

Undoing and redoing the work of the Masoretes

Part 3: Extra verses

This is the third article in a series. The series is about errors in BHS and/or WLC. The other articles in the series are as follows:

- [Undoing and redoing the work of the Masoretes – Part 1: Th...](#)
- [Undoing and redoing the work of the Masoretes – Part 2: Say...](#)
- [Undoing and redoing the work of the Masoretes – Part 4: Atn...](#)

In editions close to WLC, such as Accordance HMT-W4 and Logos LHB, Joshua 21:34–38 look, schematically, like this:

ס

... מִיָּטָה זְבוּלֹן ... 34

... אֶת־דְּמֹנָהּ 35

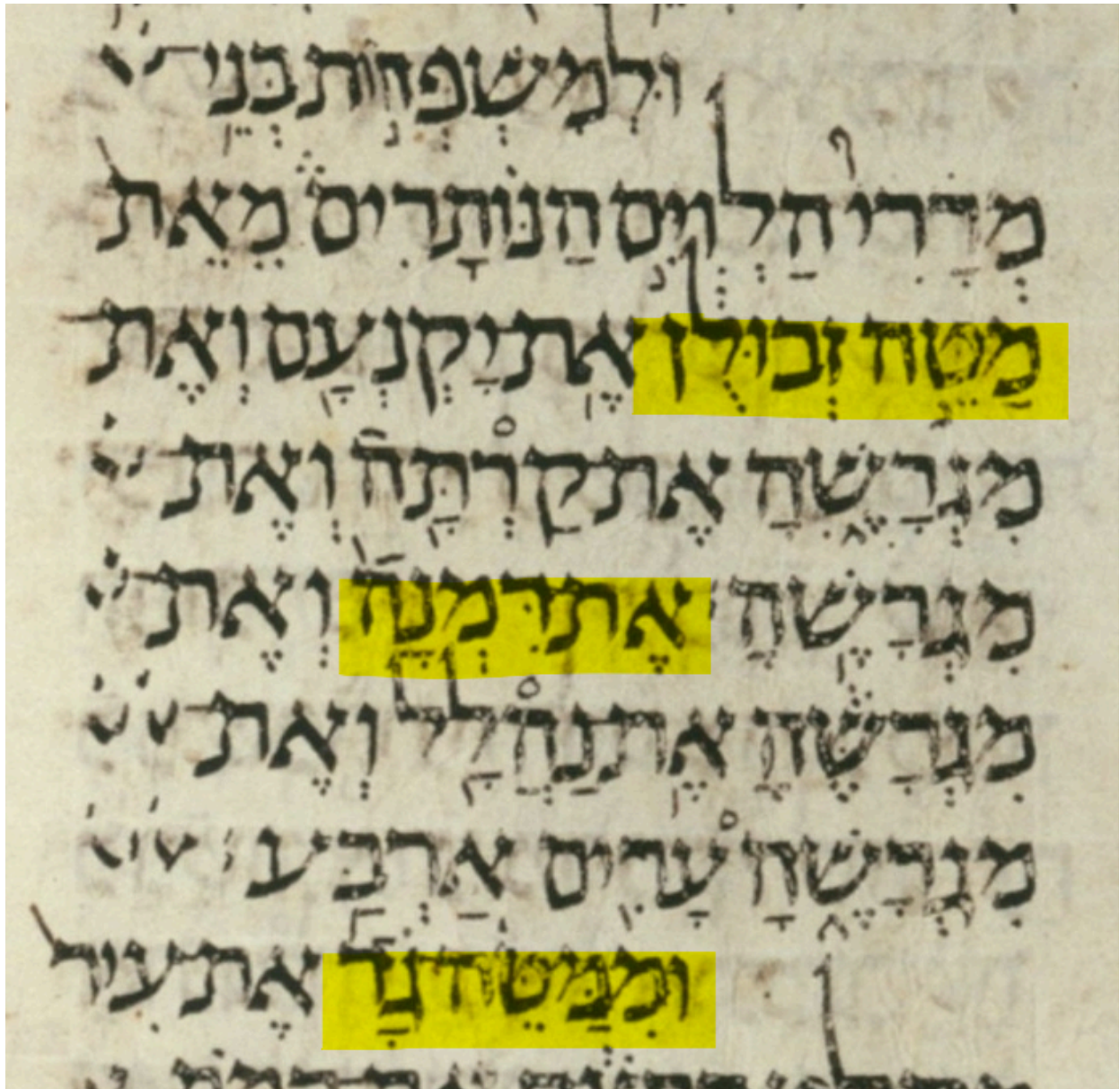
... וּמִמֵּיטָה רְאוּבֵן ... 36

... אֶת־קְדֵמוֹת 37

ס

... וּמִמֵּיטָה־גָּד 38

But ל has no content corresponding to WLC's verses 36 and 37! Page 133B, column 1, lines 4–11 of ל look like this (highlighting added of course):



It all starts out fine. In ל we see:

- a *setumah* paragraph break
- content corresponding to WLC's verses 34 and 35

But right after that, we see:

- a *setumah* paragraph break
- content corresponding to WLC's verse 38!

Schematically, ל looks like this:

ס

... מִטָּה זְבוּלֹן ... 34

... אֶת־דְּמֹנָהּ 35

ס

