

## chapter 1

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# Scripture and Tradition

Sacred tradition embodied in authoritative Scriptures is a cornerstone of both Judaism of the Greco-Roman period and early Christianity of the first and second centuries. But what precisely did Jews and Christians consider to be authoritative Scripture, and how did they interpret it? Three factors that have emerged in the past fifty years have immensely complicated any attempt to answer to these questions: the manuscript finds of the 1940s and 1950s; new insights into the nature of oral tradition; and a developing recognition of the variety in the religious thought and social organization in early Judaism.

### The Situation in Early Judaism

#### **The Extent of the Authoritative Corpus**

##### *Manuscripts from the Caves of the Judean Desert*

The fragmentary manuscripts found in the caves at Qumran and other locations along the rim of the Dead Sea reveal the richness of Jewish literary production during the late Persian and Greco-Roman periods and shed new light on previously known texts that are not included in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> In addition to all the books of the Hebrew Bible except Esther,<sup>2</sup> the Dead Sea caves have yielded fragmentary copies of other texts that fall into three categories. From the Apocrypha we have Tobit in Aramaic and in Hebrew, the Wisdom of ben Sira in Hebrew, and the Letter of Jeremiah in Greek.<sup>3</sup> Representing the Pseudepigrapha<sup>4</sup> are *1 Enoch* in Aramaic, *Jubilees* in Hebrew, and texts related to the *Testament of Levi* and the *Testament of Naphtali* in Aramaic and Hebrew, respectively. A host of other Hebrew and Aramaic texts (most of them previously unknown) in a variety of genres fill out the complement of Dead Sea texts stemming from the last four centuries B.C.E. and the first century C.E. As a result of these discoveries, we must reassess the texts previously known to us

in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, asking whence they came, when they were written, and how they relate to the writings in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, we must place both the Hebrew Bible and these other texts into the broader context of Judaism in the Persian and Greco-Roman periods.

### *The Components of the Canon*

The history of the development of the Jewish biblical canon is still being written.<sup>5</sup> Something like the tripartite division of the Hebrew Bible (Torah, Prophets, Writings [in Hebrew: *Torah, Nebi'im, Ketubim*, known by the acronym *Tanakh*) was known already to the grandson of Joshua ben Sira, who referred to it in his prologue to his grandfather's book of wisdom (ca. 130 B.C.E.) as "the law, the prophets, and the other books of the fathers" (Sir Prol. 8-10; cf. 24-25).<sup>6</sup> Fifty years earlier, ben Sira himself arranged his hymn to "famous men" (chaps. 44-49) according to the contents of the Torah (44:16-26), the Former Prophets (45:1-49:7), the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, in historical context at 48:22-25; Jeremiah, 49:6-7; Ezekiel, 49:8-9; and the Twelve, 49:10), and added references to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Nehemiah (49:11-13). Whether ben Sira knew all the Writings is uncertain; he makes no reference to Ezra, Job, or the Daniel traditions (which were finally edited after the time of ben Sira's activity). Conversely, he shows high regard for the patriarch Enoch and knows some of the traditions associated with his name and that of Noah (49:14; 44:16-17).<sup>7</sup>

The Qumranic evidence relating to the developing Jewish canon is ambiguous. The caves have yielded no codices to indicate an order of books,<sup>8</sup> nor is it clear in what sense the preserved texts of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha may have been authoritative. Nonetheless, the large number of manuscripts of the *Jubilees* torah and the Astronomical Book and prophetic parts of *1 Enoch* indicate that these works had some kind of authoritative status at some point in the history of the Qumran community and its antecedents.<sup>9</sup> The testamentary or quasi-testamentary material written in the names of Levi, Qahat, and Amram is also of interest because it seems to provide a guarantee of the legitimacy of the priesthood and because it alleges to be revelation about the unseen world.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, given the absence of any manuscripts of the Diaspora story of Esther, the presence of the six manuscripts of the Diaspora story of Tobit is noteworthy.<sup>11</sup> That fragments of Sirach were found at Qumran and Masada is

consonant with the high regard in which some rabbis later held the book,<sup>12</sup> but we cannot be certain that the people at Qumran and Masada considered the work to be authoritative, or at least inspired in the sense that ben Sira regarded his teaching (Sir 24:32-33).

The evidence from ben Sira and from Qumran warns us to be cautious in our views about what may have been included in the category of authoritative “Scripture” around the turn of the era and what was already excluded. More appropriate are these questions—still to be answered: What was authoritative *for whom, in what sense, and when* in the Greco-Roman period, and what were the consequences of differences of opinion in these matters?

