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Scriptural Authority in Early Judaism

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What constitutes "Sacred scripture" for the varieties of early Judaism attested during the Hellenistic and Roman periods of ancient Near Eastern history?¹ Does the concept of "Bible," at least in terms of how that title is customarily understood by modern readers, exist for any of the religious groups found in *Eretz Israel* or the Diaspora? How should we conceptualize the demarcation—if any—between what is "canonical" literature and what is, by contrast, "apocryphal" or "spurious"? Please note that these initial queries deliberately feature special nomenclature—certain words or phrases framed by quotation marks—which is intelligible to modern readers, but which is gradually coming to be recognized as anachronistic by informed scholars of early Judaism. What are these inaccurate, allegedly inappropriate, terms? They are quite frankly expressions like "Bible," "Sacred Scripture," and "canon."

An essential thesis of this essay can be expressed in a sentence-length assertion; namely, that the concept of "scripture" in early Judaism was not consonant with what moderns term "the Bible." One can, in fact, go even further and say that the notion of "Bible" in the form of a fixed list of written texts that are foundational for the behavior and ideology of a

particular community of people, a group of scriptures whose composition and individual contents could not be altered in any way, or in other words a *canon* of authoritative scriptures—was probably not operative among *any* of the religious parties in *Eretz Israel* until the final decades of the first century or perhaps even the initial decades of the second century of the Common Era.²

In order to construct support for these statements, which many readers will recognize run directly counter to the widely accepted wisdom of established textbooks and commentaries, we will need to rehearse several topics of fundamental importance. These are, in the order of their appearance: (1) a brief discussion of both the traditional and pre-Dead Sea Scrolls understandings of the development of the biblical canon; (2) a summation of the evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls that pertains to this issue; and (3) the presentation of a new proposal, one whose aim is not only to reconstruct the conceptual ideology undergirding the production of what comes to be termed “Bible,” but that also intends to shed light on the process of the preservation and transmission of writings and the history of the Abrahamic religions throughout the Near East during the first millennium of the Common Era.

Traditional Understanding of the History of the Canon

Up until the rise of modern critical methods for the study of the Bible, it was widely assumed by Jewish and Christian scholars alike that the Bible achieved its final canonical form sometime during the career of Ezra the scribe,³ who is depicted in the biblical book bearing his name as “a scribe learned in the law of Moses which the LORD, the God of Israel, presented” (7:6). Officially commissioned by the Persian monarch Artaxerxes as a special governmental emissary, he is dispatched from the royal court in order “to inspect [the province of] Yehud and [the city of] Jerusalem [to determine their concordance] with the law of your God which you possess” (7:14). He also bears financial subsidies contributed by both the Persian administration and the Jewish inhabitants of Babylon for the material support of the temple service. Moreover, Ezra is granted full authority to appoint magistrates and judges to insure compliance with “the law of your God” and “the law of the king” (7:25–26).

The key recurrent phrases—“the law of [your] God,” or sometimes “the law of Moses”—have traditionally been interpreted as the earliest extant references to what eventually becomes, at the minimum, the first five books of the Bible—the so-called “books of Moses” or the Torah—or at the maximum, the entire contents of what we now term “Bible,” or what Christians call “the Old Testament.” Modern critical scholars tend to prefer a minimalist view,⁴ recognizing that our present Bible does indeed include material that dates well after the purported time period of

Ezra (fifth or fourth century B.C.E.),⁶ whereas maximalist interpretations are the norm in some of the earliest external sources that we possess for the process of canonization. For example, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus has this to say about what appears to be the Bible:

[thanks to the authorial activity of the prophets]...we do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. Our books, those that are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time. Of these, five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history from the birth of humanity down to the death of the lawgiver...From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes as king of Persia, the prophets subsequent to Moses wrote the history of the events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.

Josephus continues his presentation with the following intriguing notice: “From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.”⁷

The careful reader discerns in the testimony of Josephus two useful principles for determining where the boundaries of the scriptural canon were drawn for that particular writer, who is perhaps our most important source for the reconstruction of first-century Jewish history. According to Josephus, a writing is “justly accredited” if it (1) was authored by someone belonging to the period stretching from Moses to Artaxerxes, inclusive, and (2) that someone also enjoyed the status of “prophet.” Twenty-two books reportedly satisfy these criteria, and they are grouped under three headings: laws and ancestral traditions, histories, and hymns and precepts. Josephus’ generic arrangement, coupled with his trifold numerical grouping (5+13+4), is usually viewed as a primitive expression of what eventually became the standard tripartite mode of describing the contents of the Bible within classical Judaism; namely, as *Tanakh*, an acronym signaling the three components of *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*.⁸ The sum total of twenty-two books diverges from the rabbinic reckoning of twenty-four, but this is not a grave discrepancy; it is likely that Josephus may have counted certain books as a single work that later tradents treated as two separate compositions; for example, counting Jeremiah and Lamentations as one book due to their alleged common authorship.⁹

Of especial interest, though, for our present purposes are his implicit requirements for membership within the approved roster of Jewish scriptures. One credential is chronological, while the other is built on reputation. The chronological parameters, as mentioned above, are

Moses and Artaxerxes, the Persian monarch of that name "who succeeded Xerxes as king of Persia" (1.40). A quick glance at the roster of Achaemenid royal succession permits us to identify this particular Artaxerxes (there were three!) as Artaxerxes I Longimanus, who ruled 464–423 B.C.E.¹⁰ Why does Josephus employ the name of this foreign ruler as a chronological marker? According to the exposition of biblical history contained in his *Antiquities*, Artaxerxes is identical with Ahasuerus, the royal husband of Esther (Esth. 1:1–2).¹¹ Furthermore, as we have seen above, the Bible itself associates an otherwise unqualified "Artaxerxes" with the period of Ezra the scribe (Ezra 7:1). It would thus appear that Josephus has roughly synchronized the final production of "justly accredited" records and the demise of prophecy with the era associated with the events depicted in the biblical books of Esther (explicitly) and *Ezra-Nehemiah* (implicitly).¹² Sacred Scripture thus emanates from authors situated between the boundaries of Moses and Ezra.

