

that the true sense of them may be come at with ease, by persons of the lowest capacity and meanest ability, for whose sake, as observed, the Bible was written; and that they are of this use has been owned by the opposers of them: so *Capellus*^b, speaking of the accents says, “certainly these little marks when fitly and opportunely put, are indeed of this use, that sometimes we less hesitate about, and more expeditiously take in the mind and sense of the writer;” and so *Walton*^c says of the *Masorettes*, that “they pointed the text, not at their own will and pleasure, but according to the true sense and received reading from the sacred writers to their times; hence the reading is made *more easy*, and the text less obnoxious to *ambiguity* and corruption.” Should it be said, as it often is, that by attending to the connexion of words, and to the context, the sense of a word in question may be soon and easily understood. Let it be observed, that all have not the same natural parts and abilities, and the like acumen of wit, clearness of understanding, and critical judgment, as particularly the
above

^b Arcan. Punct. l. 2. c. 25. f. 7. ^c Prolegom. 8. f. 10.

above persons mentioned ; and besides, the words in connexion and in the context being unpointed, some of them may be equally difficult to be understood, and the sense of them must be examined and fixed, ere the sense of the word in question can be determined ; all which will require time, and perhaps after all, entire satisfaction is not obtained : and if men who may be thought to be well versed in the language, and men of parts and abilities, have been led into mistakes, through a neglect or want of the points, much more may persons of mean and ordinary capacities. The authors of the several *Greek* versions of the Bible, the Septuagint interpreters, *Aquila*, *Theodotion*, and *Symmachus*, were all *Jews*, excepting the last, and he was a *Samaritan*, and may be allowed to have a considerable share of knowledge of the *Hebrew* language ; yet these, especially the seventy interpreters, neglecting the points, and translating without them, what gross senses have they put upon the text ? sometimes directly contrary to what is intended, sometimes what is very absurd, and even wicked and blasphemous, or nearly so ; take an instance of each, *God is angry every*
every

every day, *Pf.* vii. 11. the *Greek* version is, does not bring on anger, or is not angry every day, the word לֹא differently pointed, is used for *God*, and for the negative *not*. The passage in *Is.* xxiv. 23. then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the lord of hosts shall reign, &c. which with others *Dr. Lowth*^d represents as so grand and magnificent, and so coloured, that no translation can express, nor any altogether obscure; and yet this is most miserably obscured in the *Greek* version of it, and a sense given extremely low, mean, and absurd; *the brick shall waste, and the wall shall fall, when the Lord reigns, &c.* לִבְנֵה differently pointed signifies the moon, and a brick, and חֲמָה, the sun and a wall, the authors of this version have absurdly taken the latter sense. *Lam.* iii. 33. it is, *be, i. e. God, doth not willingly afflict*; the *Greek* version is *he doth not answer from his heart, cordially and sincerely, thereby charging God with insincerity and dissimulation*; yet the three letters ענה unpointed signify to answer as well as to afflict; in *Kal* it signifies the former, in *Piel* the latter; which is the true sense here, and to be distinguished by

^d De Sacr. Poef. Heb. Prælect. 6. p. 69, 70.

by the points; and how have the same interpreters, by changing points and letters, spoiled the famous prophecy of the *Messiah* in *Is.* ix. 6. where, instead of *everlasting Father, the Prince of peace*, they translate *I will bring upon the princes peace?* though the passage is otherwise produced by *Clemens of Alexandria*^e, more agreeable to the *Hebrew* text; which shews that the *Septuagint* version is not in the same state now it formerly was. The learned *Vitringa** has observed, that “ the *Greek* interpreter of *Alexandria*, who came forth under the name “ and number of the *Seventy*, not being “ expert in the *Jerusalem* reading, has “ often in his unhappy and unlearned version, so deformed the prophet (*Isaiab*’s) “ discourse, in the more obscure places, “ that *Isaiab* cannot be known again in “ *Isaiab* :” and through negligence or disuse of, or want of the points, the *Greek* interpreters have made mistakes, when one would think it was almost impossible they should; thus בְּנֵי differently pointed, or without any points, may signify *sons* or *builders*.

