

definition the commitment of the Masoretes was to tradition and the maintenance of tradition. For further information see B.J. Roberts: OLD TESTAMENT TEXT AND VERSIONS, page 41.

(2) Definition (more defining)

Defining the Masoretic Text we use the statement of Wurthwein in the TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT "The Hebrew text of the Old Testament is called the Masoretic text because in its present form it represents the Masora, that is, the tradition preserved by the Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes." (p. 9) This basic statement requires four defining points in clarification:

MASORA...involves the idea of that which is handed down as in our earlier note. The method of transmission is not stipulated. The nature of the tradition is also not regulated. What is important is that something of value and of historic consequence is cherished for meanings of varied sorts. The value placed on the text by the continuing Jewish community is hinted at in this discussion.

MASORETES...were not so much an official class as a general group who were committed to the tradition of their culture. One hardly went to school and studied to become a Masorete! As a group those whose minds guarded the tradition, the Masoretes were involved not only in biblical tradition but in the rich cultural traditions of the Jews that centered on synagogical life and existence. We remember them for their Bible aid but they worked for the total preservation of the Hebrew culture.

MASORETIC AGE...indicates the period from about 500 to 1200 AD with some variable allowance in the method of dating. During this time the Jewish community was widespread and harassed. It found its only real legacy in the cultural traditions. Its real key to survival in troubled times, and they were that, was its ethnic unity and solidarity. Yet there were many different callings and varieties of Jews. They tended to cluster about school groups, sura, and under the leadership of gifted teachers, gaons. These schools became the authoritative voices in Judaism and became the centers for normative Jewish thinking.