’: this indicates the targum (interpretation); ‘and they gave the sense’: this indicates the verse stops; ‘and caused them to understand the reading’: this indicates the accentuation, or according to another version, the masoretic notes.”⁷ Ezra and the men of the Great Synagogue handed down their “understanding” to the Sopherim, scribes who, according to the Rabbis, “counted the letters of the Torah.”⁸ The Naqdanim, also scribes, were expert in vocalizing the text. The work of both the Sopherim and the Naqdanim was finally handed down to the Masoretes, whose work is *the* Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Aaron ben Asher, the last and greatest Masorete, claimed that the text he was handing down—its consonants, vocalization, and the grouping of words and sections—went back to the Sopherim, Ezra and the wise men (Great Synagogue), and the prophets.⁹ Ben Asher’s crowning

work, the Masoretic text furnishes the traditional understanding of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and is the basis of all Rabbinic Bibles and scholarly editions of the Hebrew Old Testament.

The Masoretic tradition, which claims to preserve Ezra’s tradition, has been confirmed, at least in part, by modern inquiry. Modern scholars have found evidence of early accent systems¹⁰ (word grouping system) in a Septuagint manuscript, John Rylands Greek Papyrus 458 (dated to the second century B.C.), where words are grouped, similar to the Masoretic accentual tradition, for reading in the Synagogue.¹¹ Of course, the Pentateuch of the Septuagint, dating some three hundred years before Christ, indicates a textual and vocalization tradition similar to the Masoretes. Moreover, the Dead Sea Scrolls, many dating to the first century before Christ, show that vocalization and word groupings, very similar to the Masoretic tradition, were current, and indeed dominate, over a thousand years before the Masoretes.¹² How far back the Masoretic tradition goes, no one knows for sure; however, evidence demonstrates that the text, vocalization, and accentuation (word groupings) go back centuries before Christ, perhaps even to Ezra, as the Rabbis and Aaron ben Asher claim. Even if the vocalization and word groupings of the Masoretes do not go back to Ezra, they represent a very ancient rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, a valuable resource for syntax, exegesis, and historical interpretation.

Excursus on Masoretic Accentuation

Examples of Traditional Grouping

Practical examples of this instruction abound, often reflected in modern trans-

lations and commentaries. The following examples illustrate word groupings—which words should be grouped together and which words should be separated.

Ruth 2:14

Two renderings of the Hebrew are possible. The direct discourse may begin (1) after the third word in the Hebrew, or (2) after the fifth word in Hebrew. The Masoretic tradition affirms the second rendering.

(1) And Boaz said to her,
“At meal time approach here and eat of the bread.”

(2) And Boaz said to her *at meal time*,
“Approach here and eat of the bread.”

Genesis 11:4

The issue here is the modification of nouns. Does the clause—“whose top is in the heavens”—modify the words, “city and tower,” or just the word, “tower”?

And they said, “Come, let us build for us a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens” (REB, NAB, NJB).

And they said, “Come, let us build for us a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens” (NRSV, NJPS, NASB, NIV).

In the first option, the clause—“whose top is in the heavens”—modifies both city and tower. Three translations, REB, NAB, and NJB, seem to follow or to allow this interpretation. In the second option, the modifying phrase modifies only the tower, not the city. The Masoretes agree with the second option.

Deuteronomy 11:13b

To love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

To love the Lord your God,
and to serve Him with all your heart
and with all your soul (NRSV).

In the first option, the modifying phrases—“with all your heart and with all your soul”—qualify both infinitive clauses “to love the Lord your God and to serve Him.” In the second option, the modifying phrase qualifies only “to serve Him,” not “to love the Lord your God.” The NRSV, by placing the comma after “God,” follows the second option. The Masoretes, by contrast, accept the first option.

1 Samuel 3:3

Most modern Bibles translate this verse similar to the New American Standard Bible:

And the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God *was* (NASB).

And the lamp of God had not yet gone out—now Samuel was lying down—in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God *was* (Masoretic Text).

The Masoretes view the clause, “now Samuel was lying down,” as a parenthetical statement. Most modern translations, however, give the erroneous sense of Samuel sleeping in the Tabernacle proper or the holy of holies. Targum Jonathan also supports the Masoretic understanding: “Now the wick in the sanctuary of the Lord had not yet gone out, now Samuel was lying in the court of the Levites, and a voice was heard from the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was.”

