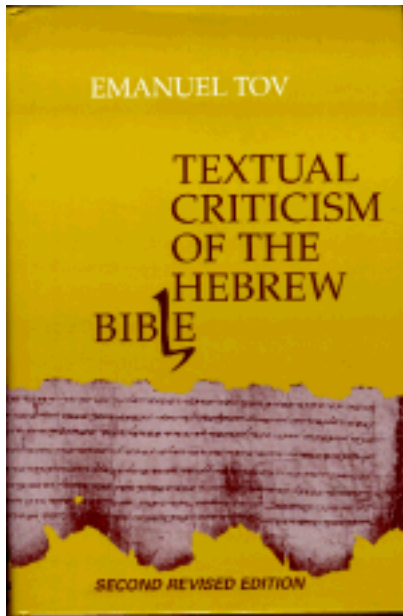


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**Tov, Emanuel**

*Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*

2d edition

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. Pp. xl + 456. Cloth.  
\$50.00. ISBN 0800634292.

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If one were asked to make a list of books that would be most useful in the library of someone serious about biblical studies, Tov's book would surely be near the top of the list. This is the second revised edition of a work first published in 1992. The sheer volume of reliable information, presented in a clear and readable manner, along with intelligent methodological discussions, have already made this work a classic.

The scope of Tov's work makes it impossible to give a brief description of its contents. After an extensive introduction (ch. 1), chapter 2 gives a detailed introduction to "Textual Witnesses of the Bible." Pages 22–79 alone deal with all aspects of the Masoretic text (MT), ranging from its ancestry in the Qumran proto-MT to details of the Masorah such as the *puncta extraordinaria* (extraordinary points [fifteen cases of dotted letters]). Tov then provides extensive introductions to the Samaritan Pentateuch (and the Qumran pre-Samaritan texts), the Qumran biblical texts, and the various translations, especially the Septuagint (LXX). On the way, smaller and more indirect witnesses, such as the silver amulets containing the priestly blessing from Ketef Hinnom, are not neglected. Chapter 3, "The History of the Biblical Text," discusses important issues of synthesis in the field,

such as the relationship between the various textual witnesses and the question of the “original shape” of the biblical text. Chapter 4, “The Copying and Transmitting of the Biblical Text,” covers a vast range of topics. Tov displays one of his several specialties with a detailed discussion of scribal practices reflected in both Qumran and later biblical texts. Then he summarizes the subfields of study relating to the Hebrew script and the development of orthographic (spelling) practices. Finally, he gives a detailed introduction to the sort of processes that created variant readings. This is an item usually found in introductions to textual criticism, but Tov is again comprehensive, ranging from scribal errors (e.g., interchange of similar letters) to intentional changes (e.g., theological changes). Chapter 5, “The Aim and Procedures of Textual Criticism,” and chapter 6, “The Evaluation of Readings,” present Tov’s perspective on the procedures textual critics follow in their work. The author argues that the evaluation of variant readings is an “art” and downplays the applicability of textual “rules,” such as “the more difficult reading is to be preferred.” Chapter 7, “Textual Criticism and Literary Criticism,” is, as Tov notes (15), not a section usually found in handbooks of textual criticism. It discusses, with many examples, cases where the attested variants in different versions of biblical books are so great as to allow the two texts to be designated as different literary editions of the same work. One of the most famous examples concerns the book of Jeremiah, where the MT and LXX versions differ radically in length and arrangements of contents. Chapter 8, “Conjectural Emendation,” discusses cases where scholars propose new readings of the text without the authority of any variant readings. Chapter 9 discusses “Critical Editions,” *Biblica Hebraica*, *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, and the *Hebrew University Bible*. The volume closes with thirty plates and indices of ancient sources, authors, and subjects.

This is the second edition of Tov’s book. He indicates in his preface (xxxix) that several sections that have been rewritten. However, the extent of the revisions was constrained by the boundaries of the individual camera-ready pages submitted to the publisher. Thus, while an attempt has been made to update the bibliography, the number of post-1992 references is not large. A flaw with the new bibliographical references is that several times they are not referenced in the author index (index 2). I noted the absence of Flint-VanderKam (xxxi), Schiffman (xxxiii), Treballe (xxxiv), Penkower (5 n. 4), and Kelley (72).

Occasionally, too, a reference escaped the updating process. Page 231 describes the DJD edition of 4QJer<sup>c</sup> (DJD XV, 1997) as “to be published.” The Hebrew article by Levin on page 8 “The ‘Qeri’ as the Primary Text of the Hebrew Bible” has been published in English in *General Linguistics* 35 (1997 [1995]): 181–223.