The other principle utilized by Josephus for the identification of a "justly accredited" work is its reputed publication by a "prophet." A close reading of this passage in conjunction with the remainder of Josephus' surviving corpus of works demonstrates that he did not reserve this title for only the authors of the thirteen "histories" mentioned in *Contra Apionem* 1.40, but intended the label to be applied to all the "scriptural authors."¹³ Hence "Scripture"—in order to be "Scripture"—required a prophetic imprimatur.

Is this an accurate understanding of Josephus' scheme? We can test our reading of Josephus by comparing his portrayal to that found in the Babylonian Talmud, another Jewish source whose final redaction occurs over half a millennium after the time of Josephus, but whose oral roots reach back into the final years of the Second Temple period of Jewish history, or in other words, to the period when Josephus was active. Therein we read the following interesting material:

Who wrote the Scriptures? Moses wrote his own book and... Job. Joshua wrote the book which bears his name and (the last) eight verses of the Pentateuch. Samuel wrote the book which bears his name and the book of Judges and Ruth. David wrote the book of Psalms... Jeremiah wrote the book which bears his name, the book of Kings, and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his colleagues wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. The Men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and Esther. Ezra wrote the book which bears his name and the genealogies of Chronicles up to his own time (i.e., up to 2 Chron. 21:2)... who finished (the book of Chronicles)? Nehemiah b. Hachaliah (b. B. Bat. 15a).

This talmudic witness allows us to confirm the information supplied by the statements of Josephus. Here too biblical authorship is held to begin with Moses, but instead of culminating in the production of the book of Esther, we discover instead that the scribal activity of Ezra and Nehemiah completes the scriptural period for the Sages. Moreover, the book of Esther is mentioned immediately *prior* to the invocation of Ezra and Nehemiah, whereas in Josephus the events associated with that novella are situated *after* the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus the Sages—like Josephus—consider the material featured in the books of Esther and *Ezra-Nehemiah* to be roughly contemporaneous.

A comparative examination of the Bible and Josephus' *Antiquities* reveals that Josephus has artificially synchronized Ezra with Xerxes, the predecessor of Artaxerxes I (*Antiquities* 11.120–58), and assigns to the latter ruler the events associated with the production of the book of Esther (*Antiquities* 11.184–296). Both the biblical book of Ezra and the Greek 1 Esdras—probably Josephus' primary source for this period—feature an otherwise unidentified "Artaxerxes, king of Persia" as the ruler who commissions Ezra and dispatches him to Judea with "the law of God" (7:1–28; cf. 1 Esdras 8:1–27). Hence the names "Artaxerxes" and "Ezra" interplay as narrative contemporaries within biblical discourse, regardless of the actual historical identity of the ruler (Xerxes? Artaxerxes I? II?) intended by the biblical author. This is the historiographic model followed by the rabbinic schema—for the Sages, an Ezra/Artaxerxes nexus clearly postdates the marriage of Esther and Ahasuerus. Note too that since Josephus is addressing his exposition in *Contra Apionem* to an educated pagan readership, it makes rhetorical sense for him to use chronological markers that such an audience could readily identify. Moses enjoyed an international fame thanks to his reputation as an early lawgiver and powerful magician,¹⁵ but Esther, Mordecai, and even Ezra remained unknown outside of Jewish circles. By contrast, given the frequent encounters and hostilities between the Greek and Persian cultural spheres, the names of the Achaemenid monarchs, as well as their relative dates, were familiar to an audience schooled in the histories of Herodotus, Ktesias, and Xenophon.

Can the systems of Josephus and the Sages be reconciled? Provided we group the events associated with the biblical books of Esther and *Ezra-Nehemiah* around the common rubric "Artaxerxes," we can read Josephus' use of the name Artaxerxes as a type of transcultural code for "Ezra" and understand him to be stating that "justly accredited books" within Jewish culture can be placed on a continuum between the biblical figures of Moses and Ezra. Moses and his era mark the beginning point; Ezra and his era mark the termination point, and by implication, the closing of the scriptural canon. Any writing ascribed to a figure who preceded Moses in the traditional history—for example, Enoch, Noah, or

Abraham—is not “justly accredited.” Neither can one be that is ascribed to a figure who postdates Ezra—for example, Ben Sira, or R. Judah ha-Nasi.

