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The Canon and Text of the Old Testament

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In recent years events have taken place that again and again have brought the Bible before the eye of the general public. The 1930s marked the acquisition by the British Museum of the celebrated Sinaitic Codex, which in 1859 had been "discovered" by Constantine Tischendorf in St. Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai. The 1940s exhibited the remarkable Dead Sea Scrolls (more accurately described as the Judean Desert Scrolls), eventually comprising in total hundreds of Bible and Bible-related texts, a number of which antedate the standard OT text a thousand or more years. Added to such well-known events has been, from the beginning of the century down to now, the recovery of a substantial number of NT papyri from the sands of Egypt. With this new material have inevitably come new interest in and new questions on the background of the various books of the Old and New Testaments. In the limits of one chapter I will seek to sketch this background of the OT as it relates to questions of canon and text.

CANON

Terms

The word "canon" is actually a Greek word (*kanōn*) which has had many uses. Essentially the term refers to a

“reed”; then to a “tool” used by a carpenter or builder. *Kanōn* was used especially for a carpenter’s “level”; as such it was a straight piece of wood with a scale on it. It was also used as a scribe’s “ruler.” From the literal sense of “level” or “ruler,” all the metaphorical senses are derived: (1) a “written law” or “rule” to distinguish right from wrong, a “rule” of life. In this sense the teachings of Jesus or the words of Scripture might be called a *kanōn*. (2) an exemplary or ideal man may be compared to a straight ruler and called a *kanōn*. (3) a rule of grammar, a rule or principle in philosophy, or, ecclesiastically, a rule of faith or a church ordinance might be termed a *kanōn*. (4) a very common use is “list,” probably derived from the row of marks on a level or ruler. The Eusebian Canons, for example, are found in many manuscripts of the Gospels. They are lists in ten columns to assist the reader in locating parallel passages in the Gospels. (5) from the above, *kanōn* also refers to a list of persons eligible for office or privilege; and then to a list of people commemorated in the mass, the living and dead for whom prayers are said. To put a dead person in such a list is to *canonize* him.

Of the many different senses in which *kanōn* is used, the important one for this discussion is (4), *kanōn* in the sense of a list. When so used it denotes the list of accepted writings which were read in public worship and were regarded as having divine authority. The word *kanōn* is first used in this way by Athanasius shortly after A.D. 350.

The word “apocrypha,” like “canon,” has various uses. It is a Greek adjective (neuter plural) that literally means “hidden things” or “hidden (books).” In its early usage it was the practical equivalent of “esoteric” and stood for books that were to be read by the “enlightened” inner circle, books that were excluded from public use. At length “apocrypha” came to mean “heretical” and “spurious.” In 367, Athanasius in his Easter Letter refers to the Scriptures as “canonical” (*kanonizomena*) as contrasted to those writings that were “apocryphal” (*apokrupha*). In modern times “apocrypha” is mostly used for the fourteen or fifteen books associated with the OT (and printed in some editions of the

English Bible) which are not found in the Hebrew canon.

The word "pseudepigrapha" (literally, "false writings") technically should denote books written with fictitious names; but practically it refers to those Jewish writings which were excluded not only from the OT canon but from the Apocrypha as well. Unlike the Apocrypha, which are represented in various manuscripts of the Septuagint (LXX) and the Latin Vulgate, the Pseudepigrapha in no way approached canonical status.

As applied to the OT, the word "canon" marks off thirty-nine books from all other books, which alone are accepted as Holy Scripture. But how did these particular books come to be acknowledged as authoritative? How was the OT canon effected, and what were the principles and criteria of canonization? What of the circumstances and persons involved in the process? The questions are *historical* in nature. They do not concern as much the origin and contents of Scripture as the general use and recognition of them.

The historical evidence on these points is somewhat scattered and sometimes even scarce. The problem is compounded because many of the books of the OT had to make their ways separately into the canon. Although this adds strength to the canonical list, the evidence on a number of books is not as abundant as the researcher would like to have. There is the difficulty also of distinguishing between what the ancients regarded as "Scripture" and what books were to them profitable for reading.

Divisions of the Canon

At an early date the Jews divided their Scriptures into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (or Hagiographa). The Law contains the five books of the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Prophets include eight books that are subdivided into Former Prophets and Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; the Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (the "Minor Prophets" from Hosea to Malachi). The

Writings are eleven in number: Psalms, Proverbs, and Job (regarded as books of poetry); Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther (known together as the Five Scrolls); Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (counted as one book), and Chronicles. The total number of these books is twenty-four. Some methods of reckoning (attaching Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah) count twenty-two books in all, the number corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Whether the books are counted as twenty-four or twenty-two, it is important to remember that these books are precisely the same as the thirty-nine books of the OT found in most editions of the English Bible.

When Jesus speaks of "the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" as being fulfilled in him (Luke 24:44), his division of the Scriptures approximates the Jewish threefold division of the OT. But the NT also suggests a twofold division. One often reads in the NT such expressions as "the law and the prophets" (Matt. 5:17; Luke 16:16; Rom. 3:21) and "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29; John 1:46; Acts 28:23). These expressions are typical Jewish ways of referring to the OT, for there is no question that at this stage the Writings formed a portion of acknowledged Scripture. "The law and the prophets," and such expressions, simply meant the OT. Parallel to NT usage is that of the Qumran community, which was located adjacent to the Dead Sea, whose writings about this time also speak of what is written in Moses and the prophets. The LXX, likewise, does not follow a threefold arrangement.

Early History of the Canon

In later Judaism the threefold division of the OT was compared to the holy places of the temple—the Law to the Holy of Holies, the Prophets to the Holy Place, and the Writings to the Temple Court. The Jewish position for long centuries has been that the Law is foremost and that the Prophets and Writings exist to explain the Law. The Prophets and Writings, to be sure, are inspired; but the Law is basic. It is convenient to approach the subject of canon in

three parts. This is not to suggest, however, that it has always been this way; neither does it suggest inferiority of one part to another nor that the canonization of the various OT books necessarily took place in three separate stages.