### The Developing Text of the Hebrew Bible

The Qumran Scrolls not only suggest that the limits of the canon of Scripture were not fixed but also demonstrate a remarkable fluidity in the *text* of the books of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> Scholars long noted significant differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of 1 and 2 Samuel and of Jeremiah; some ascribed these to scribal carelessness. The Scrolls, however, attest diversity in the Hebrew texts of a larger number of biblical books. As in the case of the canon, the history of the biblical text has yet to be written; but some facts are clear. A long and a short Hebrew text of Jeremiah existed side by side at Qumran.<sup>14</sup> The longer text of Samuel, previously known only in Greek, is the form of the text in the Hebrew Qumran manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> Textual variants in the Torah, previously attested variously in the Masoretic text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Greek Bible, occur in the Qumran Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>16</sup> The Qumran commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab) can quote one version of a passage and expound it by alluding to a variant text.<sup>17</sup> While scholars have offered a number of competing hypotheses to explain these infinitely complex data, one general fact is clear. At the turn of the era, the text of many of the biblical writings was not finally fixed, and scribal and exegetical practice allowed a great deal of interpretive freedom. This fact needs to be related to a paradox evident in both rabbinic and early Christian exegesis: a precise, word-for-word interpretation of the text went hand in hand with scribal manipulation of that text.

### Scripture in Its Interpretive Context

*The “Rewritten Bible”: The Rise of Haggadah*

Common among the Qumran manuscripts as well as Pseudepigrapha not found at Qumran is a type of literary work that retells narratives found in the Hebrew Bible, especially the Pentateuch. It is a precursor to rabbinic haggadic exegesis. The term “Rewritten Bible” is probably anachronistic, because we cannot always be certain that what was rewritten was considered to be “Bible” at the time it was rewritten.<sup>18</sup>

One of the earliest examples of this type of recast narrative occurs in *1 Enoch* 6–11, which elaborates and transforms the fragmentary story of the sons of God and the daughters of men in Gen 6:1-4.<sup>19</sup> Two tendencies are at work in the retold version of the story. (1) Motifs that Greek myth associated with Prometheus, the revealer of technology, are interwoven with the main narrative thread about the mating of divine beings and mortal women. (2) The story as a whole is given an eschatological twist, so that the flood becomes a prototype of the final judgment of the world, which will cure the evils brought about by the illegal mating and the revelations of forbidden secrets. Whatever the precise relationship between *1 Enoch* and Genesis 6–9, the Enoch text should be dated no later than the time of Alexander’s successors (ca. 315 B.C.E.).<sup>20</sup>

A much longer and more complex example of rewritten narrative is represented by the book of *Jubilees*, a work that scholars have long known in an Ethiopic version and in some Greek, Latin, and Syriac fragments.<sup>21</sup> The Qumran caves have yielded fragments from thirteen or fourteen manuscripts of the original Hebrew form of *Jubilees*, which was the source of the aforementioned versions.<sup>22</sup> The author of *Jubilees*, who wrote in the first half of the second century B.C.E., recast Genesis 1—Exodus 12, deleting some parts of the pentateuchal texts, revising others, and adding substantial blocks of new material.<sup>23</sup> These additions include both legal material (which I deal with in chapter 2) and narrative elaborations.

Perhaps most extensive among these narrative elaborations are some of the Enochic texts described above, which *Jubilees* enhances with other traditional material about Noah and the flood (4:15-26; 5:1-12; 7:20-39; 8:1-4; 10:1-17).<sup>24</sup> The second major set of narrative additions elaborate on the Genesis stories about Abraham. The beginning of the cycle of stories explains why Abram left Ur of the Chaldees (11:3—12:21). The son of an idolatrous priest, he came to understand that there was only one living God, and so he set the

idol's temple on fire (Hebrew *'Ur*) and fled the country. Abram's speculation about God also led him to recognize the folly of astrology (for which Chaldea was famous). Taken together, these stories recount how the conversion of an idolater led to the foundation of the chosen nation of Israel, which *Jubilees* repeatedly contrasts with idolatrous and impure Gentiles.<sup>25</sup> The writings of Philo and Josephus and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* attest similar stories about Abraham in the first century C.E.<sup>26</sup> While we cannot be certain how old the stories in *Jubilees* are, the analogy of the Enoch materials suggests that the author of *Jubilees* made use of traditional material. The antiquity of the motif of Abraham's conversion from idolatry is evident from its appearance in the recitation of Israel's history in Josh 24:2-3: "Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River." The hints of conflict between Abraham and the other Gentiles in the *Jubilees* version may indicate that these stories originated in a Gentile context.

The second major elaborated episode in the Abraham cycle recasts the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (*Jub.* 17:15—18:19). The author frames the testing of Abraham with a pair of scenes in heaven, where God responds to demonic accusations that Abraham obeys God only because it is in his interest. The story recalls the prologue of the book of Job (*Job* 1–2) and thus attests the practice of interpreting one traditional text with material from another. The same practice is attested, in reverse form, in the *Testament of Job*, where Job brings on his sufferings by seeking the true God and destroying the idolatrous temple, which is really the habitat of Satan (*T. Job* 2–3; cf. *Jub.* 12:1-13).<sup>27</sup> In *Jubilees* the sacrifice of Isaac is one of ten tests that Abraham undergoes (19:7). Since the author recounts only eight of them, he appears in this case also to draw on tradition, only part of which he uses. While we do not know how old these traditions were, we must reckon with the possibility that a process of interpreting the Genesis stories was very old. Such interpretation—originally oral—may well stem from a time when the Genesis form of the stories was not canonical in the sense that it came to be by the turn of the era.