Such an articulation of the chronological principle is clearly at work in the talmudic citation quoted above. Everyone else credited with authoring, or perhaps better, “finishing,” a biblical book falls somewhere between the two narrative boundaries of Moses and Ezra. Moreover, all of the names occurring in that citation are explicitly identified as prophets, or otherwise associated with prophetic activity, in other places within rabbinic tradition.¹⁶ The Men of the Great Assembly, the legendary governing body bridging the temporal gap between the return from exile and the Hellenistic era,¹⁷ is often linked with certain alleged aspects of Ezra’s activity, such as his supposed identity with the pseudonymous prophet Malachi.¹⁸ So as in the testimony of Josephus, the Talmud too would seem to hold that scriptural production—that is, the authoring of books that we find in our Bible—ceases in the time of Ezra, broadly construed. This period also coincides with the alleged disappearance of prophecy from Israel.¹⁹

The rabbinic estimation of the significance of Ezra for the existence of the Bible is more explicitly stated in other sources.²⁰ Consider, for example, the following opinions: “Ezra and the Torah are more important than the rebuilding of the Temple” (*b. Meg.* 16b), or “R. Yose said: Ezra would have been worthy of receiving the Torah had Moses not preceded him” (*t. Sanh.* 4.7; *b. Sanh.* 21b). A multitude of similar sentiments could be cited. The high evaluation of Ezra’s role in the written codification of Jewish scriptures finds its most picturesque depiction in the apocryphal book of 4 Ezra, a Jewish work whose composition was roughly contemporary with the activity of Josephus.²¹ Therein the character Ezra is deliberately cloaked in the Mosaic mantle: He is addressed by God from a bush in the wilderness (4 Ezra 14:1–2) and spends forty days and nights dictating a fresh revelation of God’s Law to a five-man secretarial pool (14:37–44).²² Once this task is completed, Ezra receives the following instructions from God:

The twenty-four books that thou hast written publish, that the worthy and unworthy may read (therein): but the seventy last thou shalt keep, to deliver them to the wise among thy people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the stream of knowledge. And I did so. (2 Esdras 14:45–48)²³

Here too Ezra is portrayed as being the one responsible for the promulgation of the entire Bible: This is the only viable explanation for the precise sum of twenty-four books, a sum that matches the standard enumeration in later Jewish sources.²⁴ What is perhaps more intriguing

though is the mention of “seventy” additional writings that are also of divinely inspired authorship and that appear to be more valuable than the contents of the Bible itself. In order to appreciate fully the significance of this particular datum, we should gain some familiarity with the contents of what is probably the most important archaeological discovery of this century—the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls approximately fifty years ago has now put us in a position to reassess the nature of what we call the Bible during an era not far removed from the periods of Josephus, 4 Ezra, and the rabbinic Sages. In order to facilitate this task, we must carefully consider both the contents of the Scrolls themselves and the ways by which those works we now term “biblical” were transmitted and referenced.

According to archaeological estimates, had the texts been preserved entirely intact for us, there would have been over eight hundred separate scrolls surviving from Qumran caves 1–11.²⁵ As is well known, almost all of these writings have suffered damage, most of them to the extent that they have to be painstakingly pieced together from numerous smaller fragments in order to restore some semblance of an intelligible text. Of the over eight hundred scrolls, a significant proportion, about 25–30 percent, were copies of biblical texts, with every book in the present-day Hebrew canon being represented except Esther and Nehemiah. The remaining 70–75 percent are grouped by modern scholars under the label “nonbiblical literature,” a rubric that encompasses a wide variety of what were undoubtedly important literary works. Within this category are multiple copies of documents that contain rules and regulations governing the communal life of those thought responsible for authoring and/or copying the scrolls. There are collections of hymnic compositions that presumably played some role in liturgical life. There are commentaries on certain works deemed “prophetic” by the community—books like Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Nahum. There are copies of books that never achieved canonical status within Judaism or classical Christianity, but which featured teachings or apocalyptic motifs that were treasured by certain groups in Second Temple Judaism—books like those of *Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and the Aramaic predecessor to the *Testament of Levi*. In fact, an interest in eschatology is well attested among the scrolls. One work, the famous “War Scroll,” describes the final forty-year conflict that will culminate with the expulsion of the Gentiles from the land of Israel and the reestablishment of home rule. Another complementary text, the equally famous “Temple Scroll,” depicts the new sanctuary that God will build at that time to replace the polluted second temple and prescribes the rituals to be celebrated there. A number of smaller texts

outline the procedures to be followed in the determination of festival dates, the order of priestly service, and the proper interpretations to follow in resolving purity disputes.²⁶

We therefore are in possession of a veritable treasure trove of Jewish literature emanating from the last three centuries before the Common Era and the first half of the first century of the Common Era, a period of time immediately preceding that of Josephus, 4 Ezra, and the Sages. The question that must now be asked is whether the new data supplied by the caves at Qumran confirm, discredit, or hopelessly complicate the picture created by the traditional authorities.

We might begin by considering the manuscript remains of the biblical books that have been recovered from Qumran—books like Genesis, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, or Psalms. Almost all of the biblical books attested at Qumran are present in multiple copies,²⁷ and one is tempted to conclude that such statistical significance was directly proportional to their religious importance, or at least popularity, at that time. Problems arise, however, when we begin closely comparing the numerous separate copies of portions of the Pentateuch—the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—with one another. There are manuscripts of these works that closely mirror their counterparts in the best medieval manuscripts and modern printed editions of the Hebrew Bible, the so-called Masoretic tradition, upon which our modern English translations are based. Yet there are also manuscripts that present the text in forms which vary from that of the Masoretic tradition, for instance, that of the Samaritan Pentateuchal tradition, an early version of the five books of Moses which differs from that of the Masoretes in a number of places.²⁸ Still others reproduce a form of the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch that is very close to the one underlying the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, the so-called Septuagint. Which manuscript tradition was considered to be “Bible” at Qumran? One of these? All of these? Some combination of these traditions? Or even none of these?²⁹