***Traditional Understanding and
Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia***

The editors of *Biblia Hebraica Stutt-*

gartensia (*BHS*) often disagree with the Masoretic understanding of a passage—this is particularly true in poetical sections of *BHS*. The editors indicate their disagreements by their arrangement of paragraphs, verses, and words in the *BHS* text. Such arrangements are frequently confusing, often based on emendation and speculation.

Genesis 2:4

The *BHS* (Otto Eissfeldt, editor of *Genesis* in *BHS*; also NJPS, NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB, and NIV) starts a new paragraph at Gen 2:4b. This view often presupposes two creation accounts, with a second creation account of verse 2:4b beginning with a temporal clause, as its presumed Mesopotamian original (*Enuma Elish*).¹³ The Masoretes, on the other hand, start the new paragraph at the beginning of verse four. This is consistent, of course, with all the other occurrences in *Genesis* of *tôledôt* (“offspring,” “generation”), which always begins new sections, never ending them. These new sections beginning with *tôledôt* usually present main characters and their “offspring.” *Genesis 2:4* presents Adam and Eve as the “offspring” of heaven and earth. The exegetical tradition of the Masoretes follows clear grammatical usage and meaning, not imaged or presumed borrowings.

This is the story of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
[New section at Gen 2:4b] When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens (REB, following *BHS*).

[New Section beginning at Gen 2:4] This is the story (“generation”) of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens (Masoretic text).

Psalms 25:1-2

BHS takes the first word (in Hebrew) of v. 2 and places it last in v. 1. The NAB, following *BHS*, then inserts a verb (“I wait”) to smooth out the grammatical problem created by their own emendations.

(1) I wait for you, O Lord
I lift up my soul (2) to my God.
In you I trust; do not let me be disgraced;
Do not let my enemies gloat over me (NAB, following *BHS*).

(1) David's: To you, Lord, my soul I lift.
(2) My God, in you I trust, let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies exalt with respect to me (Masoretic Text).

The *BHS* emends these verses to an assumed acrostic pattern, forcing other artificial changes throughout this psalm. It is surely better to see many acrostic psalms as partial and general than to concoct new verses to match *BHS*'s ideal patterns.

Psalms 5:2-6

BHS shifts clauses to form new verses. These changes are reflected in REB and the NJB.

(2) Listen to my cry for help,
my king and my God!
To you I pray, (3) Yahweh.
at daybreak you hear my voice;
At daybreak I lay my case before you
and fix my eyes on you.
(4) You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil, no sinner can be your guest.
(5) Boasters cannot stand their ground
Under your gaze
You hate evil-doers,
(6) liars you destroy;
the violent and deceitful
Yahweh detests (NJB).

(2) Give attention to the voice of my cry, my king and my God.
For to you I pray

(3) Lord, in the morning you hear
my voice
in the morning I arrange (my
words) to you and I will watch.
(4) For you are not a God who
takes pleasure in evil
evil cannot sojourn with you
(5) Boasters cannot station them-
selves before you;
you hate all workers of iniquity
(6) You destroy liars
murders and deceitful men the
Lord abhors (Masoretic Text, vv. 3-7).

The differences between these renderings are substantial. For instance, the second part of v. 6, “you hate all workers of iniquity,” in the Masoretic Text seems to relate why boasters cannot stand before the Lord. The *BHS* and *NJB* make this part of the verse (6b) the beginning of the next verse that expresses the Lord’s disfavor with the wicked.

There are, of course, other differences between the *BHS* (along with some modern translations) and the Masoretic Text—as in the vocalization of words, for instance.¹⁴ On occasion, *BHS*’s suggestions are based on sound textual support—especially when there is a clear mistake of the copyist, which is easily rectified by other copies of the Masoretic Texts—but frequently *BHS*’s suggestions are speculative, based on imagination or weak textual witnesses.

Conclusion of Excursus

The tradition of the Masorettes, heirs of a long and distinguished tradition that perhaps reaches back to the great scribe himself, Ezra, is a far more reliable guide to the text and interpretation of the Old Testament. Indeed, the current revisers of the *BHS* (Quinta) must agree, at least somewhat, since their new edition will arrange the text according to the Masoretic accents (word groupings).