וּמִמֵּטָה־גָּד 38

In other words, in ל we go straight from the tribe of Zebulun to the tribe of Gad. No Reuben.

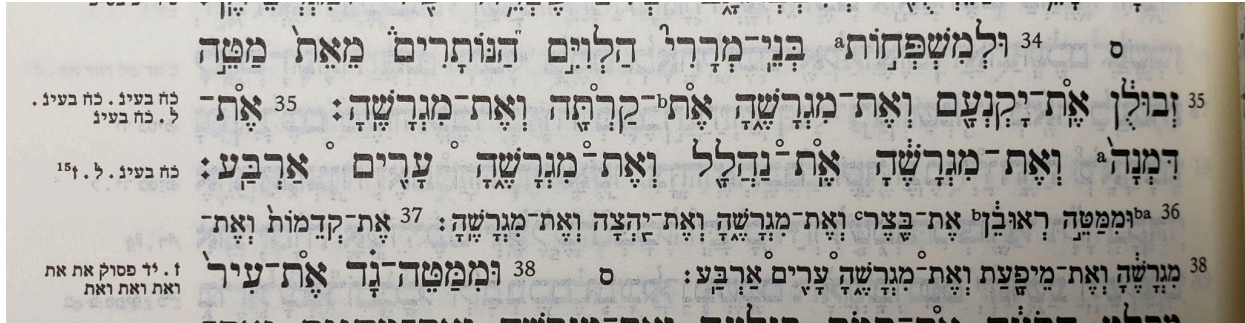
These “missing” verses are not an idiosyncrasy of ל. And even if they were, WLC is supposed to be a strictly diplomatic edition of ל, so if ל lacks these verses, WLC should lack these verses. What’s going on here?

WLC did not start with the goal of representing ל. WLC started with the goal of representing a subset of BHS. That subset consists of:

- the BHS body text
- the BHS notes relating to *qere* and/or *ketiv*

Though WLC did evolve to have some corrections to BHS, it still remained quite close to BHS. So, what does BHS look like here? The

answer is that BHS has these verses 36 and 37, **but they are in smaller type!**



So WLC transcribes BHS too abstractly here: it abstracts away the change in type size. The proper way to have transcribed BHS here probably wouldn't have been to mark these verses as small, per se: that's too concrete. But they should have been marked as something like "interpolated" or "not in L". In other words, the change in type size should have been abstracted, but not abstracted away!