The Law. The conception of canon preceded by many centuries the formal recognition of the canon. The ideas of inspiration and canonicity are distinct, but ultimately the idea of canonicity is derived from that of inspiration. To begin with, the Law was law for the people of Israel because God himself spoke the Ten Commandments and wrote them down (Exod. 20:1; 24:12; 32:16; 34:1; Deut. 4:13, etc.). Moses wrote down the words of the Lord spoken at Sinai (Exod. 24:4); the memorial concerning Amalek (Exod. 17:14); the journey of Israel in the desert (Num. 33:2); all the words of God's law (Deut. 31:9, 24); and the song found in Deuteronomy 32:1-43 (Deut. 31:22). Later, Joshua, Samuel, and others (Josh. 24:26; 1 Sam. 10:23; Isa. 30:8; Jer. 36:2) wrote down the commandments of the Lord. Deuteronomy specifically warns not to add to the divine commands or subtract from them (Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

These passages that note the writing down of God's commands are important. The writing down, as Schrenk says, is a mark of revelation (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 744). Further, the writing down is a witness for future generations. Exodus 40:20 relates that Moses took the "testimony" (the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments) and placed it in the ark of the covenant for preservation. Deuteronomy 31:24-26 states that when Moses had finished writing "the words of this law in a book, to the very end," he commanded the Levites to put the book in the ark "that it may be there for a witness against you." First Samuel 10:25 says that Samuel wrote down the rights and duties of kingship in a book and "laid it before the Lord." Preservation is not tantamount to canonicity; but an authoritative writing down and a careful watch over the things written are suggestive of it.

Throughout its history Israel was bound to keep the law of Moses. To Joshua God said: "This book of the law [the

law of Moses] shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it" (Josh. 1:8). To Solomon David said: "Be strong . . . and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses . . ." (1 Kings 2:3; cf. 2 Kings 14:6; Mal. 4:4, etc.). In the time of King Josiah (621 B.C.), after "the book of the law" was found in the temple, the book was solemnly read in the hearing of the people; and both king and people pledged that they would keep the words of the covenant written in the book (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chron. 34-35). Two hundred years later, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezra read to all the assembled people; and the people entered into a covenant to keep the law of Moses (Neh. 8-10). The last incident is usually pointed to as the approximate time when the Pentateuch was canonized. Certainly by this time it was acknowledged, but it should be kept in mind that the recognition of the authority of the law of Moses waxed and waned over the centuries according to the vicissitudes of Israel's spiritual fortunes. When, as often, Israel experienced a depression of faith, it acknowledged no divine authority in the written books. The period of Ezra and Nehemiah, therefore, should be looked upon as a time of revival of interest in the law. It ought not be cited as evidence of a recent origin of the Pentateuch.

The Prophets. When Ezra read the law to the people, no mention is made of his having read also from the Prophets. This does not mean that at that time the divine authority of the prophets was not recognized. Indeed, Ezra, as he addresses God and speaks of Israel, says: "Many years thou didst bear with them, and didst warn them by thy Spirit through thy prophets . . ." (Neh. 9:30). Yet, so far as is known, it was not the work of Ezra and Nehemiah to gather the prophetic books together and close the prophetic canon. They could not do this because in their time true prophets were still arising among the people. It was not until some time later, when the voice of prophecy was stilled, that a

final collection of the prophetic writings could be made.

The authority of the Former and Latter Prophets has practically never been disputed. The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) relate the progress of religious history. They are included in the Prophets because either they were thought to be written by prophets or they were regarded as being written under prophetic inspiration. The Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve) from the first stood on their own. Their authority was associated with the individual prophets who fearlessly gave a "thus says the Lord." Their predictions of Israel's and Judah's future doom came true, and this augmented their authority. Men like Isaiah and Jeremiah wrote their prophecies down (Isa. 8:16; Jer. 36:2ff.), and men like Daniel later "perceived in the books" what had been written earlier (Dan. 9:2). Such reading and searching "in the books" suggests canonical rank for the prophetic books—Jeremiah is specifically mentioned by Daniel.

The Writings. The general term applied to this group of books indicates its heterogeneous character. The different types of books represented complicate the question of canon. It would be a mistake, however, to think that these books were not acknowledged until after the other divisions of the OT were canonized. It is well known that this is not the case for Psalms, Proverbs, and perhaps others.

Psalms is first by order of the books that compose the Writings. It is often known as "the hymnbook of the Second Temple." This designation is appropriate, although it should not be thought that the Psalms all originated after the exile. To the contrary, a large number of the Psalms are of great antiquity. Who wrote the Psalms—traditionally seventy-three are attributed to David, others to the sons of Korah, to Asaph, to Solomon, to Moses, etc.—and under what precise circumstances, is not known. The final form of the Psalms undoubtedly depends on earlier collections. Passages like Joshua 24:26 show that certain chosen persons added authoritatively in writing to "the book of the law of God." Similarly, as various writings were authoritatively added to the sacred collection, so in the compilation of the Psalms it

can be assumed that an authoritative person(s) worked under divine guidance. If this analogy is correct, the same assumption applies with reference to Proverbs. Obviously, many of the proverbs are ascribed traditionally to Solomon (Prov. 10:1); other proverbs by other persons are also included. But it is important to remember that the sacred character of a later or final collection of proverbs would not have been acknowledged if the proverbs had originated with a recent compiler.

Among the Writings certain books were contested. It was necessary for the OT canon to pass through a period of trial as did the NT canon. With the NT certain books, such as the four Gospels and the epistles of Paul, from the outset seem to have been universally accepted. These books were called *Homologoumena* (Greek, *homologeîn*, "to agree to," "to acknowledge"). Other books, however, were for a while disputed—due to their limited circulation they were accepted in some parts of the church and rejected in other parts. These books were called *Antilegomena* (Greek, *antilegeîn*, "to speak against"). An impartial investigation of canon recognizes and distinguishes between these two categories. Suffice it to say that the canon of either testament is no worse or less secure because there were disputes about some books and their place in the canon.

