

ABSTRACT

This study represents a comprehensive analysis of the Numbers Dead Sea Scrolls that will strengthen our understanding of the form of the Hebrew text during the Second Temple period. Although the Numbers manuscripts are the least numerous of the Pentateuch manuscripts found in the Judean Desert, these manuscripts, in particular 4Q23 and 4Q27, have a key role to play to helping us understand the history of the transmission and the form of the biblical Hebrew text during this era.

This study investigates all Hebrew Numbers DSS manuscripts to ascertain if all their textual variants derived from the efforts of scribes to improve and develop their texts or if these variants emerged from differing texts that point to the existence of multiple text forms during the Second Temple period. The results of this project's analysis of all the textual variants in the Numbers manuscripts suggest that these variants must have originated from scribal intervention rather than from differing text forms. Most of these scribes endeavored to conserve the original form that they had received, even though they created a small number of variants in the process of transmission. In contrast to these scribes' conservative efforts, the scribe of 4Q27 attempted to improve and develop his received text by integrating characteristics of the contemporary Hebrew (probably the DSS Hebrew) of his time period and by adding and changing words to more clearly deliver to his readers the original meaning of the text. Since all these textual variants are secondary and not primary, all the Numbers DSS manuscripts must have originated from a single text form, which was probably a proto-MT. Therefore, since these textual variants were created by the intervention of the scribes, a single text form similar to a proto-MT must have existed in the Second Temple period.