The situation does not improve when we move to other examples of what we characteristically term “biblical books.” Among the extant copies of portions of the book of Jeremiah at Qumran are the manuscript remains of two distinct editions of this work, one of which is represented in our Bibles, and the other in the Greek or Septuagint translation of that prophet. These two different editions of the book of Jeremiah diverge markedly in length and in the order of the book’s contents.³⁰ Or consider the case of the book of Psalms: The largest psalms scroll recovered from Qumran includes many of the psalms now found in the last third of the canonical Psalter, but they are arranged in a very different order and sporadically interspersed with apocryphal Davidic hymnic works.³¹

Moreover, there are a significant group of Qumran texts that scholars typically refer to as “parabiblical texts”; that is to say, they imitate

the style and, at times, even the verbiage of biblical texts, but render a product that does not correspond to the form of the Hebrew text of the Bible that we employ today.³² Examples of this type of work would be manuscripts that conflate portions of the two versions of the Ten Commandments found in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, or manuscripts that collect in one narrative locale the various biblical regulations pertaining to certain cultic or purity rules. A clarifying word or phrase might be added in order to prevent misunderstandings of the rule’s intent. The precepts themselves might be rearranged to accord with what was perceived to be a more logical order or schema. In short, what is on prominent display in such parabiblical texts, when viewed from the perspective of what we know as “Bible,” is a “rewriting” of the Bible itself. This particular practice—interpreting the Bible by rewriting the Bible—is a very significant piece of cultural information that possesses far-reaching implications for tracing the authority of what we call “Bible” in early Judaism.³³

When we turn to the other so-called “nonbiblical” works preserved at Qumran, we soon discover that a tentative working principle of “multiplicity of copies indicates a more authoritative status” can be a two-edged sword. The *Book of Jubilees*, essentially a rival version of the book of Genesis and the early chapters of the book of Exodus, is represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls by sixteen different copies,³⁴ a number that is higher than that for the majority of the so-called “biblical books.” More than a dozen copies of portions of works associated with the forefather Enoch are present at Qumran.³⁵ Does this mean that works like *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* were “Bible” at Qumran or other locales in the land of Israel or elsewhere during this time? One is tempted to answer affirmatively. Consider the following quotation, taken from one of the most important Qumran writings, the so-called Damascus Document:

Therefore let one resolve to return to the Law of Moses, for in it everything is specified. And regarding the exposition of the times when Israel was blind to all these (precepts), behold, one finds precise explanation in the Book of the Divisions of Time into Jubilees and Weeks. (CD 16:1–4)³⁶

This sectarian treatise explicitly places the *Book of Jubilees* on the same plane of authority as the “law of Moses,” whatever *that* may mean in its present context (we could ask which version of the law? Masoretic? Samaritan? proto-LXX? some parabiblical compilation like the Temple Scroll?).

So perhaps now one can appreciate some of the reasons why it was stated at the outset of the present essay that the concept of “Bible,” as we customarily employ it, did not seem to exist for the Dead Sea Scroll community. Does that realization mean, then, that there was no scriptural

authority whatsoever, whether at Qumran or anywhere else? Obviously there was some notion of a piece of literature enjoying some measure of respect, for we just observed an instance of such wherein the *Book of Jubilees* was recommended as an excellent guide for gaining understanding about the past transgressions of Israel. So clearly there are "scriptures" broadly construed;³⁷ the quandary comes when we try to construct a *fixed list* or *canon* of such writings along with their contents. How can we distinguish what was scriptural from what was non-scriptural at Qumran?

The information culled from our previous consideration of the testimonies of Josephus, 4 Ezra, and the Sages may be of some utility at this point. We observed above that two principles seem to govern the bestowal of "scriptural" status upon a particular piece of literature. The first tenet was a chronological one—the Moses-Ezra authorial continuum; viz., all "scriptures" were authored (or in the case of 4 Ezra restored)³⁸ by personages whose literary contexts fall between the inclusive narratological brackets of Moses and Ezra. Upon examination of the non-biblical (from the later perspective) remains recovered from Qumran, one notes a demonstrable interest in literature associated with Moses at Qumran,³⁹ but there is also considerable fascination with literary texts purportedly authored by biblical figures who antedate Moses—characters like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham.⁴⁰ Moreover, the figure of Ezra does not seem to have attracted much interest among the groups responsible for the production and/or the preservation of the Scrolls. It would thus appear that a Moses-Ezra continuum was not operative at Qumran.

The second principle enunciated by Josephus, presumed by the Sages, and symbolically articulated by the author of 4 Ezra was the "prophetic" status of all "scriptural" authors. It is clear from the Qumran evidence that "all the words of His servants the prophets"⁴¹ are of paramount importance for this group, enjoying a standing that is equivalent to that of the Torah of Moses. Given that Moses is explicitly recognized as the greatest of the prophets (Deut. 34:10),⁴² we may be justified in concluding that the designation "prophet" holds the key to the resolution of the problem of "scriptural identity." In fact, the title of "prophet" may be the essential credential for widespread recognition as a "scriptural" author.