The practice of retelling stories from what we now call the Bible is documented in a wide variety of other texts found at Qumran and in the Pseudepigrapha. The Qumran Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen ar), written possibly in the first century B.C.E., elaborates the patriarchal narratives, recasting them into the first person singular and reshaping them to fit his purposes.<sup>28</sup> The *Book*

of *Biblical Antiquities* (Pseudo-Philo), written in the latter half of the first century C.E., retells Genesis 1—1 Samuel with its own set of additions, omissions, and revisions.<sup>29</sup> A short time later, Flavius Josephus wrote another, much longer version of the *Antiquities of the Jews*, again drawing on traditional interpretations of the older stories.<sup>30</sup> In addition to these running-narrative elaborations of biblical narrative, there are a significant number of other texts, some demonstrably Jewish, others perhaps Christian in their present form. In some cases, narrative elements are set in a testamentary form (*Testament of Moses*, *Testament of Job*, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Books of Adam and Eve*).<sup>31</sup> A few texts convert episodes in the Bible into independent stories (*Martyrdom of Isaiah*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Paraleipomena of Jeremiah*).<sup>32</sup> Other texts allude to narrative elaborations that are no longer extant (cf. *1 Enoch* 8; 85–90).<sup>33</sup> Through all of this one sees a tendency to interpret narrative by retelling the story.

The technique is exegetical; the storyteller elaborates on some detail in the earlier narrative or creates an episode in the narrative on the basis of a related text. Such elaborations or modifications are driven by a specific authorial agenda. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* offer examples of these techniques.<sup>34</sup> In elaborating Genesis 38, *Testament of Judah* 10–13 explicitly criticizes Judah's marriage to a Canaanite and warns against the evils of wine and greed and the danger posed by women. For the author of the *Testament of Issachar*, the episode about the mandrakes (Gen 30:14–24) illustrates the virtue of sexual continence. The nucleus of other narrative details in the *Testaments* can be found in references to one or the other of the sons of Jacob in the testament of Jacob (Genesis 49) or the blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33). In other cases, the author's situation may catalyze the creation of an episode. The hatred that the author of *Jubilees* feels toward the Edomites—common in texts of this period—leads him to an unbiblical revision of Genesis 33: Jacob kills his brother Esau.

In summary, the texts under consideration reveal a technique of making one's theological point not by means of propositional statements but through the tendentious retelling of traditional stories preserved in the texts that came to be authoritative Scripture. It is a very old technique that has precedents within the narrative sections of the Bible itself, both in the traditional strands of the Pentateuch (Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, Priestly writers) and in the Chronicler's rewriting of the royal narratives of 1–2 Samuel and 1–2

Kings.<sup>35</sup> In all cases the recast narratives reflect a tension between received tradition and the author's situation, point of view, and agenda. The precise relationship between the tradition and its narrative recasting varies, and in given cases it is difficult to determine. In the case of *Jubilees*, the author presents his book as revelation; the angels who stand in God's presence dictate the patriarchal stories to Moses, interspersing them with laws that are engraved on heavenly tablets.<sup>36</sup> Thus the author claims divine authority for his version of the Torah. Elsewhere the relationship between ancient text and interpretation is not so clear, but in all cases older tradition is reinterpreted. What we know as the "Bible" is understood and interpreted in specific and sometimes very tendentious ways, and the base text itself includes such interpretations.

#### *Interpretation of the Prophetic Texts*

For many students of the New Testament and the Christian tradition, prophecy and fulfillment is the most familiar category for interpreting the Hebrew Bible. Such interpretation is explicit in the citation formulas of the Gospels (especially Matthew) and the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>37</sup> Early Christian tradition understood the biblical texts as predictions of Jesus and the events of his life. The emphasis continued in the early church fathers and was celebrated by Martin Luther, who saw the importance of the Old Testament to be in "what points to Christ" ("Was Christum treibt"). Contemporary fundamentalist Christianity interprets history as the unfolding of predictions in the Old Testament prophets (including Daniel) and the New Testament, notably Revelation, Mark 13 and its Synoptic parallels, and 1–2 Thessalonians. This manner of interpretation has precedent in Jewish practice.