Although the BHS apparatus is normally irrelevant to the task of the WLC transcriber, here the small type should have been a clue that something was going on that was worth looking into. The small type should have led them to look at apparatus note "a" in (pseudo) verse 36. It starts with the following notation, which records what I wish they had found a way to record in WLC:

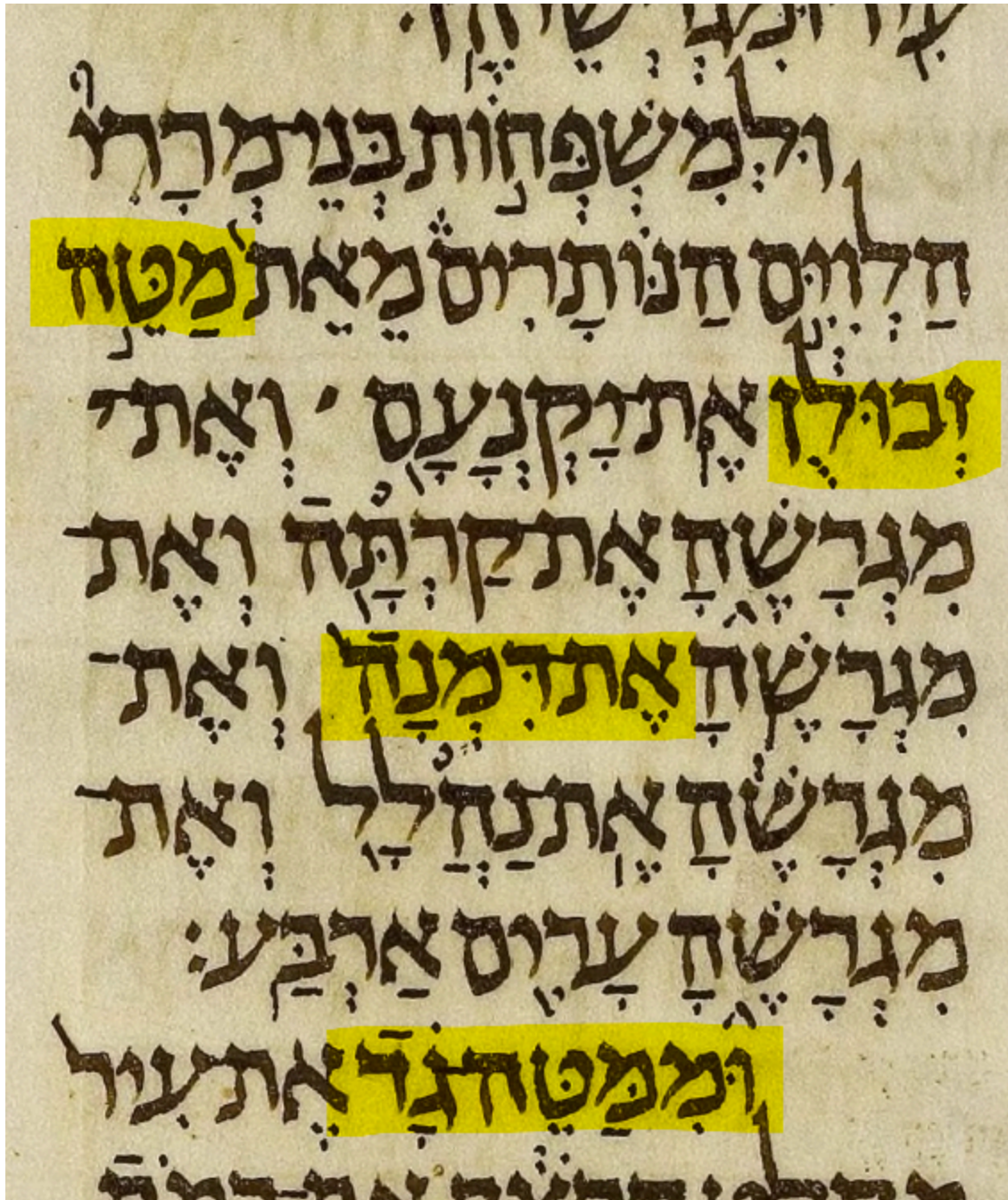
v 36.37 > LC

Here "LC" means not only the Leningrad Codex but also the Cairo Codex of the Prophets. I.e. LC is short for "L[eningrad Codex] and C[airo Codex of the Prophets]" not "L[eningrad] C[odex]." With that, we can decode "v 36.37 > LC" to mean:

Verses 36 through 37
are an addition relative to (i.e. do not appear in)
the Leningrad Codex and the Cairo Codex of the Prophets.