Page 266 note 37 refers to T. Lim's dissertation but not his *Holy Scripture in the Qumran Commentaries and Pauline Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

Tov's new edition gives evidence of the work that has been done over the past decade by himself and others, especially in the publication and evaluation of the Qumran scrolls. Sometimes this leads to major shifts in Tov's position against edition one. For example, on page 114 Tov suggested in the first edition that the "Qumran practice" scrolls (characterized by a peculiar orthography, etc.) may have been copied from proto-Masoretic texts. In edition two he now states that "some of these texts may have been copied from proto-Masoretic texts, while the majority are textually independent." This is part of a general trend in the second edition to downplay the significance of the MT at Qumran. Tov's formulation makes even more acute the question whether "Qumran practice" is a useful categorization of the Qumran texts. If the "Qumran practice" texts are actually just "proto-MT" or "independent" texts (the other two main categories of Qumran biblical texts) with a peculiar orthography, should they not be included in those other groups as subcategories rather than misleadingly being presented as a separate group?

As another example of a significant change, on page 115 Tov now considers only 35 percent of the Qumran biblical texts to be proto-MT, as opposed to 60 percent in edition one. In light of this drastic revision, it is pertinent to ask what criteria Tov uses to decide that Qumran texts are close enough to MT to be called "proto-MT." I cannot find this question addressed anywhere in the book. A tiny minority of Qumran biblical texts are virtually identical to the medieval MT (for the present, see *DSD* 9 [2002]: 364–90), hardly 35 percent. It is misleading to call these texts, as well as the similarly MT-identical Masada or Murabba'at texts, "proto-MT" in the same breath as other Qumran texts that have a significant number of variations from MT.

The wide scope of Tov's book demonstrates that "textual criticism" is foundational to all aspects of biblical studies. Indeed, some of the most important questions in modern biblical studies are being raised by the phenomenon of textual variation.

Tov still spends much time discussing traditional tasks of the text critic: evaluating variant readings to arrive at a "preferred text," which may be considered to bear a relationship with "the original text." He, however, has important methodological concerns with each stage of the process. He is aware of the subjectivity of the evaluation process (310) and the practical difficulties of

arriving at an original text, should such a thing ever have existed (164–80). Text-critical study is, of course, a prerequisite to all aspects of biblical studies: one cannot do historical, literary, or linguistic study of the “biblical text” without determining what that text is.

Textual criticism has, however, a more radical agenda to offer biblical scholars. As Tov shows, especially in his seventh chapter, we are in possession of a rather startling variety of biblical texts. This, despite the extremely fragmentary nature of our evidence: no texts older than approximately 250 B.C.E., complete texts of biblical books generally much later than this, and these from a limited number of streams of Judaism. Further, it seems likely that the more pre-first century C.E. texts we might find, the more variety we would discover.

Only a tiny percentage of Qumran biblical texts have a very close relationship with the MT (see my statistics in *DSD* 9 [2002]: 364–90). For the parallel text 2 Sam 22 // Ps 18, D. J. A. Clines shows that one in every two words has an attested variant (“What Remains of the Hebrew Bible? Its Text and Language in a Postmodern Age,” *Studia Theologica* 54 [2001]: 76–95). Tov (172) agrees with E. Ulrich (*The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999]) that the biblical texts evolved through the production of successive literary editions. It seems that the Hebrew Bible comes from a world where precise copying of texts was not the norm. Instead, whereas some core elements remained the same, the outward form of the biblical texts was in constant flux. All this indicates that the text of the Hebrew Bible is in a state of “radical uncertainty” (Clines, 81). If this view of the text is correct, the impact on biblical studies, as the term is usually understood, is fundamental. Are we in touch, in any meaningful sense, with early biblical texts? When writing history, for example, may we reckon with the possibility that variant chronologies, for example, of royal reigns (Tov, 338), were produced with each new edition of the book of Kings and that the sequence of individual incidents in the narrative varied according to differing editorial schemes (Tov, 332, 345–46)? If, further, the details of individual narratives could vary fundamentally (Tov, 327–30, 334–36, 340–45), can the biblical sources be relied on for writing history, whatever the date of their “original composition”? Similarly, with variant editions of prophetic works (Tov, 319–27, 333–34), can we talk meaningfully about the original message of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the like? Given the phenomenal variability of the supposedly quite “late” Qumran copies of Psalms (*DSD* 9 [2002]: 364–90), can we be sure we are really analyzing more than fragments of pre-Hellenistic era Hebrew poetry? Was the “Biblical Hebrew” of the current texts similar to the

original language of the “authors” (see *JJS* 52 [2001]: 130–31)? Many similar questions will occur to the reader.

Tov’s book is not only an indispensable source of information related to textual criticism. It also contains many insightful discussions of issues of fundamental importance to all areas of biblical studies. Every student of the Bible should have a copy.