Early Jewish interpretation of the prophets in terms of prediction and fulfillment is most explicit in the Qumran *pesharim*.<sup>38</sup> These running commentaries on the prophets and the Psalms quote a section of biblical text and then explain its meaning (*peshet*). The authors of these *pesharim* believed that the prophets and psalmists spoke about events of the imminent end time. Since, in their view, that end time had arrived, the commentators were able to identify in the prophetic texts explicit references to specific events in their own time, especially as they related to their community. These interpretations were not simply matters of learned opinion, in their view, but were based on divine revelation. The author of the Habakkuk *peshet* interpreted Hab 2:1-2 as

follows:

God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but he did not make known to him when time would come to an end. . . . (But the text of Habakkuk) concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets. (1QpHab 7:1-5)<sup>39</sup>

The notion of prediction and fulfillment appears also in narrative writings that recast the ancient text. The *Testament of Moses* purports to be a revelation to Moses on Mount Nebo before his death.<sup>40</sup> In fact it is a heavily rewritten version of the last chapters of Deuteronomy, in which the Deuteronomic scheme of covenantal blessing-apostasy-punishment-repentance-return of blessing is filled out in two cycles, with explicit reference to the events preceding and following the exile. The second cycle places the author, who writes around 168 B.C.E., at the verge of the great judgment. Other texts from this period employ the Deuteronomic scheme to present and explain the events of the first half of the second century B.C.E. *Jubilees 23* is a pseudo-Mosaic prediction of events in the early second century B.C.E. In 2 Maccabees the scheme shapes a lengthy “historical” account that reaches its climax in chapter 7, where one of the Maccabean martyrs invokes what “Moses declared in his song” as a prediction of the martyrdom they are suffering in punishment for the sins of the nation, and of God’s promise to deliver Israel (v 6). Thus the author reuses the tradition that is reflected in the *Testament of Moses*, but as an explanation of past events that led up to Judas Maccabeus’s liberation of the temple and not as a prediction of cosmic divine intervention in the imminent future.<sup>41</sup>

All these writings from the Greco-Roman period accept the prophetic texts as authoritative Scripture in some sense and proceed to interpret the texts with specific reference to contemporary events. The process of interpreting the tradition is much older, however. Within the biblical texts themselves, postexilic authors interpret Deuteronomy and Jeremiah to apply to their own time. The prayers in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 1 employ phrases from the older traditions in order to describe how the covenantal curses predicted in Deuteronomy still pertain to the postexilic Jews.<sup>42</sup> The speakers locate themselves within the punishment phase of the Deuteronomic scheme, and the prayers function as a ritual enactment of the repentance that will turn events from



punishment to salvation, from curse to the restoration of blessing. In this case, early tradition (Deuteronomy), later to become Scripture, is being interpreted in a text that itself will become part of Scripture.

*The Servant of the Lord: A Multivalent Symbol*

Probably more than any other text in the Hebrew Bible, Isa 52:13—53:12 (and, to a lesser extent, other Deutero-Isaianic texts about the Servant) has been seen by Christians as a prophecy of Christ and a key to understanding the figure of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>43</sup> This is understandable since the New Testament itself quotes the passage as prophecy and employs words and phrases from the Servant texts in its descriptions of Jesus and especially his passion and death.<sup>44</sup>

In the past few decades some scholars have challenged the notion that the Servant passages had a pervasive influence on early Christian tradition.<sup>45</sup> Such reassessments of timeworn truisms need to be taken seriously by New Testament scholars and should be welcomed by them. In this case, however, close scrutiny indicates that already in pre-Christian *Jewish* texts, Second Isaiah's Servant material played an important role in explaining events in the Greco-Roman period and in developing scenarios about the eschaton.<sup>46</sup> Those interpretations were variegated, however, and the hermeneutical key was not always (explicitly) prophecy and fulfillment.

Second Isaiah depicts the Servant as an ambiguous figure who reinterprets older traditions.<sup>47</sup> He is both a personification of Israel and God's agent vis-à-vis Israel. Although he is a collective entity, he is described in personal terms. In this respect he is reminiscent of a suffering prophet like Jeremiah or Moses.<sup>48</sup> In other aspects he is characterized by traits and terminology that earlier applied to the Davidic king (Isa 42:1-4; 11:2-4; 49:2; cf. 11:4; 52:13-15, the Servant's exaltation). In addition, the sacrificial language that describes his death and his intercessory activity recalls priestly functions (53:10, 12).

According to one major line of early Jewish interpretation, the Servant figure is realized in the wise teachers of the Torah in the Hellenistic period. A point of departure for this interpretation is Isa 50:4: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary." The opening words of 52:13 provide an additional point of contact: "My Servant will prosper" (*yaskil 'abdi*). The verb *sakal* is interpreted in its meaning "to be wise," and the passage is seen to refer to the *maskilim* or wise teachers of the Torah, who served as religious leaders of the commu-

nity.<sup>49</sup> This understanding of 52:13—53:12 was especially appropriate in the early second century B.C.E., when these leaders suffered death under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>50</sup> Thus major aspects of the portrayal of the Servant in 50:4-9 and 52:13—53:12 spoke to the situation of the *maskilim*.