Careful interpreters and grammar-

ians of Scripture, to be sure, have always noticed and respected this tradition. All ancient translations follow it to one degree or another—as is essentially true of modern translations as well. The medieval Jewish commentators and grammarians, such as Rashi, Eben Ezra,¹⁵ and Ibn Barun,¹⁶ appealed to it. The Buxtorfs, the great reformed scholars of rabbinic literature and of the Masorettes, honored it. Similarly, modern commentators and grammarians, such as H. Ewald,¹⁷ J. A. Alexander,¹⁸ E. J. Young,¹⁹ Paul Joüon,²⁰ and scores of others, are keenly aware of it. New Testament commentators also have noticed that the Apostles often follow this tradition.²¹ Such a time-honored tradition has been the resting place of saints for centuries. It is particularly helpful in our restless age of hermeneutical novelty, with its seemingly endless approaches and its dubious—and often dangerous—results.

Ezra: The Agent of Revival

Ezra’s instruction resulted in revival. In the Old Testament, revivals often lasted only while a righteous king lived, such as Hezekiah or Josiah. At other times, revivals lasted for generations, such as during and after New Testament times and the reformation. Not of human or natural origin, revival is the work of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men through the word of God that transforms the people of God from a lax spiritual condition to a careful, attentive spiritual condition. It always results from the preaching and proclaiming of the word of God, rendering the soul repentant, holy, humble, and full of faith. The fruit of the Spirit is the result of revival.

The good hand of God—the Spirit of God—was upon the ministry of Ezra.

God had given Ezra grace in the eyes of Artaxerxes and his powerful subordinates (Ezra 7:28), who supplied vital resources for Ezra and the people on their trip from Babylon to Jerusalem and for their work in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:12-24). Moreover, Artaxerxes granted Ezra authority to govern the magistrates and judges within the Judean province, thus allowing Ezra to enforce the law of Moses in the nation (Ezra 7:25-26). This authority, of course, was not the reason for revival, though the Spirit of God granted this authority to overcome the political opposition that Ezra faced. Political authority, while it may assist revival, is never the source or cause of revival. Ezra did not legislate revival; his ministry resulted in revival.

The means that the Holy Spirit used to revive his people in Ezra's ministry was the word of God. Indeed, it was the word of God as read and preached by Ezra, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit attending Ezra's exposition and moving in the hearts of the people, that brought revival—the gospel (the word of God) is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). In fact, the Holy Spirit's work preceded Ezra's preaching by preparing and moving the people's heart to ask Ezra to read and preach the word the God (Neh 8:1). The word fell on the soil of hearts carefully prepared by the Holy Spirit and, undoubtedly, by the many prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra's revival bore full fruit, strengthening the nation spiritually and preserving the nation from apostasy and idolatry. The people began to obey God's word, keeping the feast of booths to an extent not seen since the days of Joshua (Neh 8:17), repenting and confessing sin (Nehemiah 9), covenanting not to marry non-Israelites, supporting the worship of God (Nehemiah 10), and restoring the

tithe and the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13). The people were now as spiritually strong as at any time in Israel's history. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Ezra, the teacher of the law of God and the agent of revival, the joy of the Lord was now the strength of Israel.

Conclusion

Speaking of Old Testament events, the Apostles tell us that these events are examples for our instruction (1 Cor 10:6; 2 Pet 2:6) and that the Old Testament prophets were serving the church in their writings (1 Pet 1:12). So Ezra, the great scribe of Scripture, serves the church today, instructing us by the books of Scripture that he authored, by the godly example that he set, and by the Old Testament that he edited. May God, by His good hand, grant His people revival now through the teacher of His word and through His agent of revival—Ezra.

ENDNOTES

¹The Elephantine Aramaic texts from Egypt dated to the Persian period (400-300 B.C.) describe an idolatrous Jewish remnant that intermarried with the Egyptian population. For a brief summary of this Jewish community and its similarity to Jeremiah's Egyptian remnant, see Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 435-436. B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California, 1968).

²For an excellent study on the priests' role as custodians and teachers of the law, see T. J. Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest: A Custodian of Tôrâ* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 17-45.

³*b.* [Talmud Babylonia] *Sanhedrin 11a*. Josephus similarly states, “It is true our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time.” *Against Apion* 1, 8.

⁴*Pirqe Avoth 1:1* (Mishnah). Also, *b. Baba Bathra 14b-16a* asserts that Ezra authored the books of Ezra and Chronicles. *b. Megillah 16a* claims that the “aged Baruch” discipled Ezra, and *b. Sanhedrin 21b* declares that Ezra would have received the law at Sinai if he had preceded Moses historically! For the Great Synagogue, see Daniel Sperber, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 629-631.

