

merely on the scribe's judgment as to the desired length of the written word.

In the early part of the 10th century A.D. a group of scribes called the Masoretes, who were trying to standardize the Hebrew text, inserted marks above or below the consonants to indicate the vowels that were customarily pronounced after them, in accordance with the tradition that had been handed down orally through the centuries.

At about 1300 places the Masoretes found that the majority of the manuscripts available to them contained a reading that differed somewhat from this oral tradition. In such cases they kept in the text the consonants found in the majority of their manuscripts, but placed in a footnote the consonants that would fit the traditional reading. The vowels of the traditional reading were not placed under the consonants in the note, but were affixed to those in the text, sometimes producing a rather incongruous combination. The reading that the Masoretes preferred was called the *q^ere* (imperative of Aramaic "to read"). The reading that would be suggested by the consonants retained in the text was called the *kethibh* (Aramaic for "written").

Usually these readings do not differ greatly from one another, though occasionally there is a difference of substantial importance, as in at least one place in the famous prophecy of the 70 weeks (Dan. 9:24).

In most cases the *q^ere* seems to fit best in the text and scholars usually follow it, though at some places an argument could be made for the reading of the *kethibh*. Whenever such a variant affects the meaning of the prediction in any important way it will be given consideration in our discussion. In such cases the present writer usually prefers not to build on one or other of the two readings, but rather to see what is common to the meaning of both and therefore definite regardless of which reading is taken.

The text of the Old Testament has been preserved with marvelous accuracy, and there is a far smaller number of important variations in our Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament than in the Greek manuscripts of the New