Second Isaiah's portrait of the Servant had a second facet, however: the Suffering Servant would be vindicated and exalted. Thus the material in Second Isaiah became a paradigm for the exaltation and vindication of the suffering spokesman of the Lord. Hence Daniel's use of Isaiah 52–53: "The wise will shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who bring many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Dan 12:3). The author plays on the Hebrew word *zhr*, which can mean not only "shine" and "brightness," but also "teach" or "admonish" (cf. Sir 24:32 for the metaphor). Similarly, Dan 12:3 applies the expression "cause many to be righteous" (*yašdiq harabbim*, Isa 53:11) to the teaching activity of the *maskilim* that leads the community to righteous conduct (*mašdiq̄ harabbim*).

A more extensive explication of Isaiah 52–53 in terms of the persecution and exaltation of the righteous spokesman of the Lord is laid out in Wisdom of Solomon 2 and 5. This text from around the turn of the era paraphrases parts of Isaiah 52–53 in a literary form that draws on the stories of the persecuted and exalted courtier known from such texts as the Joseph story in Genesis 37–45 and the tales in Daniel 3 and 6.<sup>51</sup> The Deutero-Isaianic material is also used in 2 Maccabees 7, the story of the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother, who also serve as God's spokespersons, admonishing Antiochus for his opposition to God.<sup>52</sup>

Wisdom 2 and 5 and 2 Maccabees 7 reveal two important interpretive characteristics. First, they take words or phrases from the prophetic text and build them into narrative elements in a story. Antiochus is literally astonished at the youths' conduct (2 Macc 7:12; cf. Isa 52:14; see also Wis 5:2). The third brother refers to the tongue that God has given him, which Antiochus orders cut out (2 Macc 7:10; cf. Isa 50:4). This technique of creating a narrative incident on the basis of a detail in the original text parallels the haggadic method referred to above (p. 14). Second, both Wisdom and 2 Maccabees weave a narrative out of material derived from several different biblical passages. The first brother, though a personification of Deutero-Isaiah's Servant, describes his circumstances as a fulfillment of the Song of Moses (2 Macc 7:6; Deut 32:36),

and the episode corresponds functionally to the repentance element in the Deuteronomistic scheme.<sup>53</sup> The author of *Wisdom* identifies the kings who observe the Servant's exaltation in Isaiah 52–53 with the wicked royal opponent of God in Isaiah 14, and the same exegetical combination appears in 2 Maccabees, where chapter 9 describes the death of Antiochus as the fall of the mythic figure in Isaiah 14.<sup>54</sup> Thus, behind *Wisdom of Solomon* 2 and 5 and 2 Maccabees 7 and 9 stands a common exegetical tradition that weaves Deutero-Isaianic material together with material from Isaiah 14 in order to reinterpret Isaiah as a description of the suffering and vindication of the spokesmen of God and the punishment of their royal persecutors.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, as is clear from *Wisdom* and its schematic story, this manner of interpretation does not posit a single fulfillment of prophecy, but finds in the prophetic text the description of a *type* of person, whose career and fate are repeated at different times and places. In the same vein, two Qumran hymns describe their author's situation as that of the Servant of the Lord: "My tongue has been the tongue of your disciples" (1QH 15[7]:10; 16[8]:36; cf. Isa 50:4).

Finally, the variety of interpretation is noteworthy. According to 2 Macc 7:37–38 (cf. 8:5), the deaths of the brothers turn God's wrath to forgiveness. Its quasi-propitiatory function will become explicit in the rewriting of this story in 4 Maccabees (cf. 17:22),<sup>56</sup> and this interpretation of Isaiah 52–53 will play an important role in New Testament interpretations of the death of Jesus (see below, pp. 111–12). The *Wisdom of Solomon*, however, ignores this interpretive possibility and incorporates the sacrificial language in Isaiah 53:10 into a double simile: "Like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them" (Wis 3:6).

Perhaps the most remarkable of all Jewish interpretations of Deutero-Isaiah's Servant material occurs in the Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37–71), an apocalyptic text from the turn of the era, which will concern us in more detail in chapter 4 (see below, pp. 104–6).<sup>57</sup> Of interest here is the manner in which it interprets tradition. The central character does not suffer, but is a transcendent heavenly figure who acts as vindicator of the suffering righteous and chosen. As such, he personifies biblical material about Daniel's "one like a son of man" (46:1; cf. Dan 7:13–14) and the Davidic king (1 En. 49:3; 62:2; cf. Isa 11:2–4; 48:8, 10; Ps 2:2), as well as the Servant of YHWH (1 En. 48:1–6 and 49:4; cf. Isa 49:1–6; 42:1; 1 En. 62–63; cf. Isaiah 52–53). As in the previous texts, Jewish

interpretation weaves together material from diverse sources, reading one source on the basis of the other: the Servant becomes the Anointed One; the Davidic king becomes a transcendent heavenly figure; the heavenly Son of Man is king and Servant. Thus each of these three sets of “biblical” texts—about the Servant, the one like a son of man, and the Davidic king—exists in an interpretive context, and the respective texts and their interpretive contexts stand in tension, or even in open conflict, with one another.