Prophetization and Scripturalization

There is a curious phenomenon at work in the religious ideologies of late antique Near Eastern religious communities that one might tentatively designate "prophetization." What is meant by this term is fairly simple to recognize: It is the seemingly arbitrary bestowal of prophetic rank upon a number of literary or even historical figures who do not

normally enjoy such status within the traditional scriptures. An important national hero like David, for example, is portrayed within the Hebrew Bible as a monarch, warrior, and skilled musician, but he is never credited therein as a "prophet"; instead, he receives counsel from professional soothsayers like Gad (1 Sam. 22:5) and Nathan (2 Sam. 7). Postbiblical literature, however, "prophetizes" David: His alleged writings or pronouncements (e.g., the book of Psalms) are now scrutinized for the possible light they can shed upon questions affecting the present or future ages.⁴³ Insofar as David gradually achieves recognition as a prophet, attention is increasingly devoted by scribal circles to the identification, preservation, and transmission of writings that he supposedly authored. Similar projects of prophetization—not all of which are Jewish in their final form—focus upon figures like Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham (note Gen. 20:7!), Jacob and his family, Aaron, Joshua, Solomon, Baruch, Zerubbabel, Ezra, Mordecai, and Daniel. Even Gentile figures like Jethro, Balaam, the Sibylls, and Zoroaster attract attention in this regard. By the end of late antiquity, the eventual result of this process is the generation of approved "lists" of "trustworthy prophets" who serve as a chain of authority for the faithful mediation and transmission of the teachings that define a particular religious tradition.⁴⁴ The list of biblical authors recited in *b. B. Bathra* 15a above—each of whom, recall, is also a "prophet"—represents a classical Jewish articulation of this concept.

"Prophetization," metamorphosing a cultural tradition's heroes and heroines into "prophets," and "scripturalization," encoding that same tradition in written format, appear to be closely related phenomena. Great "prophets" of past generations—Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah—are inexorably connected with "books." Perhaps under the influence of this classical prophetic paradigm that associates one or more "books" with each prophet, every potential candidate for the title of "prophet" had to exhibit some tangible evidence of their oracular prowess, the best proof of which would be a book transmitting their revelatory message to subsequent generations. This conceptual necessity helps explain the remarkable eruption of pseudepigraphic works attributed to biblical characters during the Second Temple period of Jewish history and the continuing popularity of this style of publication within early Christian and gnostic circles. Those figures dubbed prophets must, if they are to be credible candidates for this title, have a "book."

A "book" however, is not equivalent to scripture. The authority of what functions as scripture within a textually-centered religious community is based on a public recognition that this particular writing expresses the core values of the tradition; moreover, it enunciates them in such a way that its narrative structure, syntax, and vocabulary elicit continual discussion, comment, and exegesis by subsequent generations of readers. Given this stricture, it may prove more useful to approach the

issue of scriptural authority in early Judaism by paying closer attention to *literary* signposts and signals than to *theological* abstractions. The advantage in such an approach is that it is inherently more concrete: It utilizes the tangible structural elements present within the texts themselves.

In order to perform this operation, let us borrow and adapt a classificatory scheme originally proposed by the Israeli biblical scholar Devorah Dimant as a description of the primary forms of biblical interpretation practiced during the Second Temple period of Jewish history.⁴⁵ Dimant observes that this interpretive literature basically falls into two categories or genres of texts, compositional and expository. A "compositional" work, according to Dimant, is one that freely weaves portions of what we know as biblical text with other, nonbiblical, material in order to create or further develop a continuous narrative line. Furthermore, compositional works contain no formal markers within them that distinguish what is later recognized as biblical from those elements that are later considered nonbiblical. An author or an editor appears to enjoy complete freedom in adjusting, expanding, rearranging, or deleting words, sentences, and even entire narrative episodes from what Dimant assumes to be the "base" text: namely, our Bible. Examples of compositional works include at least one work that eventually won canonical status in its own right, the biblical book of Chronicles, but also works like *Jubilees*, the Temple Scroll and other parabiblical texts, portions of *1 Enoch*, and the Genesis Apocryphon, yet another rewritten version of portions of what we know as the book of Genesis. Practically every work that scholars have placed under the label "the rewritten Bible" falls into this category of interpretive composition.

By contrast, Dimant describes an "expository" work as one where the biblical elements are explicitly presented as an integral unit, with clear formal markers distinguishing what is Bible from what is not Bible, that is, commentary or expansive gloss. Examples of expository works would be writings like the Qumran *pesharim*, wherein quotations from biblical books like those of Habakkuk or Nahum are linguistically distinguished from the later interpretations by the insertion of the phrase "its meaning [*peshet*] is..." Another formal marker of this type would be the occurrence of a phrase like "as it is written..." which is then immediately followed by a textual quotation. In an expository work, in other words, there is no way that the attentive reader (or listener) could confuse text and interpretation. Each occupies its own place on the page and is carefully distinguished as if each had been printed using a different typeface.

Dimant intended her classificatory scheme to be descriptive of the primary forms of biblical exegesis practiced during Second Temple Judaism. However, her insights also possess great potential for

reconceptualizing the problem of scriptural authority in early Judaism, especially if we expand her self-imposed chronological boundaries to encompass the literary history of the varieties of Judaism attested in the Near East for over a millennium. Let us therefore superimpose on Dimant's scheme another *formula* for describing the history of Jewish literary activity from approximately 500 B.C.E. to approximately 600 C.E. To judge from the extant evidence, there appear to be three distinct stages through which all written Jewish literature can potentially progress during this period: (1) publication, (2) scripturalization, and (3) canonization. A few words of explanation are required for the definition of each stage.