Two books of the Writings were especially controversial, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Discussions concerning them among the Jews were still going on in the last half of the first century and even later. Information about these discussions comes from the Mishnah, that portion of the Talmud which consists of the oral law formulated by the end of the second century A.D. The rabbis, always careful that the Holy Scriptures not be lightly handled, devised a law to the effect that sacred books communicated ceremonial uncleanness to hands that might touch them. Hands thus touching the sacred books would have to be washed; books that "defiled the hands" were the books regarded as being divinely inspired. In the Mishnah there is a treatise entitled "Hands" (*Yadaim*). In this the two books of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon are involved, for the

question is whether these books "defile the hands." The Mishnah (Yadaim 3. 5) affirms specifically that both of these books are sacred. But the rival, first-century rabbinic schools of Shammai and Hillel disagreed on Ecclesiastes, the former rejecting, the latter accepting it.

The Song of Solomon, due to its subject matter, posed problems for acceptance. It is often asserted that this poetic work would have never made the canon if allegorical interpretations of it by Jews and later by Christians had not been adopted. But this is mere assertion. The Song of Solomon if interpreted literally as a poetic love song(s) is not to be disparaged unless physical love in marriage is discordant with the laws of creation. Yet the loud protest of Rabbi Akiba (second century A.D.), in the same passage of the Mishnah mentioned above, is the surest evidence that there was controversy over the Song of Solomon. Akiba said:

God forbid! No man in Israel ever dissented about the Song of Songs, holding it not to be sacred. The whole age altogether is not worth as much as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holiest of all. If there was a division, it was only over Ecclesiastes.

Limits of the Canon

Disputes about certain biblical books are not unnatural. They presuppose the existence of a basic corpus of holy writings whose limits had already been broadly fixed. It is necessary, now, to examine the extent of the OT canon. The evidence comes both from Jewish and Christian sources. In considering the latter, the evidence from the NT alone will be viewed, although much supportive evidence could be adduced from Christian materials in the early centuries of the church.

A long-established tradition associates the gathering of the canonical OT with Ezra and Nehemiah. This association naturally goes back to Ezra's reading of the law to the people (Neh. 8-10), but there are other evidences for this tradition as well.

Second Esdras (Latin title, 4 Esdras) is one of the books

of the Apocrypha. A composite work whose main portions are dated about A.D. 95, it contains a fanciful account of the origin of both the canonical and noncanonical books of the OT. Ezra is depicted in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem. He complains that the law of Moses has been burned, and he asks God's Spirit to come upon him to write down everything that has happened from the beginning. In response God tells Ezra to select five men who are trained to serve as secretaries and to withdraw from the people for a period of forty days. Ezra does this. The next day he drinks from a cup that is offered to him. His heart pours forth understanding; his mouth is no longer closed. The men write what is dictated to them, in characters they had never learned. The narrative continues:

So during the forty days ninety-four books were written. And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me [Ezra], saying, Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people.

2 Esdras 14:45-46

Although the story is legendary, it possesses some value. The distinction between the twenty-four books which are to be read by the "worthy" and "unworthy" and the seventy books which are for the "wise" alone points up the acknowledged difference at that time between the canonical and noncanonical works. The twenty-four books unquestionably are the same as the thirty-nine in present editions of the OT. Though a legend, the account witnesses that in the first century A.D. the Jews recognized twenty-four books as especially sacred.

Josephus likewise limits the canon. He was a priest and a Pharisee, who wrote at the close of the first century A.D. In his *Against Apion* he defends the Jews by arguing that they possessed an antiquity unmatched by the Greeks. It is true that Josephus is highly partisan in his presentation, and any assessment of him must take this into account. What Josephus says, nevertheless, may be taken as representa-

tive of how many Jews felt on these matters. He writes:

It therefore naturally, or rather necessarily, follows (seeing that with us it is not open to everybody to write the records, and that there is no discrepancy in what is written; seeing that, on the contrary, the prophets alone had this privilege, obtaining their knowledge of the most remote and ancient history through the inspiration which they owed to God, and committing to writing a clear account of the events of their own time just as they occurred)—it follows that we do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but twenty-two, and contain the record of all time.

Of these, five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history from the birth of man down to the death of the lawgiver. This period falls only a little short of three thousand years. From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes as king of Persia, the prophets subsequent to Moses wrote the history of the events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.

From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.

Josephus then goes on to expound the Jewish veneration of Scripture:

We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them.

Against Apion 1. 7-8

The citation is lengthy and is given in full because of its importance. From Josephus several conclusions may be derived.

1. The number of those books looked upon as having divine authority is carefully limited. Josephus fixes the number at twenty-two. As seen earlier, this is but another

way of counting the books in order that the number might correspond with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

2. The division of these books is according to a three-part pattern—five books of Moses, thirteen books of prophets, and four books of hymns to God and principles dealing with man. But it should be noticed that this threefold division is not that of the familiar Law, Prophets, and Writings. Josephus includes all the historical books in the prophets, including Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, as well as Daniel and Job. The remaining four books, therefore, must be Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon; for these alone meet the requirements of his description.

3. The time covered in these books is expressly limited. Josephus believed that the canon extended from Moses to Artaxerxes (464–424 B.C.). The Jews believed that prophetic inspiration ceased with Malachi, who apparently was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. This was the period of Artaxerxes. Others indeed wrote later, but their writings are not on a par with the earlier writings. In other words, according to Josephus, the canon is closed.

4. The text of these books is sacred. No one has dared to expunge or alter it, since to every Jew these writings are “decrees of God.”