### Summary

These examples lead to some generalizations and conclusions about Jewish attitudes toward Scripture at the turn of the era. (1) What we now think of as Jewish Scripture (the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Bible) was not fixed as authoritative Scripture for all first-century Jews in all places. A few of these works were probably not of high authority for some people. For others, works like *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and the Qumran Temple Scroll were authoritative. The texts of all these works were not completely fixed. (2) *Scriptura* was not *solus*. A given text or set of texts was accompanied by traditional interpretation, which might have been developed in comparison with other texts and which was formulated in light of one’s historical situation. (3) This interpretation was not uniform; a given text or set of texts was understood in sometimes radically different ways by different people and religious communities. (4) Such interpretations could not necessarily be separated from the text itself (as they were formally in the Qumran *pesharim*), but were understood to be *the* correct way to understand the text(s). (5) This process of interpretation was not new. It was at work not only in rewritten narratives of the Greco-Roman period, but also in the text of the Hebrew Bible itself, where one text transformed, commented on, or alluded to another text. From the start, what came to be “Scripture” was treated as tradition, to be interpreted in the context of other tradition and of one’s circumstances. (6) The phenomenon of Scripture and its (authoritative) interpretation may help to explain scribal freedom in creating textual variants (where they are not mistakes) and the authority of works like *Jubilees*, the Temple Scroll, and parts of *1 Enoch*. Scribal variants are interpretation. *Jubilees* is not simply another book; it provides the authoritative interpretation of Genesis and Exodus, particularly as it pertains to right torah.

## Scripture in the Early Church

“Scripture” was obviously a major category for the Christian writers of the first and second centuries. The New Testament is saturated with quotations from the Hebrew Bible, or, more specifically, its Greek translations.<sup>58</sup> Often the text introduces these quotations with formulas that appeal explicitly to “Scripture,” what “is written,” or what God or Scripture “says,” or imply Scripture with language about fulfillment.<sup>59</sup> In other places one senses the use of biblical idioms and style, even when there is not formal citation or extensive quotation.<sup>60</sup> Authors refer or allude to characters in the biblical books. In the second century and beyond, the situation becomes more complex as some authors begin to cite or treat New Testament texts as authoritative Scripture, and the church, in response to what it considers to be its heretical opponents, develops a second part to its scriptural canon. Nonetheless, especially in response to Marcion, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible continues to play a major role in the argumentation, theologizing, and preaching of Christian authors.

Of early Christian authors, however, we may still ask the question: What is Scripture and in what traditional ways is it being interpreted?

### The Biblical Canon of the Early Church

According to the traditional view, the Scripture of the early church comprised the collection of thirty-nine books that we have come to know as “the Old Testament” or “the Hebrew Bible,” or, to be more specific, the Greek translation of these texts, “the Septuagint.” Persons in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions maintain that the extra works and textual additions in this collection (called “Apocrypha” by Protestants) were also part of the Bible of the early church.

The status of the “Apocrypha” in the early church is uncertain.<sup>61</sup> Were these books and expansions of books part of the early church’s Bible? Their inclusion in Christian codices of the Greek Old Testament suggests this. Yet it is noteworthy that, for the most part, the New Testament and the writers of the early church do not quote and refer to these books. Nonetheless, some exceptions indicate knowledge of material in the Apocrypha, whether it be the books themselves or another form of the traditions contained in them.

The passion narratives in Mark and Matthew reflect material found in Wisdom 2 and 5.<sup>62</sup> In Romans 1, Paul's argument parallels the anti-idol polemic in Wisdom 14–15.<sup>63</sup>

Several facts are clear. The extraction of the Apocrypha as a separate collection was the work of Jerome, a fourth-century scholar who had a high esteem for the Hebrew Scriptures as the Bible of the Jewish people.<sup>64</sup> Jerome's landmark canonical decision notwithstanding, Christian scribes before and after Jerome included these texts in the codices of the Greek Bible. These books continued to be included in the codices of daughter translations of the Greek created in the Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, and other Eastern Christian communities.

It is not only the Apocrypha that are of concern here, however. Some works of the Pseudepigrapha were also considered to be authoritative and useful for the early church. Most notable was *1 Enoch*. Jude 14–15 formally cites *1 Enoch* 1 as something that “Enoch prophesied.” The author of Luke or his tradition knew something like the last chapters of *1 Enoch*.<sup>65</sup> The Gospel traditions about the Son of Man interpreted Daniel 7 in light of the interpretation now preserved in the Parables of Enoch (see below, pp. 110–11).<sup>66</sup> Matthew's special material (M) appears especially to have utilized this material.<sup>67</sup> The epistle of *Barnabas* quotes part of *1 Enoch* as “Scripture.” Tertullian refers to the patriarch as a prophet, quotes a passage from *1 Enoch*, and uses material from others. Other allusions to Enochic traditions appear in the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Pseudo-Clement, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and other authors of the second to fifth centuries.<sup>68</sup> While none of this justifies the conclusion that the books of Enoch were universally considered to be on a par with the books of the Hebrew Bible, it does indicate the substantial influence of these texts, and it suggests that, as in other matters, we must posit considerable variety in the early church. Moreover, lest one be provincial, the text of *1 Enoch* continues to the present time to be printed in the Bibles of the Ethiopian church, as does the book of *Jubilees*.