By "publication" is meant a process by which literature shifts from an oral to a written format, or alternatively, moves from the mind of an author to the inscribed page. Having been "published," the work is now encoded in a written format, and as such is no longer necessarily dependent upon its author or tradent for its physical survival. It has become a corporeal object. Once having achieved this format, the work is potentially available for inspection and utilization by any literate individual or group within society. Authors may of course amend, alter, or withdraw their publications; similarly, readers are free to use or ignore them as they see fit.

"Scripturalization" labels a subsequent stage in literary history where a publication, due to its presumed antiquity, alleged authorship, or wide social appeal, manages to achieve a certain cultural authority and status. Whenever precedent or justification for a particular action of collective import is required, a "scripture" might be cited in order to support or criticize a certain decision or activity. Similarly, texts that are "scriptural" continually receive close study and exposition from various scribal circles for the purpose of enhancing and extending their utility in a world that, culturally speaking, is far removed from that of their original composition and publication. Often a concrete result of such intensive study and exposition is the issuance of new editions of the scripture, editions that physically incorporate within them the various glosses, explanations, and interpretations that have been produced and come to be accepted by generations of exegetes.

Finally, by "canonization" is meant the compilation of a fixed list of scriptures, the whole of which is deemed to be literarily inviolable. The text of a canonized writing cannot be altered in any way, for better or for worse, even if a blatant error is demonstrably present. Similarly, the list of scriptures that advance to the rank of "canon" is often conceived as a closed corpus, with no provision granted for addition to or subtraction from this list.

When we approach early Jewish literature using Dimant's scheme in tandem with the superimposed developmental formula, we

immediately notice some very interesting things. First, the evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates that the Qumran community possessed, used, and even respected a large number of writings that fall into the categories of publication and scripture. The evidence is largely negative, however, with regard to their recognition of a canon, whether viewed from the later perspectives of classical Judaism and Christianity, or from the community's own sectarian documents. Texts like the books of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms are clearly scriptural. The cultural authority of such books is attested by the inordinate attention devoted to their reproduction, expansion, abbreviation, and elucidation, as well as by the occurrence of quotations from them with explicitly marked citation formulae like "as it is written" or "as the prophet NN says." But *also* scripture are nonbiblical texts like *Jubilees*, the Enochic cycle of books, and the Aramaic predecessor of the *Testament of Levi*, works that are treated exactly the same way as those biblical books mentioned above. None of these works, though, are canonical; their precise linguistic formulation, the way the words are arranged on the page, is demonstrably still in flux. There apparently remains considerable freedom for scribes to revise and manipulate the wording of any scripture. Nor does there appear to be any evidence for a fixed list of acceptable scriptures.

In fact, the very production of Dimant's compositional genre of literature indicates that the material that such works incorporate and manipulate cannot be canonical.⁴⁶ While texts like the book of Chronicles or *Jubilees* or the Temple Scroll may use materials that we recognize as biblical, nothing qualitatively distinguishes their treatment of biblical passages from materials and traditions that are manifestly nonbiblical. Nevertheless, within compositional works a certain level of authority is beginning to become visible in that the author or editor consciously chose to develop, expand, adapt, or adjust this particular scripture, namely, something that is discernibly Bible, as opposed to some other mythological tradition. This level of attention and intellectual effort would only be expended on a writing that contained material that already had won some level of authority in the community, even if its exact verbal expression had not yet been determined.⁴⁷

An additional degree of authority becomes visible in those texts that belong to Dimant's "expositional" category. Here the base text—in most cases (but not *all*) what we term "Bible"—is physically distinguished from other phrases and sentences supplied by the later interpreters. No attempt is made to conflate or combine text and commentary; each remain discrete textual units. It would seem that expositional works offer our first concrete evidence of the promotion of a scripture to something approaching canonical status.⁴⁸ The author cites an authoritative passage from an earlier text and then proceeds to record an accepted interpretation for that passage. Such works do not alter their transcription of

the base text, even when their interpretations feature a wordplay or pun that would facilitate such tampering. It is, moreover, probably no accident that the Dead Sea Scrolls expositional texts—works like the *pesharim*—appear to be among the youngest of the scrolls as determined by palaeographic and empirical methods of analysis, whereas the compositional texts predominate among the older scrolls found at Qumran. This relative dating of interpretational form implies that the notion of canon, a qualitative difference among scriptures, is only beginning to emerge during the middle decades of the first century C.E.⁴⁹

By the time of the early rabbinic midrashim (second to fourth centuries C.E.), we witness an almost exclusive production of expositional texts: A clear distinction is constantly maintained between Bible and what is often a variety of authoritative interpretation(s). But by this time we are already clearly in possession of a formal canon—the *torah shebiktav* or "Written Torah." Classical Judaism would, in fact, go on to recognize a supplementary "canon," the *torah sheba'al peh* or "Oral Torah," via a parallel process of publication and scripturalization that mirrors the dynamic outlined above.

Addendum: A Brief Introduction to Rabbinic Exegesis of the Bible

In order to illustrate some of the ways whereby the Sages interact with a literary corpus that has finally achieved canonical status, that is, the Bible, a few words should be said about the exegetical process termed "midrash." The Hebrew word *midrash*, often mislabeled a distinct literary genre, is better understood as a type of interpretative activity—the English word "exposition" perhaps best captures its essential meaning. There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of midrash: (1) *midrash halakhah*, or halakhic midrash, wherein explicit precepts or guidelines for conducting one's life in accordance with God's mandates are deduced from biblical discourse; and (2) *midrash haggadah*, or haggadic (or aggadic) midrash, wherein explanatory comments, expansive additions, illustrative anecdotes, and legendary stories are generated from what are perceived to be pregnant, yet silent, aspects of the biblical text. Common to both categories of midrashic activity—halakhic and haggadic—is its bibliocentric basis: Midrash does not transpire in a textual vacuum; the Bible always serves as the point of origin or the ultimate court of appeal for midrashic formulation and argumentation. Hence, midrash necessarily presupposes the concept of an authoritative text.

