INTRODUCTION

The public reading of the Torah (*Pentateuch* or *Five Books of Moses*) on Sabbath, a rite established in ancient Judea more than 2000 years ago, begins a little over halfway through the service, when prayers are suspended and a Torah scroll is brought to a table in the center of the synagogue. Seven congregants, in sequence, recite blessings before and after a passage from the scroll is read aloud by a Ba'al Qoh-rei ["Reader"] who inserts the vowels absent in the scroll's text and punctuates every verse using a special melody, like a libretto's score. This ceremony is familiar to synagogue attendees but most will never witness an event that occurs very infrequently. This one generally begins with the reader stopping to peer intently at the scroll, then calling over some others as he points to the text. They will consult a printed copy and conclude that there is an error in the scroll - an extra letter, a missing letter, a missing space or one appearing where it is not called for. The most frequent blemish is a letter partially erased or with a jutting ink spot. Any of these flaws will cause that scroll to be set aside and not used until it is repaired. Another one will be brought for the completion of that week's reading.

This stringent treatment preserves the integrity of the scrolls against the slightest defect. One used for public reading must contain all five books of Moses in their entirety. The recitation must also be exact; an error in the vowelizing or pronunciation of a word is immediately brought to the reader's attention, often by a chorus of attentive listeners. More scrupulous congregations will even demand a repetition if a passage is sung wrong, hence improperly punctuated. Should a kosher scroll be unavailable, a printed copy may not be substituted nor may Scripture be orally quoted for instruction or study (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin 60b).

Soon after Scripture's canonization, Aramaic displaced Hebrew as the Jews' vernacular. These languages are close but the differences were sufficient to modify the Torah reading routine in those communities - a *Meturgeman* who translated each verse Into Aramaic after it was chanted in Hebrew by the reader. While generally adhering to the text, these officiants frequently had to paraphrase to convey nuances which could now only be brought out orally; many also took the liberty of adding their own embellishments to fill perceived lacunae. Both these departures from the literal found their way into written Aramaic translations.

The Jewish diaspora in Hellenistic regions became Greek speakers; most lost their facility with Hebrew, which was relegated to the religious and ritualistic spheres of their lives but for this, the need for Greek translations of their foundational documents became critical. Unlike Aramaic, a Semitic tongue like Hebrew, Greek is Indo-European, a group that does not lend itself to smooth and accurate translations of Semitic languages. It was inevitable that these renditions substantially veered from the intended Scriptural meanings; transformations into koine thus produced compromised versions.

These developments opened the dam of biblical revisionism. The distortions in translations and hermeneutics through the ages are beyond our scope; we focus instead on specific errors that crept in and their effects that detached clerical and scholarly perceptions from Scripture itself. This severance of the "Bible" from its original Hebrew language and scriptural form in the scrolls transformed its narrative, as we demonstrate in the Prologue. We deploy the technique of Forensic Linguistics to remove the pseudo-intellectual debris that accrued over centuries to uncover Scripture's bedrock, how it was understood by its compilers and earliest readers. A professor teaching Cervantes who uses English translations of the author's works because he himself does not know Spanish or much about Iberian history and culture would be a laughingstock. Yet, this exactly describes the expounders of "the Bible". As much of what we advance diverges from traditional interpretations, we supply detailed expositions. This may prove tedious reading *(which is why content which can be skipped without loss of continuity is in smaller or italic fonts)* but it forestalls refutations by those lacking the expertise to do so.

The first Greek translations became the bases for subsequent ones that went through several transformations before emerging as "modern" versions. This iterative process accumulated errors over the centuries, resulting in many textual distortions. *[The King James is the best-known and, in terms of literary quality, the most eloquent but this does not spare its being riddled with errors in numbers as large as its companion versions. We cite two examples in the Appendix, the first an oft-quoted passage in Isaiah, the second an even more egregious mistranslation in Psalms.]* As these adulterations coalesced into "authorized" texts, serious research was neglected, while interpretations and commentaries based on these formed a body of flawed beliefs widely accepted as biblical doctrine. The necessity for rectification is heightened by the Bible being the world's perennial bestseller. Of the one hundred million new copies distributed annually across the globe, twenty million are in the United States; along with those in other English-speaking regions, the English translations are by far the most numerous and it is to these that we turn our attention.

We use the Masoretic text (מָסוֹרָה MA-SOH-RAH - "handed over") that emerged in 6th century Palestine and spread to all the Diaspora. Every *TaNaKh* (Hebrew Bible) in the world will display absolute textual uniformity. Torah scrolls predate these by centuries *(as seen from those found in Qumran)*, their text already standardized. Scholars found variant readings and posited others based on divergences in some Greek translations originating in Alexandria and the Samaritan Pentateuch. Jewish religious authorities then zealously purged the texts of sectarian readings from which these came; we do not dispute scholarly findings but do not generally consider them. We also avoid post-biblical doctrines and ideas. Claims that later discoveries or developments can be "found" in Scripture are retroactive attribution of knowledge or beliefs the ancients did not have.