Even though for Josephus the canon was closed, as seen earlier, discussions on certain books continued among some of the rabbis. By the end of the first century A.D. certain things had happened which pushed the Jews to resolve any differences they might have had on the canon. By now the glorious temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. The Jews for several centuries had been dispersed over the known world. Increasingly it had become difficult to maintain Jerusalem as the center and focus of all religious activity. Away from Palestine, Hellenistic Jews especially became book-centered rather than temple-centered. In the meantime other writings had arisen, many of which were pseudepigraphic in character. There was, besides, a new religion that had come on the scene—Christianity. It, too,

had its writings. So what were the writings that were to constitute the book?

It would be inaccurate to say that when a group of Jewish rabbis met in A.D. 90 at Jabneh or Jamnia, near Joppa on the Mediterranean Sea, they forevermore answered this question. In the first place, they had no authority to decide anything. In the second place, even if they had had authority, the issues at stake were not finally settled. It would be correct to say that the discussions and decisions (?) at Jamnia reflected general opinion at that time. The canon in reality was substantially fixed long before Jamnia. Jamnia did not admit certain books into the canon but, to speak more accurately, allowed certain books to remain.

It has already been observed that the Talmud witnesses to varying opinions on certain books. Some of the books of the OT were Antilegomena—disputed books. But the Talmud itself, based on traditions that are centuries old, unhesitatingly accepts these disputed books. In a kind of commentary on the Mishnah, called a Gemara, a rather long statement is made about the authors and editors of the OT:

Moses wrote his own book, and the section about Balaam and Job. Joshua wrote his own book, and eight verses in the Torah. Samuel wrote his own book, and the books of Judges and Ruth. David wrote the book of Psalms at the direction of the ten elders, the first man, Melchizedek, and Abraham, and Moses, and Heman, and Jeduthun, and Asaph, and the three sons of Korah. Jeremiah wrote his own book, and the book of Kings and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his company wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. The men of the Great Synagogue wrote Ezekiel, and the Twelve, Daniel, and the Roll of Esther. Ezra wrote his own book and the genealogies in Chronicles down to his own time.

Baba Bathra 14b-15a

In this listing of the writers of the OT, two things stand out. First, the canonical books begin with Moses and go down to the time of Ezra. This agrees remarkably with the statement of Josephus. Second, though others besides the original authors have been involved in shaping or editing certain books, this work is not thought to be inconsistent

with the authority inherent in them.

Other evidence on the canon, much older than that of the Talmud and of Josephus, could be cited; but evidence in the B.C. era is not as substantive or pointed as statements made in the OT itself. But one reference will be given. The book of 1 Maccabees, a well-known book of the Apocrypha written about 100 B.C., speaks several times as though it had been a long time since a prophet appeared among the people. The book relates the fierce struggles of the Jews to regain their political and religious freedom in the second century B.C. Near the close of the book, Simon Maccabeus is elected high priest, commander, and leader by the Jews. First Maccabees 14:41 says that the Jews were well pleased with this choice, that Simon was to be "governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet." The latter clause should be compared with other similar statements in the book—"until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them" and "the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them" (4:46; 9:27). In the centuries following Malachi, the Jews themselves recognized that they had no prophet. This is why, for example, the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach (usually known as Ecclesiasticus, written about 180 B.C.) was rejected by the Jews. The author, they reasoned, was known to live in fairly recent times, after the death of the last prophet, when the spirit of prophecy had departed from Israel.

Thus far, on the limits of the canon, Jewish sources have been considered. There are evidences also from Christian materials.

The NT evidence on the OT canon is quite strong. One type of evidence may be seen in the NT portrayal of the scribes. The scribes, it is said, did not teach with authority. They argued and interpreted and fenced in the law of Moses with their traditions, but they did not speak authoritatively. They did not disguise themselves as prophets. For them the voice of prophecy had ceased.

The NT stance is in agreement with that of the scribes, at least in so far as acknowledging the undisputed authority of

the old writings. "It is written," the NT says—whatever is written is unquestionably so. Characteristically the NT speaks of the OT as "the Scripture" (John 7:38; Acts 8:32; Rom. 4:3); the use of the singular refers to Scripture as a whole. The NT also calls the OT "the Scriptures" (Matt. 21:42; John 5:39; Acts 17:11), designating together all the parts of Scripture. The Old Testament is also "the holy scriptures" (Rom. 1:2), "the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15), etc. These names and titles are not studiously registered. They are the standard nomenclature of the times. Such designations mark the OT off from other books; and it is important to notice that these designations by the NT authors are never applied to the Apocrypha.

But NT designations of the OT do not tell precisely which books were regarded as canonical. The NT, however, does quote extensively from the OT; in all, from thirty-one out of thirty-nine books. The remaining eight books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah) are not quoted simply because there was no occasion for quoting them.

Elsewhere the NT gives hints as to the contents of the canon. Jesus spoke of the time "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary" (Luke 11:51; cf. Matt. 23:35), thus referring to the martyrs listed in the OT. It is to be remembered that the Hebrew Bible begins with Genesis and ends with Chronicles. Abel, of course, is the first martyr in Genesis, and Zechariah is the last martyr in 2 Chronicles. Jesus' words "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah" strongly suggest that his OT went from Genesis to 2 Chronicles, with all the other books in between.

Concerning the contents of the canon, the question is sometimes raised about NT quotations of noncanonical materials. As noticed previously, the NT never uses such designations as "scripture" or "holy scripture" for any apocryphal book. In this connection the quotations of Jude in Jude 9 and in verses 14-15 have to be considered. Jude 9 tells about the archangel Michael contending with the devil over the body of Moses. It is said that Jude here quotes

from the pseudepigraphic book entitled the Assumption of Moses. But it should be said that it is not known with certainty that this is the case. The Assumption of Moses has been preserved only in fragments, and the fragments do not contain the material alluded to by Jude. On the other hand, it is possible that Jude makes mention of a traditional story that formed the basis of the apocryphal book.