^e Pædagog. l. 1. c. 5. See also Euseb. Demonstrat. Evangel. l. 7. c. 1. p. 336, 337.
^{*} Præfat. ad Comment. in *Isaiam*, Vol. 1. p. 5.

builders. They have taken the word in the first sense in 1 *King* v. 18. and contrary to the context and plain sense of the words, read, *Solomon's sons and Hiram's sons hewed them,* the stones. The same word, consisting of the same letters, as differently pointed, has two or three senses, and sometimes half a dozen, and even eight or ten, as the word דָּבַר. How difficult therefore must it be to attain unto, and settle the true sense, as in such and such a place, at least to common persons; and for these the bible was originally written, as well as for learned men.

5. It will be difficult to assert and maintain the perspicuity of the scripture, laying aside the vowel-points and accents; and make it to comport with the wisdom of God to deliver out his laws, the rule of man's conduct both towards himself and one another, and doctrines designed to make men wise unto salvation, and to instruct them in matters of the greatest moment for time and eternity: to deliver these, I say, in ambiguous words, that admit of various senses, and at best give a sense difficult to attain unto by men of the deepest learning and of the greatest capacity. It is
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the part of a wise law-giver to express his laws, and of a king to publish his edicts, and of a teacher to give forth his doctrines and instructions in the clearest manner, in the plainest terms, in words the most easy to be understood; and not in ambiguous language capable of admitting divers senses, and such as is contrary to what is intended; and can it be thought that God, our law-giver and king, and who by his word proposes to teach men to profit, and to lead them by the way they should go, would act otherwise?

6. NOR shall we be able, I fear, to support the infallibility of the scripture, that part of it the Old Testament, as a sure rule of faith and practice, when by taking away or laying aside the points, it becomes flexible, and may be turned as a nose of wax to any thing to serve a purpose, to countenance any doctrine or practice agreeable to the different tastes and inclinations of men; since hereby it will admit of different senses, and so in consequence must be uncertain, and not to be depended on: and, I fear it is this wantonness of spirit that has led many to throw away the points and accents, that they might be under no restraint,

straint, but at full liberty to interpret scriptures as their fancy inclines, and their interest leads; but if the points give the true sense and mind of the Holy Spirit in the sacred writings, which has been owned by such who have opposed the divine original of them, why should they be laid aside, to make way for any sense the fancy of men may impose upon them? *Walton* in so many words affirms^f, that “ they (the *Masorettes*)
 “ express in their punctuation the *true sense*
 “ of the Holy Ghost, which was dictated
 “ to the holy penmen, and by them com-
 “ mitted to writing, and preserved both by
 “ Jews and Christians”; and that “ they
 “ pointed the text according to the *true*
 “ and *received reading*, which expressed the
 “ *true sense* of the Holy Ghost, and not as
 “ they pleased; nor is it lawful for any
 “ one to reject their reading at pleasure,
 “ but all are tied to it, unless some error
 “ or better reading can be clearly proved;^g”
 and *Capellus* himself says^h, “ none are to
 “ be obliged to admit the punctuation of
 “ the *Masorettes*, because, and as it is from
 “ them; but all may be bound by this
 “ punctu-

^f Prolegom. Polyglott. 3. f. 51. ^g The Considerator
 considered, p. 200. ^h Arcan. Punct. l. 2. c. 26. f. 2.

“ punctuation, as and because it can be
 “ demonstrated, that it almost every where
 “ both agrees with the consonants to which
 “ it is added, with the series and structure
 “ of the words in the passage, and that it
 “ produces a sense commodious, true, co-
 “ herent, &c. nor can any other punctua-
 “ tion be produced more apt and more
 “ commodious¹.”