Anyone expounding Scripture must be acquainted with the social and cultural milieu of the ancient Israelites, much of which is gleaned from the text itself. What the savants invariably overlook is that the post-canonization audience was a different society flourishing over a millennium later. The text had therefore to also reflect the creedal motivations of those first readers, not apparent from superficial reading; that community had modified notions of divinity and man's responsibility, tenets and religious sensibilities not discernible in these writings which nevertheless influenced their own understanding of them. Scholars must therefore look elsewhere for these. The best source anthology for this is the Talmud, a massive compendium that sheds light on Israelite doctrine and Ideology and which therefore must also be accessible to any aspiring expositor.

For the actual translation of words and phrases, an intimate familiarity with biblical Hebrew is sine qua non. This not only requires years of diligent study but mastering abstruse semantics unlike anything encountered elsewhere. For this reason, it will be instructive to supply a short synopsis of Scriptural grammar and syntax.

The Hebrew alphabet has 22 consonants but no vowels, although five of its letters can be vowel indicators. Its three-letter root system makes for a language with few words, a paucity mitigated by resourceful use of vowels mentally inserted, allowing diverse modulations. By analogy, the English "root" B-R-D can be bread, bride, broad, bard, bared, bird and more. These words are unrelated but Hebrew words or cognates sharing a root have a common thread [not always true of two-letter "radicals"; most Hebraists believe these derive from three-letter roots but we are not sure what the dropped letters were or their placement, so two-letter homonyms may be unrelated]. Context determines meaning; what precedes or follows a word is crucial. Hebrew does not use synonyms; words with similar roots have distinct meanings, as do words whose meanings seem similar but which have different cognates. When these share passages, the text signals different meanings for the same subject (e. g. GENESIS 1:2). Next to vowels in importance, prefixes and suffixes modify gender, number and tense, this last complicated by two forms - complete ("perfect") and incomplete ("imperfect"). Along with the fact that it has no present tense infinitive of "to be" (technically the incomplete), these features of biblical Hebrew can prove daunting even

to accomplished scholars. A girl can say "I was in the store" or "I will be in the store" but not "I am in the store"; her mother must infer that אני בחנות A-NEE BA-CHA-NOOTH (I IN THE STORE) means she is there now.

One word can have varied meanings. בַּיִת BA-YITH (HOUSE) is any container, real or conceptual: בֵּית יָד - BEITH YAD (GLOVE {"house of hand"}; בית שימוש BEITH SHI-MOOSH (RESTROOM {"house of usage" - modern euphemism}; בֵּית כָּר BEITH KOR {a field expected to yield a "kor" of grain}; בֵּית לֶחֶם BEITH LEH-CHEM (BETHLEHEM - "House of Bread") - a market town (JUDGES 17:7); בֵּית אֵל BEITH EL (HOUSE OF [THE] LORD - GENESIS 28:19). The abstract בֵּיתוֹ BEI-THOH (HIS HOUSE - LEVITICUS 16:6) is "his immediate family", while בֵּית דָוִיד BEITH DA-VID (HOUSE OF DAVID -ZACHARIAH 12:7) was the royal family. Letter prefixes or suffixes retain their intrinsic sense. The prefix בְּ "Beth" normally means "in", based on BA-YITH (HOUSE - the letter's archaic ideogram) or "container", hence בְמַקְלִי B'MAQ-LEE (WITH MY STAFF - GENESIS 32:11, something held "in" the hand) and בְּצֹאנֶךָ B'TZOH-NEH-KHA (FOR YOUR FLOCKS - GENESIS 31:41, a preposition marking transfer of ownership "into" another's domain). The letter "beth" retains its essential meaning, unlike "beta" (also from the Phoenician "Beth"), which has no meaning in Greek.

In addition to the structural elements of Hebrew, any exegete must be familiar with how the letter "Vav" plays a role other than a consonant. As a conjunction, it frequently converts verbs from future tense to the incomplete past, a distinct feature of Scriptural grammar whose implications we discuss as the need arises. Commentators must also take heed of its presence or absence at the beginning of a verse or Parsha, for that affects the orientation of what follows. A scholar must also examine if "Vav" is a vowel indicator within a word or as a suffix, a function it performs for OH {Chohlom} and OO {Qoobootz}. When it is, that word is referred to as being MAH-LAY ("full"); if not, it is CHA-SEIR ("lacking"). Readers long ago ceased to differentiate these in pronunciation, hence identical meanings were attributed to them; this may be true as to basic import but not the words' connotations. These details of grammar and syntax can only be ascertained by physical perusal of the Hebrew text in the scrolls or meticulous printed copies, which raises another pertinent issue.