Jude 14–15 gives reportedly a prophecy of Enoch, and it is true that this prophecy is found in the apocryphal book of Enoch (1 Enoch 1:9). But here several things need to be said: (1) It is possible that Jude is acquainted with this prophecy from a different source. (2) It is possible that both the book of Enoch and the book of Jude draw upon a common source of oral tradition. (3) It is probable, however, that Jude quotes directly from the book of Enoch. If so—and the form of the quotation is almost precisely in agreement with the book of Enoch—Jude does not quote Enoch as “scripture” nor does he say “it is written.” When a writer cites another work, this does not mean that he necessarily regards the work as divine. Paul quotes from the heathen poets (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). He also names, evidently from a noncanonical source, Jannes and Jambres as magicians of Pharaoh (2 Tim. 3:8); but in doing so he does not thus sanction his source as being from God.

In summary, the witness of the NT to the OT canon is of supreme importance. The NT does not specifically spell out each book that ought to comprise the OT, yet it gives evidence that in the first century the canon of the OT was firmly established. The evidence from Jewish sources in this period is abundant and persuasive. The canon of the Hebrew Bible today includes exactly the same thirty-nine books of the OT found in most editions of the English Bible.

Qumran and the Canon

Hundreds of manuscripts, popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, began to come to light in 1947 and the years following. These materials were discovered in caves located west of the Dead Sea. The vast majority of these manuscripts are connected with Qumran, a Jewish community

which was situated on the northwest portion of the Dead Sea. In all, about six hundred manuscripts (most of them fragmentary) have been found near Qumran. It is believed that most of these manuscripts were taken from the Qumran library and placed in the caves for safekeeping.

Extensive archeological work has shown that the Qumran community existed in the period from the second century B.C. to the latter part of the first century A.D. These centuries, of course, are very important for the canon of the OT. Do the books of Qumran shed significant light on the canon? Is it possible to discover which books were especially treasured at Qumran?

At this point several observations need to be made. (1) The Qumran sect, which separated itself from the mainstream of Judaism in the second century B.C., does not represent normative Judaism. It would be a mistake, therefore, to take Qumran as some kind of standard by which the canon can be measured. (2) The Qumran documents include both biblical and nonbiblical texts. About 175 of the scrolls are copies of the OT in Hebrew. These include a number of copies of Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets. Every book of the OT is represented, except Esther. The scrolls vary in length and in condition of preservation of the Bible text, from a fragmentary copy of Chronicles to practically a full-length copy of Isaiah. (3) Since the Qumran library includes both biblical and non-biblical materials, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between the books that were "Scripture" at Qumran and those that were esteemed as useful and valuable for life in the community.

With the above observations in mind, certain information about the Qumran documents may still prove helpful. There is no question that Qumran accepted the Law and the Prophets. The number and range of manuscripts on this portion of the canon attest this. Moreover, commentaries produced by the Qumran community on parts of Genesis, Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk strengthen this conclusion. Among the Writings, Psalms is conspicuously represented by some thirty manuscripts. Job and

Proverbs are likewise well represented. For Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ruth, and Lamentations, there are fragmentary manuscripts; so also for Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. The only book of the Writings not directly represented is Esther. But it is difficult to say whether this is significant. The book is short; and, further, some have claimed that there are oblique allusions to Esther in other Qumran scrolls (G. W. Anderson in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 150).

The book of Daniel is well represented by fragments from at least eight different manuscripts. In other scrolls there are definite allusions and quotations from Daniel; some quotations are introduced by the words "as it is written in the book of the prophet Daniel." The book of Daniel, therefore, unquestionably was a part of the Qumran canon. Incidentally, the Qumran evidence on Daniel is against the additions to Daniel found in the Apocrypha (The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon).

In summary, the evidence of Qumran shows that the books of the OT were not only in existence but were in extensive use in the period approximating the beginning of the Christian era. At Qumran many of these books were being commented on and quoted as "scripture." On this point the Qumran evidence supports the evidence of the NT, which is more complete. No negative evidence on the OT canon has come from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Apocrypha

This study of canon thus far has concerned itself mainly with the thirty-nine OT books found in most editions of the English Bible. But early editions of the English Bible, including that of the Authorized or King James Version of 1611, included the Apocrypha in separate sections. The Apocrypha, as seen earlier, includes fourteen or fifteen books (the number varies depending on whether The Letter of Jeremiah is counted separately from Baruch) not found in the Hebrew canon. The following is a list of the Apocrypha:

1. The First Book of Esdras

2. The Second Book of Esdras
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. The Additions to the Book of Esther
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach
8. Baruch
9. The Letter of Jeremiah
10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
11. Susanna
12. Bel and the Dragon
13. The Prayer of Manasseh
14. The First Book of Maccabees
15. The Second Book of Maccabees

All but three of these (1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) are considered canonical by the Roman Catholic Church. The Apocrypha is given a semicanonical status by the Church of England. It reads them "for example of life and instruction of manners," but it does not apply them "to establish any doctrines."

The Apocrypha is found entirely in Greek and Latin manuscripts, although by no means in all of them. Second Esdras, for example, is found in no Greek manuscript, and The Prayer of Manasseh is not found in all of the Greek copies. But since in the Greek manuscripts most of the Apocrypha stands side by side with the canonical books, this raises once again the question of which books ought to comprise the canon.

It is often said that the Greek or Alexandrian canon differed from the Hebrew or Palestinian canon and therefore that the Alexandrian canon included the various books of the Apocrypha. But one should guard against assertions and generalizations. It is important to notice that the number of Apocryphal books in Greek copies is not the same. The Greek copies evidence no fixed canon of the OT. It is also important to remember that the Greek copies extant are not those belonging to Alexandrian Jews but are of Christian origin. Any supposed difference between an Alexandrian and

Palestinian canon would be difficult to trace on the basis of manuscripts copied by Christian scribes. There is, in fact, little evidence to show that the conception of canon by Jews outside Palestine was different from that within Palestine.