7. THE inspiration of scripture is affected thereby. If *all* scripture or the *whole writing* of the Bible is *by inspiration* of God, then not the matter only, but the words in which it is written, are of divine inspiration; and indeed what else are meant by *the words the Holy Ghost teacheth*, 1 Cor. ii. 13? and if the words of scripture are of divine inspiration, and given by God himself, then, surely, not half words, as consonants without vowels are; and if whole words, which is most agreeable to the wisdom and honour of the Divine Being, then both consonants and vowels were given by inspiration; and if the latter were not, but of human invention, then, so far as they have been and are in use, and the sense of scripture

¹ Qui puncta vel negligent, vel prosum rejiciunt, certe carent omni judicio & ratione. Calvin. in Zech. xi. 7.

ture has been and still is taken from them, and made to depend on them, such sense stands not upon divine authority, but upon human authority; and on that of a set of men, blinded, besotted, and destitute of the Spirit of God, bitter enemies to christianity, and perhaps a set of men as bad as ever was on earth; and if the points are of their invention and addition, they ought never to stand in our Bibles, and be used by us, but should be rejected with great indignation: a pointed Bible, if possible, should not be in the world, having in it such an addition to the word of God, which ought not to be made, and which is so directly contrary to his order, *Deut.* iv. 2. and xii. 32. *Prov.* xxxi. 6. And to which may be further observed,

8. IF the vowel-points were not annexed to the letters by the penmen of the sacred writings, when penned by them, but have had a later and a new beginning, that would have been known; some would have divulged it; it would have been on record somewhere or another, and we should have been informed by some means or another, by whom they were placed, and where and at what time; but nothing of this has ever
tran-

transpired. The story of *Elias* about the men of *Tiberias* merits no regard; and even that the points were annexed by *Exra*, or by the men of his congregation, is mere conjecture, without any foundation; and therefore upon the whole it may be concluded, that they were originally put by the sacred penmen, *Moses* and the prophets.

IT is often said, in favour of reading the Bible without points, that *Rabbinical* books are written without them, and are easily read. But then it should be observed, that they are read by such who have first read the *Hebrew* Bible with points, and who are well versed in *Bible-Hebrew*; and by such the commentaries of *Kimchi*, *Abarbinel*, and others, may be read with some ease, whose style is plain and clear; and by degrees other writings more rough, crabbed and difficult may be read also; but as *Buxtorf*¹ and others observe, there is a great difference between the Bible and *Rabbinical* books, in writing, in style, in manner and means of learning and reading them. In *Rabbinical* books, the *matres lectionis*, as ם are called, are used to supply the want of vowels; whereas in the Bible they

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are

¹ De Punct. Antiq. par. 3 p. 370.

are most frequently omitted, and even in places where they might be expected, and least of all should be omitted: the style of *Rabbinical* books is for the most part plain, and where it is not, as in the *Talmud* and other writings, it is hard and difficult to read them; but the style of the Bible is generally short, concise, full of ellipses and other figures, especially in the prophetic writings; add to which, what is contained in *Rabbinical* writings are things usually before known, or easily understood, and to be read without much stop or hindrance; but the sacred scriptures contain mysteries, things sublime, and more remote from the capacities of men, and require more attention, help and assistance in reading them; and besides, if a mistake is made in *Rabbinical* writings, it is not of that importance, as in reading the Bible; and therefore we may venture to read with less pain and with more safety, the one without points than the other. *Buxtorf*, the son, upon his own observation asserts^k, that it is more easy to read *Rabbinical* books unpointed, than any of the books of the Bible pointed; and that he could venture to say, that

^k De Punct. Antiq. par. 2. p. 376.

that he could more readily and certainly read any *Rabbinical* books never seen by him before, than any book of the Bible even pointed, and though well known by him, and often read over and over again. Yet, notwithstanding all the advantages on the side of *Rabbinical* writings, how many mistakes have been made by learned men, as by *Scaliger*, *Schickard*, *Kircher*, *Vorstius*, and others? what blunders in translation has *Buxtorf* exposed in *Morinus* and *Capellus*? and even those great masters in *Rabbinical* literature, as the *Buxtorfs* themselves, *Selden*, *Lightfoot*, &c. are not without their errors; nor need it be wondered at, since, in the *Talmuds* especially, there are many places which seem quite unintelligible, and besides are written in the *Chaldee* dialect, and that very impure, and abounding with exotic words.