Some actual examples of how midrash works may prove useful here. An excellent illustration of halakhic midrash occurs in the initial discussions of the Mishnah⁵⁰ in tractate *Berakhot* regarding the mechanics of prayer, a topic upon which the Bible provides almost no guidance, even though it is a form of pious behavior clearly valued by God.⁵¹ In *m. Ber.* 1:3, we read: "The School of Shammai taught that everyone should stretch

out (prone) and recite (the *Shema*)⁵² in the evening, but should stand (and recite the *Shema*) in the morning, for Scripture says: 'in your lying down and in your rising up' (Deut. 6:7)." Since the Bible refers to these two bodily postures in the very portion of Scripture that serves as the first part of the *Shema* recitation, the School of Shammai concluded that the Bible was hinting how the recitation was to be physically performed: One assumed a prone position in the evening ("in your lying down") and an upright stance in the morning ("in your rising up"). A behavioral norm is thereby deduced from the literal wording of the biblical text.

The very same mishnah demonstrates, however, that the Shammaite deduction is in fact flawed: "The School of Hillel responded, (If your interpretative logic is followed), everyone may recite (the *Shema*) in whatever posture (lit. 'way') they happen to be in, for (the same) Scripture says, 'in your proceeding on the way' (Deut. 6:7)." In other words, if at least two phrases of the referenced clause in the verse signify the physical posture to be assumed when engaging in the recitation, it is reasonable to conclude that the other syntactic components of that clause ("while you sit in your house and during your proceeding on the way") also encode a similar message. But the messages are in fact contradictory—therefore the opinion of the School of Shammai must in this instance be wrong. "If so," the mishnah continues, "why would the Bible use the language of 'in your lying down' and 'in your rising up'? (It actually means) *at the time of your lying down, and at the time of your rising up.*" The Shammaite attempt to generate halakhic midrash from this verse, although undermined at the level of an overly literal understanding, is in fact affirmed by the Hillelites. The verse, however, does not teach about bodily posture, but instead uses this language metaphorically to serve simply as temporal markers for the occasions of the *Shema*'s recitation—at the time one normally goes to bed and at the time one normally gets up.

Haggadic midrash, like halakhic midrash, also displays a heightened sensitivity to the various interpretational nuances of the biblical text. The goal of haggadic midrash, however, is not the derivation of behavioral guidelines; rather, it seeks to probe certain intriguing aspects of the biblical text in order to uncover hidden cultural "data." For example, in *b. Hag.* 12a we read: "Why (did God name the firmament) 'heavens' (*šamayim*; see Gen. 1:8)? R. Jose bar Hanina taught '(the word *šamayim* means) for there (*šam*) was water (*mayim*).'" According to this Sage, God's phonetic articulation of the word for "heavens" embeds within it the biblical teaching regarding its original function; viz., to serve as a barrier for separating and restraining the primeval chaos-waters (Gen. 1:6). The same source continues: "A *barnita*⁵³ teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, brought fire (*eš*) and water (*mayim*) and mixed them together and thereby made the firmament."⁵⁴ This is an alternative

haggadic explanation for the vocable "heavens," observing that the primal elements from which the "heavens" were apparently made (fire and water) are still visible as separate vocalic components of the divine designation (Gen. 1:8: "and God named the firmament '*šamayim*'"). According to this latter midrash, a careful study of God's language, as recorded in the Written Torah, may possibly shed unexpected light upon the elemental structure of the created order, a point further underscored by God's very use of the spoken word to fabricate the physical universe (Gen. 1, *passim*).

A lengthier example of haggadic midrash can be illustrated from the *Mekhilla de R. Ishmael*, a Tannaitic midrash keyed to a large portion of the biblical book of Exodus. Therein we read:

R. Nathan taught: From where (i.e., from what Scriptural passage) can one learn that God showed Abraham our ancestor (the future events of) Gehenna, the revelation of the Torah, and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds? Scripture states: "when the sun set and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking oven..." (Gen. 15:17)—this was Gehenna, for Scripture confirms: "(the Lord) has an *oven* in Jerusalem" (Isa. 31:9; cf. 30:33)—"... and a flaming torch..." (Gen. 15:17)—this was the revelation of the Torah, for Scripture confirms: "all the people witnessed the thunderings and the *torches*" (Exod. 20:15)—"... which passed between those *pieces*" (Gen. 15:17)—this was the miracle at the Sea of Reeds, for Scripture confirms: "who split the Sea of Reeds into *pieces*" (Ps. 136:13). He (also) showed him the Temple and the sacrificial service, as Scripture indicates: "He (God) answered, Bring me a three-year old heifer, a three-year old she-goat, a three-year old ram, etc." (Gen. 15:9). He (also) showed him the four empires who were destined to enslave his descendants, for Scripture says: "As the sun was setting, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a *great dark dread* fell upon him" (Gen. 15:12). "Dread"—this is the empire of Babylon; "dark"—this is the empire of the Medes (and Persians); "great"—this is the empire of the Greeks; "fell"—this is the fourth empire, wicked Rome.⁵⁵ But there are some who reverse the interpretation: "fell"—this is the empire of Babylon, for it is written "Fallen is Babylon" (Isa. 21:9); "great"—this is the empire of the Medes (and Persians), for it is written "King Ahasuerus *made great* (Haman)" (Esth. 3:1); "dark"—this is the empire of the Greeks, for they darkened the eyes of Israel with fasting; "dread"—this is the fourth kingdom, for Scripture says "fearsome and *dreadful* and very powerful." (Dan. 7:7)⁵⁶