Various reasons can be given for not according canonical status to the Apocrypha—that Christ and the apostles, so far as the evidence goes, did not accept the Apocrypha; that Josephus (apparently also Philo) rejected it; that early Christian lists did not include it, etc. But the question is not why reject the Apocrypha. The fact is that the Jews never accepted these books. The books originated after the time of Ezra, when the voice of prophecy had died out. To accept the Apocrypha as canonical, therefore, would be unthinkable for the student of history.

TEXT

The study of the text of the OT follows to some extent the pattern traced in the study of canon. Both canon and text are data of history. They concern not so much the divine but the human side of the Bible. While canon deals with the historical process involved in the collection and recognition of certain books as Scripture, text has to do with the historical process by which the Scriptures were transmitted from generation to generation.

The word "text" is used to refer to the precise wording of a document. If one speaks, for example, of the "text" of Isaiah, he has reference to the exact words (including spelling and word order) of the book of Isaiah. This in itself presents problems, for the prophet Isaiah lived 700 years B.C.; and until recently no Hebrew manuscript of the book of Isaiah was known to exist earlier than the ninth century A.D. The time gap is considerable and could only be spanned by an accurate and consistent transmission of the text over the centuries. It is necessary to assume that over a long period of time, when copies of the text were being made from previous copies and where human skills and unskills were at work in the making of these copies, scribal slips and alterations would occur in the text. It is the work of the textual critic to

detect such alterations and to restore the wording of the text as far as it can be discerned from the text materials at his disposal.

Manuscripts of the Text

The oldest extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible are the Qumran manuscripts from the Dead Sea area. These, along with other manuscripts located in the same vicinity, are dated from about 250 B.C. to A.D. 135. These manuscripts are, of course, without dates; but evidence for their age is derived from paleographical (pertaining to the study of ancient writing) deductions and archeological investigations of the sites connected with the discovery of the manuscripts.

The manuscripts of this early period are written in well-lined columns on leather rolls, although a few have been found on papyrus sheets. The main Isaiah scroll from Qumran is made up of seventeen strips of leather sewn together, constituting a roll of more than twenty-four feet in length and more than ten inches in height. This and other scrolls were wrapped in linen cloth and placed in jars for safekeeping (cf. Jer. 32:14). The Isaiah manuscript is conveniently referred to as IQIs^a. (The Q indicates the region of Qumran; the number before the Q, the cave in which the manuscript was found; the abbreviation after the Q shows the contents of the manuscript; the letter suspended above the line gives the number of the manuscript. Thus IQIs^a stands for the first manuscript of Isaiah found in Cave 1, Qumran.)

Among the numerous biblical manuscripts of Qumran, several stand out prominently. IQIs^a, dated about 100 B.C., contains the whole of Isaiah, except for a few small breaks of the text due to age and wear. For all practical purposes, the text of this ancient scroll reads the same as the standardized text (called the Massoretic text [MT]) in printed Bibles. There are, to be sure, a number of divergent readings represented in it, some of which are worthwhile; but the majority of readings have to do with grammar, spelling, different forms of proper names, etc.

IQIs^b, which contains a substantial part of the text of Isaiah, goes back to the latter half of the first century B.C.

Its significance is due to the remarkable agreement it has with the MT. Both of these Isaiah manuscripts clearly demonstrate that the classic 'MT type of text was in existence in pre-Christian times; yet, interestingly, these manuscripts do not measure up to the high copying standards exhibited in medieval manuscripts of the MT.

Other Qumran manuscripts with considerable portions of the biblical text include an early copy of Exodus. This manuscript is known as 4QpaleoEx^m, that is, one of the many copies of Exodus from Cave 4, written in old Hebrew script known as "paleo-Hebrew." This Exodus copy is from the early part of the second century B.C. and contains some forty columns of an original fifty-seven. Two manuscripts of the books of Samuel are of special interest. One (4QSam^a), from the first century B.C., has preserved in fragmentary form forty-seven of an original fifty-seven columns of 1 and 2 Samuel. The other (4QSam^b) dates back to the third century B.C. One Psalms manuscript (11QPs^c), among many, includes forty canonical Psalms, as well as other poetic and narrative material, and several psalmlike compositions.

Manuscripts from Qumran enumerated so far are paralleled by texts from the same period discovered in the same general area near Wadi Murabba'at, at Masada, and in other places. From Masada have come such items as a scroll of Psalms 81-85, with a text identical to that of the MT; and a copy of Psalm 150 from the end of a roll, showing that the Psalms collection there terminated in the same way as in the modern Psalter. From Wadi Murabba'at has come especially a scroll of the Minor Prophets. Dated about A.D. 100, its text extends from Joel 2:26 to Zechariah 1:4, including (in traditional order) Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai. Several columns of the manuscript are wonderfully preserved; others only imperfectly. The manuscript is remarkably like the MT, having only three variant readings of any importance whatever.

Next in age to the earliest Qumran materials is the Nash Papyrus. This is a small leaf that contains the Ten Commandments and the Shema (Deut. 6:4ff.). Since it is

dated about 150 B.C., its form of writing was especially important in fixing dates for the various Dead Sea Scrolls.

For the remaining manuscripts of the OT and those that shed light on its text, it is necessary to move into the Middle Ages. One manuscript in particular is the Samaritan Pentateuch, which must now be mentioned because of its claims to antiquity. The Samaritan Pentateuch is often listed with the OT versions; strictly speaking it is not a version but a form of the Pentateuchal text that reaches back into pre-Christian times. The earliest known example of this text is the Abisha Scroll, proudly kept by the small Samaritan community at Nablus in Palestine. Written in a form of the archaic script, it originated, the Samaritans claim, in the time of Joshua. But the text of the manuscript, which consists of various strands, goes no farther back than the last part of the eleventh century A.D. On the whole it can be said that the Samaritan Pentateuch presents a form of the text similar to and yet different from the MT. The Samaritan variations to a large extent have to do with spelling differences and such differences as reflect the Samaritan belief that worship should be on Mt. Gerizim instead of Jerusalem; but other differences are in agreement with the LXX form of the text instead of the MT.