It is frequently objected against the Bible being written and read with points, that the copy of the law every where kept in the Jewish synagogues is without points, as answering to the *Mosaic* Archetype. That it is an unpointed copy of the law which is usually kept in the *Jewish* synagogues now,

will be allowed¹, but that the Archetype or Autograph of *Moses* was without points may be asserted, but not easily proved; nor can it be said, with any precision, how long it has been the custom of the *Jews* to have an unpointed copy of the law in their synagogues; nor can what they have, be thought to be an ectype of, or to answer to the copy of *Moses*, nor be kept with that view. For had the Autograph of *Moses* the *Keri*, or marginal readings? it will not be said by the opposers of the points that it had; but the present copies of the law in the synagogues of the *Jews* have, if I mistake not, and even the pricks and points which they call *crowns*^m; are the present copies in the synagogues written in *Samaritan* characters? they are not: and yet, according to the hypothesis of *Morinus*, *Capellus*, and those that follow them, they ought to be so written, to be an ectype of, or to answer to that of *Moses*; since that, according to them, was in that character: but to have a copy in that character now would be contrary to their own rules, one of which runs thusⁿ,

“ they

¹ *Lyra* in *Hof.* ix. 12. *Menasseh ben Israel. Conciliator*, in *Exod.* qu. 50. p. 170. ^m *Schulchan Aruch*, par. 1. c. 141. f. 8. and par. 2. c. 275. f. 6. Vid. *Hacksplan. Cabala*, p. 309. ⁿ *Massechet Sopherim*, c. 1. f. 6.

“ they dont write (the facred books) nei-
 “ ther in the language beyond the river
 “ (or the *Samaritan*), nor in the *Syriac*,
 “ nor in the *Median*, nor in *Greek*; and in
 “ whatsoever language or writing they are
 “ written, they may not be read (*i. e.* pub-
 “ lickly) until they are written in the *As-*
 “ *syrian*,” or square character. There are
 other reasons to be given, why unpointed
 copies are kept and used in the synagogues
 of the *Jews*, and which may serve to lead
 to the original of this custom, and the rea-
 son of its continuance.

I. ONE reason was, that the *Cabalists*,
 and those who had got into the allegorizing
 way of interpreting the scriptures, might
 have the opportunity of framing and esta-
 blishing their own and even various senses
 of them, which an unpointed Bible will
 admit of, when a pointed one will not.
 Hence that saying of R. *Menachem* °, “ a
 “ book of the law in which there are many
 “ faces (or on which many senses may be
 “ put) is one not pointed;” for, as he says,
 “ when letters are not pointed, they have
 “ many faces (or may be differently read);
 “ but when they are pointed, they have only
 “ one

° Apud Munster. Præfat. ad Vet. Test.

“ one sense, according to the punctuation:”
 and this R. *Bechai*^p plainly suggests, is the
 original cause and reason of using unpointed
 copies; “ letters not pointed, he says, admit
 “ of various senses, and are divided into
 “ divers sparks; and *because of this we are*
 “ *commanded* not to point the book of the
 “ law; for the literal sense of every word
 “ is according to the punctuation, and
 “ there is but one literal sense in a pointed
 “ word; but an unpointed word a man
 “ may understand many ways, and find out
 “ many wonderful and excellent things:”
 and it is for much the same reason, that
 men may not be tied down to one sense of
 a word, that points are now so much
 opposed. Some have drawn an argument
 for the novelty and against the antiquity of
 the points, from the *Cabalists* making no
 use nor mention of them in their writings,
 but drew their various senses, it is said, from
 the letters only, and the combination of
 them, and not from the vowels and accents;
 but this has been abundantly confuted by
Buxtorf^q. The commentator on the book
 of *Cofri*^r makes mention of R. *Aaron*, a
 great

^p Apud Buxtorf. ut supra, p. 45, 46. ^q Ut supra,
 par. 1. c. 5. p. 54, &c. ^r R. Judah Muscatus in *Cofri*,
 fol. 230. 4. Vid. Wolf, Bibliothec. Heb. p. 128.

