

B. Comparative notes on Hebrew and Greek Texts1. The material available for research

There is far less material available for the study of the Old Testament text than for the study of the New...far fewer primary texts, that is. It is said that there are more than 8,000 Greek mss and fragmentary mss dated before 1200 AD. But for this same period there are but a few hundred Hebrew mss and most of them are from the latter part of this time. This may be due to the Hebrew community practice of destroying mss when no longer in service, or it may have been effected by the magical attitude that some parts of the Hebrew community developed regarding the text. There are many factors, no doubt, in a full explanation. Certainly the Hebrew mss was not widely disseminated as was the Greek New Testament mss. Where the Hebrew communities went, so went copies of the sacred Scriptures but they did not have much existence in Hebrew outside the communities. The Christian church, moreover, did not take up the Hebrew text as the basis for its instruction but seems to have preferred the LXX and later the Vulgate. From about 400 AD to 1400 AD the Hebrew Scriptures had little place in the Christian community (the Hebrew text, that is) and had it not been for the interests of humanism in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Hebrew text might have been neglected for a longer period. Therefore in terms of the basic language texts to be studied, the Greek texts far outnumber the Hebrew.

2. The Variety of Versions

As used now, version refers to an edition of the text by some copiest or a group of copiers. Although not technically accurate, we identify someone's production of a text already printed in established form as a rescension. Edition is a broad term that may be used synonymously for either. From a common source you have:

the original work

a version which would be a copy as noted

a rescension republishing the version

an edition which might include both!

And, of course, you could have a translation beside the original that would also possess these.

The great difference is that the codices of the New Testament almost all have Old Testament counterparts. There is considerable variety in them depending on where they were translated or copied. But the Old Testament with far fewer versions has a much greater uniformity in content.