Before discussion of the "model codices" of the MT, brief mention should be made of the Geniza Fragments. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, at Cairo, in the old Jewish synagogue, thousands of pieces of manuscripts were found in a room walled off from the other portion of the building. The room, called a "genizah" (Aramaic *genaz*, to hide), was a kind of storehouse for manuscripts that were no longer usable. Any manuscript that was old or incorrect, in order to prevent the misuse of something with the sacred name of God on it, was stored up and later would be given ceremonial burial.

From the Cairo Genizah have come some two hundred thousand fragments—biblical texts in Hebrew and Aramaic, Aramaic paraphrases of the text, Talmudic and liturgical texts, letters, lists, etc. These texts date mainly from the sixth to the eighth centuries A.D. They include occasional

divergencies from the MT, but they are especially important for the light they cast on the transmission of the text in this period of time.

The model codices are so called because they are the prototypes of current editions of the Hebrew Bible. The Cairo Prophets, known as C, was copied by Moses ben Asher in A.D. 895. It contains both the Former and Latter Prophets and is still the property of the Karaite sect of Jews in Cairo. The Aleppo Codex, known as A, copied by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher about A.D. 930, was until recently a marvelous codex of the entire OT. In 1947, however, it was badly damaged in riots against the Jews; it was later smuggled into Israel, where now its preserved portions will be used for further editions of the Hebrew Bible. The Leningrad Codex, known as L, is a complete copy of the OT. Its notes indicate that it was copied in 1008 from manuscripts written by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher. It has served as the basis of the critical edition of the Kittel-Kahle Hebrew Bible in wide use today.

History of the Text

That few really old Hebrew manuscripts have survived does not indicate a lack of scribal activity over the centuries. To the contrary, the Jews from early times were conscious of the foibles of those who copied the Scriptures. Thus there arose schools of professional scribes (cf. 1 Chron. 2:55), men who were trained in the art of writing, who were specialists in the law, and who were the supreme guardians of the text they transmitted.

Rules were formulated for the handling of the text. Multiplication of copies by dictation was not allowed. Each scroll had to be copied directly from another scroll. Official copies used in the synagogues were derived ultimately, until A.D. 70, from a master copy in the temple. Synagogue copies were kept in a cupboard that faced toward Jerusalem, and the rolls in the cupboard were the most sacred objects in the synagogue. (For these details, see C. H. Roberts in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 49-50.)

Evidence of the scrupulousness of the scribes is manifold.

When for some reason a manuscript had a letter too large or too small, the copies made from it duplicated even these features, with the result that these letters of unusual size appear today in printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. But the scribes were textual critics as well as transcribers. If, for instance, the scribe found an error in the manuscript he was copying, say a letter omitted in a word, he would insert the missing letter above the line and leave the word on the line as he had found it. If, similarly, the scribe found an extra letter in a word, he would leave the word the same but put a dot above the letter in the word which he questioned. These corrections were carried down through the manuscripts and are likewise in modern Hebrew Bibles.

The scribes made other corrections. With reference to the above, there are fifteen places in the OT where the scribes inserted dots over single letters or whole words. One example of this is Genesis 33:4, the words "and he kissed him." The dots show the doubts of the scribes over the words, but the scribes did not alter the text because the text was regarded as unalterable. On occasion the scribes felt obligated to suggest a change in the way the text should be read orally. Some words, they thought, would be inappropriate or grammatically incorrect if read publicly in the synagogues. In these cases they would suggest in the margin of the manuscripts changes that were to be followed by the reader. The reader would learn to read the text one way while the text was written another way. But everyone understood that the written text was not to be altered.

These and similar practices were of long-standing tradition among the Jews. It was the function of *Masora*—the Hebrew term for tradition—to guard the text. It was one of the functions of the scribes to count the letters and words of the text. The Hebrew word for scribes is *sopherim*, which means "counters." The scribes counted the middle verse, the middle word, and even the middle letter of a book. The middle verse of the Law is Leviticus 8:7, the middle word is in Leviticus 10:16. The middle verse of the Hebrew Bible is Jeremiah 6:7. The scribes counted the number of times a particular word or a particular form of a word occurred in a

book. Lists were made up of such words, and for a long time they were retained only in the powerful memory of the ancient mind. Later they were embodied in writing to form the massive written collection of *Masora*.

The Massorettes, "the masters of the tradition," were the descendants of the earlier scribes. Active between about the sixth and tenth centuries A.D., the Massorettes are especially known for their system of vowel points and accents which they applied to the text. Up until their time, the text of the OT had been without vowels. The Massorettes feared, since Hebrew was being less and less spoken, that the true pronunciation of the consonantal text might be lost. The points they added above and below the line would serve as a safeguard against this. The Massorettes also compiled a mass of careful instructions for copyists, which were included above and below and on the margins of the manuscript page and at the end of a book. The Massorettes of Tiberias in Palestine were the most important of the Massorettes; and the ben Asher family of Tiberias, with whom several of the model codices are associated, are especially renowned. Because of the labors of the Massorettes and their extensive contributions to the preservation of the text, the standard Hebrew text today is known as "the Massoretic text."

Condition of the Text

The meticulous care and concern of the Massorettes for the text, however, could not give a text without error. Indeed, as has been seen, the Massorettes and earlier scribes were fully aware of scribal errors in the text. Some of these errors can be traced back very early, to the paleo-Hebrew script where, for example, an *n* could be easily confused with a *k*, or a *d* with a *t*. Of the later square Aramaic characters, the form of writing used in practically all of the biblical manuscripts, *d* and *r*, *h* and *h*, and other letters almost identical in appearance can easily be confused. Nor were the scribes of biblical manuscripts immune from such typical scribal mistakes as transposition of consonants, writing letters once instead of twice or twice instead of

once, omission due to words of similar ending or beginning.