### The Text of Scripture

It is a well-established fact, demonstrated by more than a century of New Testament scholarship, that more often than not New Testament authors quote (and modify) the letter of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scrip-

tures, even in cases where it diverges from the Hebrew text.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, it is often to the Christian author's advantage that the Greek differs from the Hebrew because it allows the interpreter to make a point that could not be made on the basis of the Hebrew. The translation of *'almah* ("young woman") as *parthenos* ("virgin") in Isa 7:14 provides early Christians with a scriptural basis for the virginal conception of Jesus. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews finds documentation of Jesus' incarnation in the idiosyncratic Greek translation of Ps 40:6, where "ears you have dug for me" is rendered "a body you have furnished me" (Heb 10:5-10). It is a matter of dispute, often not to be resolved, whether when a given Christian writer cites the Greek Bible to advantage, that writer or the tradition he transmits actually found the variant in a Hebrew text. The fact remains, however, that Christian writers built their exposition and apologetic on a lively and varying tradition of Jewish exposition and scribal practice, not on a fixed biblical text.

## Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church

### The Church Read Scripture within Its Traditional Interpretations

Like their Jewish contemporaries, early Christians read the books they considered to be authoritative within the context of traditional interpretations. In the instance just cited, the Gospels might quote the *words* of Daniel 7, but the *interpretation* of the Son of Man as judge is attested in *1 Enoch*. Similarly, the book of Revelation quotes Davidic texts from Isaiah 11 and Psalm 2 (Rev 1:16; 2:27; 10:15, 18; 11:5), but it agrees with *1 Enoch* in ascribing them to a transcendent savior identified with the Son of Man and quite possibly the Servant of the Lord (5:6, 12).<sup>70</sup>

The Servant figure, moreover, is more pervasive in the New Testament than some recent iconoclastic interpretations have argued. As we shall see later, the early church read texts of Deutero-Isaiah within the context of Jewish interpretations that identify the Servant with the type of righteous sufferer depicted in the stories of Daniel 3 and 6, Wisdom of Solomon 2 and 5, and the Psalms (see below, pp. 106–7). In these cases, it is imperative that historical exegetes read the scriptural text (Second Isaiah) as it was read by some first-century Jews, within a tradition of interpretation that was at least two centuries old and that can be documented in pre-Christian Jewish texts.

Other examples of traditional Jewish interpretation are evident at many points in the New Testament. Both Paul and the author of Acts cite the tradition, documented in *Jubilees*, that the Torah was given by angels (Gal 3:19; Acts 7:53). The Epistle of James speaks of the “patience” of Job (Jas 5:11), certainly not evident in the canonical book, but at the heart of the *Testament of Job*.<sup>71</sup> In its list of heroes, Heb 11:35-38 alludes to the story of the mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7 and to legends about the deaths of Isaiah and Jeremiah, now preserved in the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* and the *Paraleipomena of Jeremiah*.<sup>72</sup> Many more cases could be cited, and others doubtless remain to be discovered and documented.

### The Use of Rabbinic Traditions in New Testament Exegesis

A half century ago, scholars often interpreted the New Testament in light of material drawn from the large corpus of rabbinic writings: the Talmudim, the Targumim, and the Midrashim. A major resource for such comparative work was the monumental commentary on the New Testament by Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, published mostly in the 1920s.<sup>73</sup> For those not personally familiar with the rabbinic corpus (most New Testament scholars), this multivolume reference work offered a gold mine of parallels from the rabbinic and some other Jewish writings. However, subsequent scholarship on the rabbinic materials has warned against an uncritical use of these texts, for two reasons. First, parallels, however close, must be read in their context and not simply lifted from a compendium.<sup>74</sup> To do otherwise is unfair to the source being cited and to the text being interpreted. Second, careful form-critical work on the rabbinic texts during the past few decades has demonstrated that these texts consist of many layers, and that the dating of any given passage can be extremely problematic even when it is ascribed to a known and datable rabbi.<sup>75</sup> These caveats stand.