L and C are the only Hebrew manuscripts cited, i.e. they cite no contradictions to this tradition. Indeed I doubt there are any among the other esteemed manuscripts, two of which I will review below: א and 17. Though scholars (and amateurs such as me) love to study differences within the Masoretic tradition, we must admit, when we “come up for air” and get some perspective, that these differences are, though numerous, minute. I am not aware of any differences as large as a word missing, much less two verses.

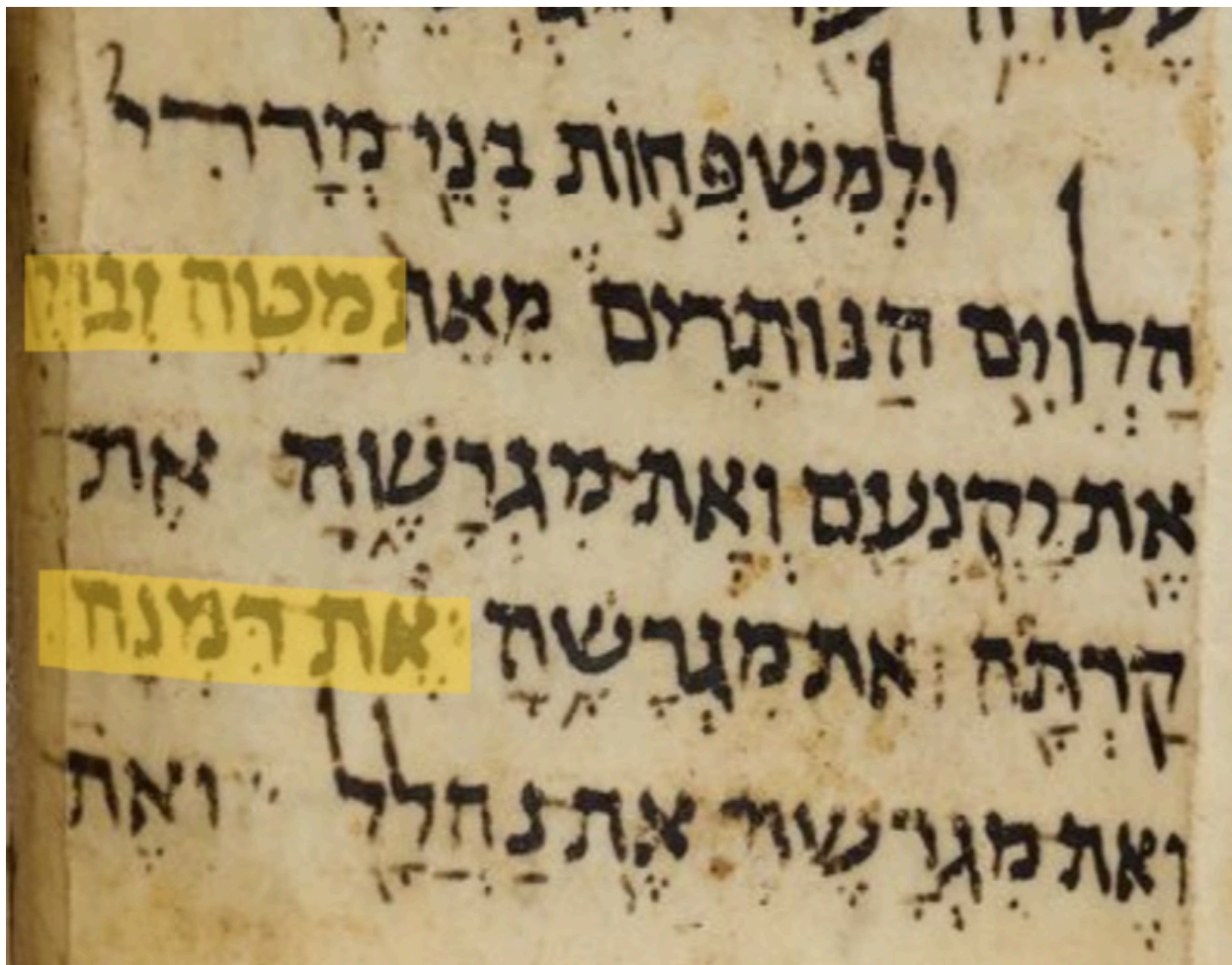
Here’s the relevant passage from the Aleppo Codex (א) (page ?, column 2, lines 4–11) (from Bar-Ilan images):