It is clear, then, that despite precautions to the contrary, there are errors in the MT of the OT. In 2 Samuel 5:16, one of David's sons is Eliada; in 1 Chronicles 14:7 the son's name is Beeliada. The MT in Genesis 10:3-4 reads Riphath and Dodanim; in 1 Chronicles 1:6-7 Diphath and Rodanim. First Kings 4:26 reads 40,000, but 2 Chronicles 9:25 reads 4,000. First Kings 7:26 reads 2,000, but 2 Chronicles 4:5 reads 3,000. The various texts cannot all be correct. While it is true that these errors are not of much consequence, they show quite clearly that the MT sometimes is faulty.

The textual critic can go even further in detecting errors. He sees that by a different division of words in the text of Amos 6:12, the difficult MT, "Does one plough with oxen?" becomes the understandable "Does one plough the sea with oxen?" Psalm 49:11 should read "Their graves are their homes for ever," in agreement with the Greek and Syriac versions, instead of "Their inward parts are their homes for ever." The difference between "their graves" and "their inward parts" is simply whether one of the letters in the word is *b* or *r*, letters that look very much alike in the Hebrew text. Examples of this sort, where the MT in minor points needs correction, can be multiplied. This points up the value of the versions which, as far as the Bible text is concerned, are always secondary to the manuscripts in the original languages. Nevertheless, the versions do supply a great amount of information on the OT text and often come to the rescue when the textual critic is wrestling with a textual problem. The LXX text, the Latin and Syriac translations, the Aramaic paraphrases called "Targums," and others are of immense importance in recovering the text of the OT.

But how does all of this bear on the condition of the OT text? Is the text soundly based or is the text precarious? And what light, after all, is cast on the text from the Dead Sea Scrolls? Perhaps it is best to answer the last question first.

It is difficult at this time to give a full assessment of the scrolls and their impact on the entire text of the OT. Each

book, in reality, has its own textual history; and, therefore, broad generalizations on the text are unwise. Some scholars now posit different text-types in the pre-Christian era. Frank M. Cross, for example, thinks that three different textual families, in Palestine, in Egypt, and presumably in Babylon, developed slowly between the fifth and first centuries B.C. (Cross, "The Contributions of the Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text," *Israel Exploration Quarterly* 16 (1966), 81-95). Certainly there is evidence from Qumran, from 4QSam^a, 4QSam^b, 4QpaleoEx^m, and others, that other forms of the text existed similar to that of the LXX and of the Samaritan Pentateuch and different from that of the MT. On the other hand, it is well known that a large number of the scrolls in text-type are allied with the MT; they exhibit indeed an early MT called "Proto-Massoretic." And of the many different textual readings that have come to light in the scrolls, the MT again and again presents the superior reading.

Perhaps the best way to respond to a question on the overall condition of the text is to juxtapose two statements made by two different scholars. One statement is that of James Moffatt who, in his Introduction to his translation of the Bible, says, "Now the traditional or 'massoretic' text of the Old Testament, though of primary value, is often desperately corrupt." The other statement is that of William Barclay, ". . . we need have no fear that the Massoretic text of the Old Testament is anything but accurate" (*The Bible Companion*, William Neil, ed., p. 412). The two statements are not as hopelessly contradictory as they appear to be. While they perhaps represent different biases, they certainly reflect different perspectives. Moffatt, speaking as a translator, refers to the sticky textual problems that are sometimes presented to translators. (One doubts, however, whether the translator has the freedom to rearrange and amend the text as Moffatt does. This "freedom" is likewise engaged in too liberally in the New English Bible OT.) But Barclay's statement comes from a volume addressed to the average reader about his Bible, assuring the reader that the message of the OT still speaks clearly in the MT. Besides, the word

“corrupt,” as used by a textual critic, is a relative term. The textual critic is concerned with the minutiae of the text in its transmission. His task is to search for a pristine text even in matters of spelling. By and large, a late manuscript or recension of the text will be relatively “corrupt”; an earlier one relatively “pure.” The general reader, unacquainted with such terminology, might be misled by the hyperbolic language sometimes used concerning textual variations.

For all practical purposes, then, the MT, upon which modern editions of the Hebrew Bible are based, is a very good text. Indeed, it needs to be emphasized that the MT is a text of extraordinary quality.

My own studies in text criticism lead me to feel that in the books of the Old Testament all the way through Samuel the Masoretic text (not the Septuagint and not certain Qumran texts) must remain the touch-stone against which discrete variants are gauged.

James A. Sanders,
 “The Dead Sea Scrolls—A Quarter Century of Study,”
The Biblical Archaeologist 36 (1973):141-42

... the authenticity of the Massoretic text stands higher than at any time in the history of modern textual criticism, a standpoint which is based on a better assessment of the history of the Jewish transmission.

Bleddyn J. Roberts,
 “The Old Testament: Manuscripts, Text and Versions,”
The Cambridge History of the Bible,
 Vol. 2, Cambridge: University Press, 1969

Many instances show, according to what has been said, that texts have suffered corruptions in the course of the centuries. But as emphasized above: it never has touched religiously, or rather theologically relevant matters. And the view more and more gains ground that the *Massoretic text* upon the whole is the best form of the text, even if versions in many single cases may have a better reading.

Aage Bentzen,
Introduction to the Old Testament, Vol. 1, p. 101

It is no mere antiquarian interest that seeks answers on

the canon and text of the OT. The study of canon and text investigates the grounds and sources of faith. The student, with a knowledge of these sources, is a better prepared student and a student who ought to be better equipped for life.

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