At the same time, the evidence presented in this chapter adds a complication for the interpreter. Narrative haggadah, well known in the rabbinic texts, has a long history dating back into the Persian period, and some of the traditions in the Talmudim, Targumim, and Midrashim are paralleled in earlier texts of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.<sup>76</sup> Thus, if a text in the rabbinic writings seems to shed light on a New Testament passage, one needs to ascertain whether the tradition is attested also in



earlier texts. Even if one cannot find such an earlier form of the tradition, one must consider whether positing such an earlier tradition does shed light on the New Testament passage in question. Scholars have cited rabbinic tradition about the giving of the Torah at Pentecost as background for the story of the giving of the Spirit in Acts 2.<sup>77</sup> Others have emphasized that the tradition is unattested before the third century C.E.<sup>78</sup> Both groups have a point. One should not simply posit what is convenient with the claim that later texts reflected earlier tradition. At the same time, thoroughgoing skepticism is inconsonant with the facts as we know them and as new discoveries continue to reveal them: extant texts represent only a fragment of the written and oral tradition that once existed. Caution, honest scholarly tentativeness, and careful methodology remain the best approach to the data.

### Jewish Precedents for the Rise and Development of the Jesus Tradition

The lively, variegated nature of Jewish interpretation of its sacred traditions offers some precedents and models for our understanding of the rise and development of Christian traditions about Jesus of Nazareth. It should not be surprising if the first Christians—being Jews or heirs of Jewish tradition—adopted attitudes about the foundational traditions of their newly shaped religion that reflected Jewish attitudes and replicated Jewish practice.

#### **The Creation of Narrative Haggadah about Jesus**

Many have observed that the narratives about Jesus' conception, birth, and childhood parallel Jewish stories and imitate "midrashic" technique. Models for these stories can be found in the biblical narratives about Samson and Samuel and about Moses' persecution by Pharaoh.<sup>79</sup> Narrative elements in the passion accounts reflect motifs in the Psalms about the suffering and restoration of the righteous one. Theological conservatives argue, however, that early Christians would not indulge in the creation of untruths about their Messiah.

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that, when it came to narrative, Jews were quite broad-minded in their understanding of what was true. Storytellers could elaborate a biblical episode or create a whole

new episode on the basis of a nonnarrative element in the text or in another text, or because they thought that their situation called for such an embellishment. Thus they could create long stories about Abraham's conversion from idolatry and they could depict Jacob killing his brother Esau (see above, pp. 13, 15). In other instances they could: (1) take a historical kernel (the death of the Maccabean martyrs); (2) read it in the light of Deutero-Isaianic motifs about the suffering and vindication of the Servant, the return of the children of Mother Zion, and the creation and redemption of Israel; and (3) narrativize those motifs into the rich and provocative story of the seven sons and their mother (2 Maccabees 7), and then repeatedly revise it to fit new circumstances (4 Maccabees, the rabbinic writings, and the history of Josippon).<sup>80</sup>

Such an impulse to storytelling, which is as universal as humanity, understands truth in a freer and richer way than the recounting of facts, events, and propositions. For the Jews, sacred narrative traditions spoke in new ways to new times, and nonnarrative traditions could be converted into narrative and embodied in stories about the past and present. Common to both is the notion that God's activity touches human beings in specific and concrete ways, which one can understand because they parallel one's experience, or which one can marvel at because of the disparity with one's experience. That early Christians employed such techniques in the infancy and the passion narratives about Jesus the Messiah and Righteous One should not surprise us, since it is explicable on the basis of attitudes and practices inherited from Judaism.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Development of the Synoptic Tradition**

Jewish narrative technique also illuminates the subsequent development of gospel (especially Synoptic) traditions about Jesus. It is axiomatic for critical scholarship that the respective Synoptic authors rewrote one another's texts, sometimes on the basis of oral Jesus tradition, sometimes with a view toward details in the Jewish Scriptures, and that they did so in response to the perceived needs of their communities as these were influenced by the events of their own time. In so doing, these early Christian preachers and teachers were following impulses and practices in place in the Jewish community. Even if their appeal to the authority of Jesus the

risen Lord presupposed a sense of their own inspiration, as seems to have been the case, there is an analogy in some of the rewritten biblical material, for example, in the Temple Scroll, which recasts biblical law into the first person singular, and in *Jubilees*, which presents its contents as angelic revelation.<sup>82</sup>

### **Disagreements over the Bible and Its Interpretation:**

#### **A Cause for “Unbelief”**

In Jewish practice, people could disagree as to what texts comprised authoritative sacred tradition, what was its correct text, and what constituted its correct interpretation. It followed from this that one person or one community could reject the other’s teaching or practices because they did not accept the authority of a given book or textual reading, or because they considered a particular interpretation to be incorrect or implausible. We shall see specific instances of this in subsequent chapters. In the first century, specific nuances that the early church found in scriptural texts or particular christological interpretations of those texts could be rejected by some Jews on the same grounds that non-Christian Jews could disagree with one another’s interpretations. For many, the books of Enoch, with their teaching about the son of man, were not authoritative. Moreover, it was inherent in the very nature of biblical interpretation that a given interpretation need not be “obvious” and that one could accept the authority of the text while disputing or rejecting a particular interpretation of the text. Claims about the “unbelief” of first- and second-century Jews are often governed by Christian apologetic with little appreciation for the variety in “canon” and text in the first century and the nature of interpretation as it was practiced then both by Christian and non-Christian Jews.