Just as important are spacings. The text in parchment scrolls is divided into PAR-SHAs (paragraphs – plural PAR-SHEE-YOHTH), each containing one or more related events or themes. One with a new episode or topic begins at the right margin [no indenting], a minor or major separation at its end. A minor one is a space taken up by nine letters (not a strict rule) and always in the middle of a line; scribes adjust letter thicknesses near a PAR-SHA's end to ensure this. After a minor separation, the next PAR-SHA (starting on the same line) retains elements or motifs of the previous one, often forming a sequence in a long meta-PAR-SHA. *(The only exceptions are lyric sections, like the Song of the Sea (EXODUS 15), where single phrases are separated.)* A space at the left margin ends a meta-PAR-SHA; the next one, from the right margin of the next line, starts a new one. The only empty lines occur where four lines separate books, like the interval between GENESIS and EXODUS. Standard translations have the "six creation days" as the first chapter of Genesis. Actually, those 31 verses comprise six PAR-SHAs, each ending with a major separation, as does Chapter 2, verses 1-3. It is clear from this and their content that 1:1 to 2:3 is one narrative with seven independent PAR-SHAs, not stages of a sequence. Some scholars lumped verse 4 of Chapter 2 with this creation saga. Had they examined a Torah scroll, they would have seen their error at once, for this verse follows a major separation to begin a lengthy PAR-SHA that extends to 3:15, followed by a minor separation and a one-verse PAR-SHA (3:16). Another minor separation is followed by a PAR-SHA (3:17-21) and only then a major separation. 2:4 through 3:21 is one long PARSHA; the last three verses of Chapter 3 open a new one. Examination of the text layout is indispensable for accurate translation and interpretation.

Completing the textual mosaic is its punctuation system. The Masoretes devised pictorial representations but textual parsing long predated canonization. These markings were at times in the scrolls but are now only in printed books of Ta"Na"Kh. Trope sequences are memorized by readers for public recitations; these are chanted,

which induced the popular notion that the proper "music" was the purpose of these symbols interspersed in the text. This cantorial liturgy enhances the dramatic impact of these readings *(as the score augments an opera libretto)* but the symbols' primary function is to properly punctuate, essential for an accurate understanding of any verse. For any translation, if the trope sequence differs from what would be expected under the rules of punctuation, that translation is at the least inaccurate and more probably plain wrong.

Each of these factors by itself is essential for accurate translation and interpretation. Biblical Hebrew is precise. If a translated passage differs from the Hebrew text *(more suitable or accurate vocabulary and phrasing is indicated)*, that translation is wrong. Scholars must be intimately familiar with Hebrew lexis, grammar and morphology. Aramaic translators interspersed paraphrases but the Greek works, including those on which the Septuagint was based, were meant to be literal; however, the latter already contained errors resulting from the incongruence between many Hebrew and Greek words and concepts. A few later savants recognized these defects. Origen knew his sources were riddled with mistakes. In his time *(3rd century)*, Hebrew was confined to the synagogue and ritual observances, not used in everyday speech, while the Mishnaic Hebrew used for writings differed from biblical Hebrew and was adulterated by foreign words [even the high court and legislature in Palestine was called by the Greek "Sanhedrin"]. Furthermore, the growing hostility between Jews and Christians made it impossible for him to get the cooperation of those with the erudition he needed. By the time Jerome wrote his translation a century later, the rupture between the two communities was total. Though he postponed completion of his Vulgate for a decade, hoping to find reliable sources, he finally settled for the few who would aid him but, as they were on the fringes of their communities, their knowledge of Hebrew was superficial.

Most of our knowledge of Near Eastern history was unearthed in the last two centuries. This does not mean early readers of Scripture were ignorant of its history and culture. The facts and ideas interpolated by later generations to fill an historical void may have acquired the legitimacy and sanctity of tradition but cannot supersede unearthed facts, especially if our analyses confirm them. At the same time, we must keep in mind that Scripture is not a science textbook. It propounds duties and obligations, not rules for mastering nature; man was to use his intellect to discover those. The devout who think some scientific theories contradict holy writ brand these as heresy and devised alternative "models" to reconcile modern findings with their dogmas. These intellectual schizophrenics readily accept doctors' prescriptions, get on jets or use GPS yet deny that the same principles underlying these support valid deductions in history, geology, paleontology, archaeology and cosmology. Were they better versed in biblical Hebrew and the milieu in which Scripture emerged, they would know it does not conflict with the tenets of science or sound academic disciplines. Conversely, many scientists and scholars reject the Bible as naive and antiquated. We do not attribute hostile motives to this camp or consider their endeavors attempts to subvert Scriptural doctrine *(there are some misguided evolutionary biologists)*. Their exposure to it was probably minimal and superficial; they might be surprised to learn that it is astonishingly consistent with their beliefs, even biblical accounts of the "days" of creation and man's "descent".

Some dogmas associated with Genesis are not there - nor in the intellectual matrix pervading biblical societies. Projected into the text in post-biblical eras, they attained widespread popularity and may be taken for granted by readers as being part of Scriptural doctrine. We do not take issue with these beliefs or the possibility they were current in the biblical eras. Our task is to rigorously analyze the Hebrew writings to determine how they were understood by the ancient Israelites. As many may find the absence of their cherished concepts disquieting, we inserted short paragraphs in our Exposition sections at points readers may expect to find these subjects discussed. These are marked off by dotted lines, as this one is.