CHAPTER ONE

A TEXTUAL-COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY

Investigation of biblical textual variants, both between Hebrew and Greek and within each language, has traditionally been done with a view to determining an ‘original’ Hebrew text (Urtext) or at least deciding on the ‘better’ reading. Commentators have an interest in establishing a ‘critical’ text as the basis for their commentaries. Yet this leaves other variants in a sense as ‘incorrect’, often attributed to various forms of scribal error. Our purpose, however, is to demonstrate a different approach, which aims to treat each manuscript with equal value, whether Hebrew or Greek, listening to its voice as a clue to an interpretative trajectory.

We have chosen Ezekiel 36–39 as a basis for investigation as it contains various events through which the prophet envisaged that post-exilic Israel would go, as part of her restoration to the future God had in store for them. It is transitional between the destruction of Jerusalem and exile and the new temple of chs 40–48.

1.1. Commentators and the Text of Ezekiel

Amongst commentators on Ezekiel, Cornill (1886) was one of the first to give detailed reference to the Greek text in Ezekiel, noting differences from the Hebrew. Subsequent commentators have built on his work. Cooke’s (1936, pp. xli–xlvii) extensive work in the ICC series, following the textual-critical methodologies of his day, evaluated Hebrew-Greek variants primarily to determine the ‘superiority’ of the Masoretic Text (MT) over the Septuagint (LXX), or vice versa. He organised variants under three categories: “[1]. The superiority of LXX to MT in cases where they differ; [2]. The superiority of MT to LXX in cases where they differ; [3]. Characteristics of LXX that do not necessarily imply a different text.” Other commentators have often followed these categories with their treatment of variants. This again was done to establish a critical text for the purpose of constructing a commentary. This practice can also be seen in Zimmerli’s (1979, 1983) commentaries. While
he details LXX variants in his annotations, providing possible reasons, he rarely refers to them in his commentary section, since they are not part of his established critical text. Allen (1990, 1994) is another modern commentator who follows this practice, yet with less detail than Zimmerli, and frequently attributes variants to ‘scribal error’. Block’s (1997, 1998) commentaries also consider the Hebrew-Greek variants but with less focus on the superiority of one text over the other, and he refers to variants in his commentary section when appropriate. Other modern commentators have written with little or no reference to Hebrew-Greek variants, presumably working from an existing eclectic text, either Hebrew, Greek, or a modern language, and not directly from extant manuscripts.

1.2. A Textual-Comparative Methodology

Our purpose in what follows is not focused on examining variants in an attempt to discover any Hebrew original text (Urtext), nor to establish which variant is ‘correct’. Rather, our purpose is to treat each text as an interpretive trajectory witness from the scribe or community wherein it originated.¹ This entails comparing the oldest extant Hebrew and Greek texts intra-linguistically, and then secondly, trans-linguistically, noting any variants and exploring possible interpretive reasons for these variants. Scribal error can then be assigned to variants without discernable interpretive intent. We may call this a ‘textual-comparative’ methodology. The purpose of this methodology is to give each textual witness equal status, with none considered ‘superior’ to the others. It accords each textual witness the ability to be ‘heard’ in its own right (Hebrew and/or Greek).

Our textual-comparative methodology compares extant manuscripts rather than relying on modern eclectic texts (e.g., Ziegler, Rahlfs [cf. BHS and HUBP]).² Whilst these modern texts are invaluable tools, they

¹ We occasionally use the term ‘community’ as while it is possible that a scribe is being idiosyncratic, it is much more likely that they are part of a wider group and their work is reflective of the milieu and understanding of that group. Thus ‘community’ is used in a way that recognises theological and interpretive influence wider than an individual copyist; although how wide, and whether antecedent, is indeterminate. As such, ‘scribe’ and ‘community’ are used interchangeably.

² BHS and HUBP are diplomatic transcriptions of Leningrad and Aleppo respectively, and therefore not eclectic works, yet they both list variants in their critical apparatus.