great *Mekubbal* or *Cabbalist*, the head of the university at *Babylon*, as the author of a book of pointing, and which is quoted by *Rittangelius*^s; and in the *Cabalistic Lexicon*^t, under the word נִקּוּדִים, mention is made of nine points, and their names are given, *Kametz*, *Pathach*, *Zere*, &c. and the use that is made of them is observed; and *Menasseh ben Israel*^u describes the *Cabalists*, as employing themselves in searching out the deep mysteries of the law, which are contained in the letters, *points* and musical *accents*; and a little after, he observes, that “ the law was given without points, “ like the books the *Jews* now have in “ their synagogues; so that when any word “ occurs, whose letters now are not tied to “ certain vowels, men may put what points “ they please to them, and so the words “ may be read one way and another.”

2. ANOTHER reason of the *Jews* having an unpointed copy of the law in their synagogues is, that it might be a memorial of the oral tradition of points and accents, from the times of *Moses* to *Ezra*. They
sup-

^s De Verit. Relig. Christ. p. 27. 40. ^t Kabela.
Denudata. par. 1. p. 592. ^u Conciliat. in Exod.
qu. 50. p. 169. 172. 174. Vid. Leifden. Philolog. Heb.
Mixt. Dissert. 13. p. 106. & Philolog. Heb. Dissert. 26.

suppose the points were of *Moses*, but not annexed by him to the *Pentateuch*; but that they were delivered and handed down by oral tradition from one to another until *Ezra*, who added them to it; and therefore to keep in memory this wonderful affair, they always have an unpointed copy in their synagogues.

3. ANOTHER reason why only unpointed copies of the law are kept in the synagogues, may be their superstitious accuracy and exactness in writing the law; so as to letters, if any are wanting or not rightly placed, or similar ones put for each other, the copy is prophane or rejected; and as it is still more difficult to have the points and accents exactly put, they choose to have none at all: hence they say^w a pointed copy is prophane or to be rejected, even though the punctuation is razed out; partly because it will not admit of various senses, as before observed, and partly because of the difficulty and almost impossibility of a perfect pointed copy; and the rather they are indifferent to one, and like as well to have an unpointed one in their synagogues, since *there*, none but their learned men, as priests, &c. read in them. 3. BUT

^w Schulchan Aruch, par. 2. c. 274. f. 7.

4. BUT the chief reason of unpointed copies in the synagogues seems to be, that none but learned men, or such who are well versed in the *Hebrew* language, should be admitted readers there; for if the copy was pointed, as then, any common man might read it, so any such man might be chosen to the office of a reader, though otherwise very illiterate; and to prevent any such being introduced into it, is the principal reason now, why it is unpointed. And though those who are expert in the language, and are able to read without points, and are chosen into the office of reader in the synagogue, and have exercised that office many years; yet it is their custom, as one of those readers told *Cocceius* * long ago, to prepare themselves at home by reading out of a pointed copy, for their better, easier and more accurate reading in the synagogue. And it is their usual method to this day, for the præcentor of the synagogue, though ever so well versed in reading the scripture, and ever so exact in the knowledge of the *Hebrew* tongue, the day before the sabbath, to read the passages appointed to be read that day out of a pointed

U copy,

* Coccei Defens. Cod. Heb. f. 19. p. 22. Tom. 7.

copy, and thereby make himself master of the exact reading of them, that so the day following he may read them without hesitation or stop, and pronounce, as he does, exactly in conformity to the present punctuation^r: and after all it follows not, because the *Jews* now have, and have had for ages past, unpointed Bibles in their synagogues, which men of learning could read, that they have not, nor had any pointed ones for the common people. It is certain that they had formerly, and have such now; wherefore this is no sufficient objection against the antiquity and use of the points, but an argument in favour of them; since the true reason of having unpointed copies in the synagogue is, that none might be admitted readers in them, but such who are so perfect in the *Hebrew* language as to be able to read exactly in an unpointed copy, agreeable to the points and accents in a pointed one.

^r Carpzov. Critic. sacr. par. 1. p. 267.

F I N I S.