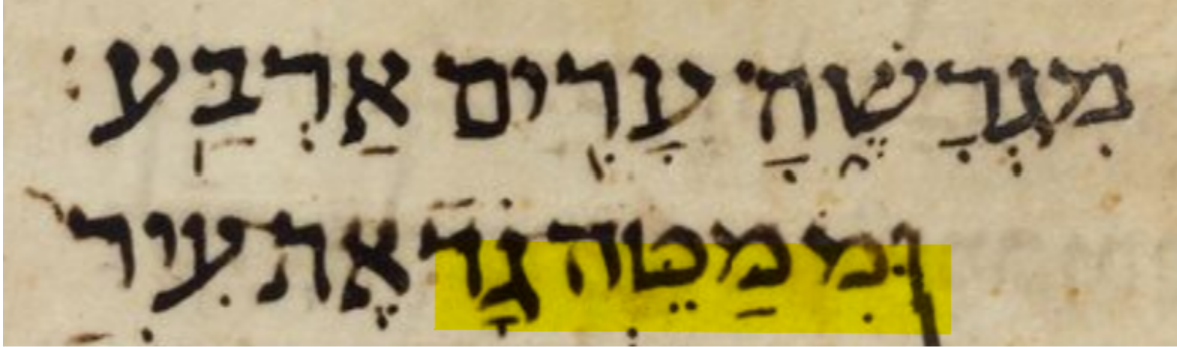


As an aside, note that there is a *sof pasuq* mark missing in the excerpt from 8 above, i.e. the colon-shaped mark shown in red below is missing just before the highlighted compound את-דמנה:

מַגְרֵשָׁה : אֶת־דְּמִנָּה

Here's the relevant passage from Sassoan 1053 (aka 1ש aka ש (sin)) (page 212, column 3, last 5 lines; page 213; column 1, first 2 lines) (from IHBMR images):





As an aside, note that the final *nun* of זבולן is cut off. (זבולן is one of our highlighted keywords.) I think this *nun* might be cut off not only in the photo, but in the actual artifact. There appears to be some sort of joint near the gutter, but this joint is not the source of the problem; indeed the *lamed* of זבולן is written “after” this joint. The real problem, I think, is that there wasn’t enough space even with writing “after” the joint. There is a thin vertical line after the *lamed* that might be part of this *nun*. But I am not sure that this line is made by ink. There are other lines somewhat like it above, near the gutter. Here’s a higher-res detail of this word and its environs, without highlighting interfering (thanks to Dr. Nehemia Gordon for supplying this image):



Emerging from this digression on זבולן in 1ש, where are we?

We have shown that two other esteemed manuscripts, א and 1ש, agree with the two manuscripts already cited by BHS (L and C) (aka ל and ק).

It seems likely that at some point in the development of the Hebrew Bible, somebody accidentally omitted these two verses about the transfer of four towns from the tribe of Reuben. (These towns were transferred to the Merarite clan of the Levites). The idea that this is an omission is strongly supported by a parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 6, since these Reuben towns are listed there.

Even though it is likely that these two verses “should be there” in some sense, this is irrelevant to the Masoretic project. They still should not be there, in a Masoretic sense.

