

RBL 11/08/1999



Hendel, Ronald S.

***The Text of Genesis 1-11: Textual
Studies and Critical Edition***

New York: Oxford University Press,
1998. Pp. xv + 168, Paperback, \$29.95,
ISBN 0195119614.

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Hendel's monograph, as indicated by its subtitle, is essentially two works. Although closely interconnected, his textual study of the first chapters of Genesis forms an independent unit, which also functions as preparation for what follows: the critical edition of a portion of the Hebrew Bible. The critical edition of Genesis 1-11 in turn serves as a sort of model for a larger scale project Hendel envisions. In what follows, we keep these two "works" separate in terms of analysis and evaluation.

Chapter 1 ("Theory, Method, Tools") is appropriately brief, given the fairly sophisticated audience this volume addresses. In Hendel's opinion, large numbers of biblical scholars continue to give short shrift to textual studies, with particularly harsh criticism justly (in this reviewer's opinion) meted out toward literary critics. On the other hand, his singling out of the Jewish Publication Society's *TANAK* for special praise in its text critical handling of the Hebrew Bible seems odd, especially with respect to the Torah. I would have thought that the New American Bible offered a better "proof text" for Hendel. The remainder of this chapter is straightforward, with clear examples of what text critics do and how they carry out their craft. Hendel, in common with many others, has some difficulty in arriving at appropriate terminology to describe the various phases of the Hebrew, Greek, and Samaritan texts. His decisions are as good as any.

In chapter 2, Hendel defends the view that by and large the Old Greek translator of Genesis handled his Hebrew *Vorlage* quite literally, with at most a very limited scope for interpretation. Thus, differences between the MT and the OG, especially in connection

with extensive harmonizations in the latter, are to be traced to the stage of transmission and not translation. Hendel's example-by-example presentation of his case is by and large convincing, although I envision the Greek translator as intervening more often than does Hendel.

Hendel devotes chapter 3 to a careful examination of textual variations (he prefers the term "problems") in the Hebrew text. Chapter 4 is an extremely important analysis of the varying chronological systems of chapters 5 and 11 of Genesis as presented in the extant Hebrew, Greek, and Samaritan witnesses. In Genesis 5 a "scandal" occurred in those chronologies that allowed Methuselah to survive the flood, while the continuance of Noah and some of his contemporaries well into the lifetime of Abraham (and even later) constituted an apparent difficulty in certain of the calculations preserved in Genesis 11. Hendel expertly examines all of the evidence, which he explains by the intriguing hypothesis that a redactor incorporated an independent document into an already existing text of Genesis, but failed to deal adequately with the chronological conundrums that arose thereby. I do not find such explanations--that we have greater insight than some long-ago redactor, editor, *et al.*--very convincing, but Hendel makes the case as well as it can be.

On the basis of this analysis, Hendel determines that the Hebrew, Greek, and Samaritan texts "are each representative of a different recension of Genesis" (p.79). This is an extremely important insight, undercut to a degree (although I am not sure how much) by Hendel's failure to provide a clear definition of "recension" (it is both an edition and not an edition--on the same page). Moreover, and this represents another important finding on Hendel's part, these three "recensions" are not only all we have, but almost certainly all that there were.

In chapter 5, Hendel looks at "harmonizing tendencies" in the Samaritan and Greek texts, which provide helpful data enabling him to make progress "toward the textual history of Genesis" (chapter 6). Hendel correctly and cogently promotes the utility of the genealogical method (which emphasizes shared secondary readings among witnesses) over against the statistical method. He concludes that (1) the Hebrew and Greek "belong to distinct branches of the textual stemma," and (2) the Samaritan shares "a common hyparchetype" with the Greek and exhibits "horizontal transmission of readings from proto-M text(s)" (p.97). He also argues that non-rabbinic Hebrew texts continued to circulate and have influence after 70 CE. All of these conclusions merit serious consideration.

It may seem odd that I devote relatively little space to what is undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of this volume; namely, Hendel's presentation of an eclectic critical edition of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1-11. Scholars have argued, and continue to argue, over whether or not the time is ready (or will ever be ready) for the preparation of such a text as well as whether his enterprise is desirable, even if obtainable. I choose not to enter

into this debate. Rather, I emphasize the fact (or, at least, I think it is a fact) that Hendel's critical text can be no stronger than the methodology he utilized in its preparation. And it is that methodology that he spells out in the first part of this book and which I have undertaken to describe and evaluate above.

Hendel is well aware of the various arguments and enters into what I would consider fruitful dialogue with a number of scholars, especially E. Tov (chapter 7). Hendel is convinced that, in presenting a critical text as "an approximation to the original insofar as that is reasonable" (p.114), he is in effect reversing the course of a history characterized by extensive changes and additions, primarily in the direction of (perceived) harmonization. Within the contours he himself has delineated, I find Hendel's textual presentation and argumentation (chapter 8) to be immensely and intensely worthwhile.

A JBL review is not the place for point-by-point analysis. Undoubtedly, others will carry that out in subsequent papers. I do look forward to the evolving project Hendel is organizing and to the undoubtedly surprising (even to him!) paths he and his colleagues will take.