⁵*b. Megillah 3a*. See note 7. Edwin Yamauchi claims that the Rabbinic assertion is anachronistic, “But the Talmudic comment is clearly anachronistic as we have no evidence of targums from such an early date” (Edwin Yamauchi, “Ezra-Nehe-miah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein [vol. 4; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], 725). The earliest extant written targum is dated around 150-100 B.C. This, however, does not make the rabbinic claim “anachronistic.” The current lack of evidence for the existence of a written targum during the time of Ezra does not make the rabbinic claim “anachronistic.” Indeed, this “targum” of Ezra may have been oral, perhaps the basis of all later targums.

⁶For the Masoretic accent system,

see William Wickes, *Two Treatises on the Accentuation of the Old Testament*, (New York: Ktav, 1970); and James D. Price, *The Syntax of Masoretic Accents in the Hebrew Bible*, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

⁷*b. Megillah 3a*. Compare similarly, *b. Nedarim 37b, y.* (Talmud Jerusalmi) *Megillah 4:1 74d*, Genesis Rabbah 36.8 (In the last two citations, the clause in Neh 8:8 “and they gave the sense” is connected with the accents). In *b. Nedarim 37b* the same quotation is found as in *b. Megillah 3a* with a discussion concerning compensation on the Sabbath for teaching the accents. Such compensation was acceptable because “the accents are also Biblical.” A similar Rabbinic view is expressed by Rabbi Shefatiah in the name of Rabbi Johanan: “If one reads the Scripture without a melody (as indicated by chanting the accents) or repeats the Mishnah without a tune, of him Scripture says, (Ezek 20:25) ‘Wherefore I gave them also statues that were not good’” (*b. Megillah 32a*). Rabbinic tradition sees the accentuation as given, or at least implied, by the biblical author—Raba made this exposition: “What was written in Scripture, (Eccl 12:9) ‘And besides that Koheleth was wise, he also taught the people knowledge; yea, he pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs? He also taught the people knowledge’ implies that he taught it with notes of accentuation and illustrated it by simile” (*b. Erubin 21b*). Commenting on *b. Berakot 62a*, Rashi says that hand movements corresponded to the singing of the accents.

⁸*b. Qiddushin 30a*.

⁹Wickes, *Two Treatises*, 5. Aaron ben Asher, *Dikdukei Ha-Te’amim*, ed. Baer and Strack (Leipzig, 1879), xvi, 1.

¹⁰Of course, when referring to the accents, one must distinguish carefully between the accent signs and the accents as orally preserved and sung. The accents as orally handed down may come from Ezra; the accent signs, preserving the oral tradition, come from a much later period.

¹¹C. H. Roberts, *Two Biblical Papyri in the John Rylands Library* (Manchester, 1936), 28; E. J. Revell, *The Oldest Evidence for the Hebrew Accent System* (Bulletin of John Rylands Library LIV, 1971), 214-222.

¹²Kyoungwon Choi, “Evidence of Word Groupings and Pausal Forms in 1QIsa” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, November 2004). Revell, *Oldest Evidence*, 214-215.

¹³Jon D. Levenson in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. A Berlin and M. Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13, 15. Levenson, with many others, sees Gen 2:4a as “an editorial linkage between the two creation accounts” (*ibid.*, 15).

¹⁴Like most modern translations, the TNIV, on occasion, emends the Masoretic Text—the consonants, vowels, and word groupings—without justification. See, for instance, Psalm 12:6 and compare it with the NIV’s rendering of the verse, which follows the Masoretic Text.

¹⁵Eben Ezra, the great medieval rabbinic commentator, states, “Any interpretation which is not in accor-

dance with the arrangement of the accents, thou shalt not consent to it, nor listen to it" (Price, *Syntax of Masoretic Accents*, 9).

¹⁶Pinchas Wechter, *Ibn Barun's Arabic Works on Hebrew Grammar and Lexicography* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1964), 29.

¹⁷Ewald says, "By further consideration and investigation in this way, there will always be found a beautiful harmony between the accentuation and the syntax, so that each may afford explanation and support to the other. Whether we start with the syntax, and come to understand it without knowing anything yet of the accentuation (as the author once actually did), or proceed from the latter to the former, accurate investigation will always lead to the same result, so that he who has a correct understanding of the syntax, has already nearly mastered the accentuation also, and he who understands the latter will always find himself more easily at home in the former. But this is, at the same time, the highest praise that can be given to the accentuation." H. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament* (trans. James Kennedy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1891), §366.

¹⁸J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991), 193.

¹⁹E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 5.

²⁰Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and rev. T. Muraoka (2 vols; Roma: Pontificio Istituto

Biblico, 1991), §15, especially 15k.

²¹For example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 101.