Likely someone accidentally omitted these two verses in some influential text, and that text, with that omission, is the one that became Masoretically canonical. In this sense the only mistakes in Masoretic manuscripts are where manuscripts disagree with one another. Sometimes it is difficult to say, in such cases, which manuscripts are right, and which are wrong, but fortunately that is not the case here. At least in the four manuscripts we have discussed, there is total agreement. And these are not just any four manuscripts, these are arguably the four most important manuscripts to consult, for the book of Joshua.

When we publish a Masoretic Hebrew Bible, our task is easier than related tasks such as publishing a translation. A translation likely draws on multiple sources, including pre-Masoretic Hebrew sources (Qumran) as well as sources in Aramaic, Syriac, and/or Greek. Here in Joshua 21 we can see that, with the use of small type, the BHS editors tried to balance two almost-incompatible goals for BHS:

- Be a diplomatic edition of לְ
- Be a wide-ranging, multi-language critical edition of the Hebrew Bible, oriented towards tasks such as translation

WLC should have omitted these verses or found a way to mark them with a semantic equivalent to BHS's small type. Instead, WLC, supposedly only a diplomatic edition of לְ, became polluted with two verses only relevant to a wide-ranging, multi-language critical edition of the Hebrew Bible.

A small problem related to a *setumah* break is embedded within WLC's larger mistake. WLC represents a *setumah* break as an "S" marker at the end of the verse preceding the break. (This "S" marker is often rendered as a *samekh* (ס) in printed editions.) The "ownership" of a *setumah* or

petuḥah marker is always a tricky issue in representing the Hebrew Bible in a dataset. Does such a marker:

- “belong” to the verse that precedes the marker?
- “belong” to the verse that follows the marker?
- “belong” to neither?

As always, there are advantages and disadvantages to each of those three approaches. But, I think that the best compromise is to have such a break “belong” neither to the verse that precedes it nor to the verse that follows it.

One disadvantage of WLC’s choice to have a *setumah* marker belong to the preceding verse is that this makes a Masoretic *setumah* break “belong” to non-Masoretic verse 37. So an edition close to WLC can’t correct WLC’s error by simply dropping verses 36 and 37: it must “rescue” the *setumah* break “taken hostage” by verse 37.

For example, though, commendably, UXLC corrects WLC’s error by marking these verses with an “X” and showing them in gray, the astute observer may notice that the *samekh* of this *setumah* break gets “swept up” in the grayness, making this *setumah* break look non-Masoretic:

21:34 וְלִמְשַׁפְּחוֹת בְּנֵי-מֶרְרִי הַלְוִיִּם הַנּוֹתְרִים מֵאֵת מִטָּה זְבוּלֹן
 אֶת-יִקְנֶעֶם וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה אֶת-קַרְתָּהּ וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה: 35 אֶת-דְּמִנָּה
 וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה אֶת-נֶהְלֵל וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה עָרִים אַרְבַּע: 36X וּמִמִּטָּה
 רְאוּבֵן אֶת-בְּצֹר וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה וְאֶת-יְהִצָּה וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה:
 אֶת-קַדְמוֹת וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה וְאֶת-מִיפְעֵת וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה עָרִים 37X
 אַרְבַּע: 38 וּמִמִּטָּה-גָּד אֶת-עִיר מְקַלֵּט הַרְצִיחַ אֶת-רַמַּת
 בְּגִלְעָד וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה וְאֶת-מַחְנֵים וְאֶת-מְגִרְשָׁה:

WLC's failure to mark these verses is partially addressed in version 4.22, with the following comment in its header:

NOTE: This file includes Joshua 21:36-37, just as previous versions have always done. Those two verses are *not* found in the Leningrad Codex (or in the Aleppo Codex or in most early codices) but *are* found in later manuscripts and printed editions of the Hebrew Bible.

We conclude by noting how this issue is handled in important printed editions. In the JPS HET an asterisk appears before the verse number label for verse 36:

מְגִרְשָׁה עָרִים אַרְבַּע: ס *36 וּמִמִּטָּה-
 גָּד אֶת-עִיר מְקַלֵּט הַרְצִיחַ אֶת-רַמַּת

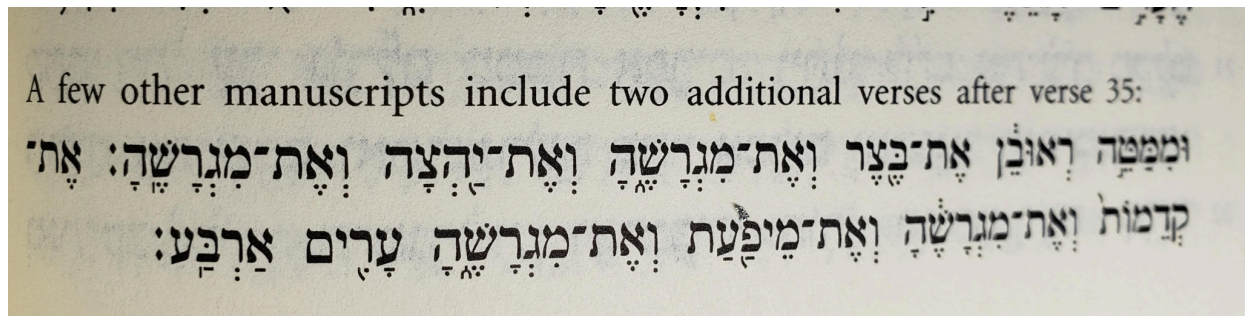
This asterisk leads to the following note:

כאן נתחבר שני פסוקים במהדורת שטוטגארט
על פי נוסח אחר, אז בשאר הפרק גורמים לשינוי
פסוקים כנספר

(כאן נתחבר שני פסוקים במהדורת שטוטגרט על פי נוסח אחר, אז בשאר הפרק גורמים לשינוי פסוקים כנספר)

This note means, roughly, “here we skip two verses in BHS in order to conform to another tradition, so in the rest of this chapter our verse numbers differ [from those of BHS].”

In Dotan’s BHL, the following appears at the bottom of the relevant page:

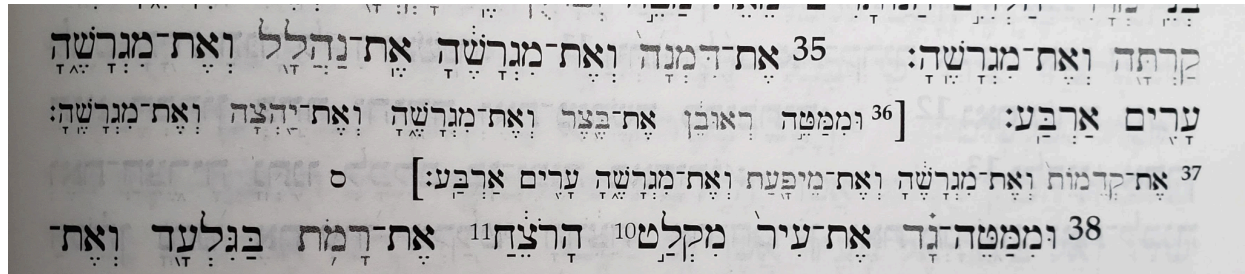


(“A few other manuscripts include two additional verses after verse 35 [...].”)

(I’m curious as to whether any of the manuscripts Dotan refers to are esteemed Masoretic ones.)

Keter Yerushalayim makes no such “apology” for its “missing” verses.

Zondervan's RHB (*A Reader's Hebrew Bible*) (Brown & Smith), though strictly based on WLC 4.4, commendably supplements its WLC base text with some big square brackets and a change to a smaller font size as in BHS:



(Note that WLC 4.4 is not, as it might seem, more recent than the most recent WLC, version 4.22, which was released in November of 2020. The dot used in WLC versions separates the major and minor revision integers, not the integer and fractional parts of a number expressed in decimal notation. In short, WLC 4.4 might be called WLC 4.04 in a different versioning scheme.)