This passage succinctly illustrates the primary way by which the Sages extracted additional levels of meaning from what was ostensibly a straightforward narrative recounting of the cementing of Abraham's covenantal relationship with God, the so-called "covenant of the pieces" (Gen. 15). As the ceremony unfolds in its biblical telling, Abraham falls into a trance, wherein God reveals to the patriarch the future Egyptian subjection and eventual liberation from that bondage of his descendants (Gen. 15:13-16). But just how much of the future did God actually display before Abraham? Surely he did not limit himself to just the exodus experience? Since he revealed to Abraham the event of the Exodus, is it not reasonable to assume that he would also reveal his miraculous acts associated with that event, especially the crossing of the sea and the gift of the Torah? And would God not also show Abraham the eventual fate of those who rejected this gift; namely, the fires of Gehenna? Would God not show the ancestor of Israel the glories of the future temple on Zion? And if the Egyptian oppression was explicitly signaled, a misfortune that transpires while Israel is absent from her land, what about the other equally grievous experiences of subjection and exploitation that Israel was destined to endure while dwelling in her promised inheritance when she would be ruled by successive world empires? The quoted midrash demonstrates that such "cultural data" is indeed encoded within the biblical text of Genesis 15, provided the reader possesses the biblical literacy and exegetical ingenuity required to detect it. Certain terms and locutions can be correlated with identical or analogous expressions in the other biblical books to establish a conceptual identification.³⁷ In other words, an essential presupposition of midrash is the notion that biblical terminology is never arbitrary; it is deliberately polyvalent and consciously intertextual. Any biblical book can be used to interpret any other biblical book, regardless of age, genre, or authorial intention.

The examples of midrash provided above thus demonstrate that rabbinic midrash, generally speaking, is an expository enterprise: There is normally a clear internal distinction made between the text being expounded (the Bible) and the exposition itself (the midrash). This holds true even for later midrashic compilations that appear at first glance to be compositional enterprises—works like *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* or *Sefer ha-Yashar*, whose flowing narrative styles exhibit a relatively seamless movement between canonical text and midrash, but without casting suspicion upon the primacy of the canonical scriptures. This sort of narrative structure may be indebted in part to that of the Targum, the expansive Aramaic rendition of the biblical text, particularly as exhibited among the so-called Palestinian versions such as *Pseudo-Jonathan*.

Suggestions for Further Reading

In addition to the works cited in the footnotes, one should consult the following items:

- Sæbø, M., ed. *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996. Many illuminating articles on a variety of historical and exegetical issues.
- Strack, H. L., and G. Stemberger. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Indispensable navigational aid for students seeking guidance while traversing the "sea of Talmud."
- VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. Probably the best introduction to date on this volatile corpus.

¹The present essay represents a conflation of lectures presented at King College (February 17, 1997) and UNC Charlotte (September 29, 1997). Unless otherwise indicated, all abbreviations follow the style guide of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

²Cf. the following strident statement "...we should probably not think of a 'Bible' in the first century B.C.E. or the first century C.E., at Qumran or elsewhere. There were collections of Sacred Scripture, of course, but no Bible in our developed sense of the term." Quotation is from E. Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures at Qumran," in *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. E. Ulrich and J. VanderKam (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), 77.

³An old but still valuable discussion of this issue is W. Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church: A Course of Lectures on Biblical Criticism*, 2d ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1892), 149-87. See also S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (repr. New York: Meridian, 1956), i-xi; E. Sellin and G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 10th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 482; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 562-64.

⁴In addition to the verses cited above, see also Ezra 3:2; 7:6, 10; Nehemiah 8:1, 8, 18; 9:3; 10:29-30.

⁵"...there is no doubt that the law of Ezra was the whole Pentateuch..." So J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (repr. Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1957), 408. Note also Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 556-57.

⁶I will not attempt to resolve here the thorny problem regarding the chronology of the textually interwoven missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. For bibliographic guidance with regard to this issue, consult L. L. Grabbe, *Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1.27-42, 88-98.

⁷Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.37-41. Translation is that of H. St. J. Thackeray in the Loeb Classical Library edition *Josephus*, 10 vols. (repr. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1.179. For recent thorough discussions of this passage and its significance, see J. Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 25-27, 35-50, 58-60; S. Mason and R. A. Kraft, "Josephus on Canon and Scriptures," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, 1.1; ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 217-35.

⁸Note however Barton, *Oracles*, 48: "The impression one gets is not that Josephus is attempting to describe how the Jewish canon is officially or usually divided by the Jews themselves, but that he is analysing the sacred books of the Jews in a way that will make them comprehensible (and convincing) to Gentile readers." Mason and Kraft ("Josephus on Canon and Scriptures," 221-22, 234-35) similarly object to this common interpretation, but the numerical sequencing (5+13+4) would seem to indicate that some type of tripartite division is indeed envisioned. For other early testimonies to a bipartite or tripartite canon, see H. M. Orlinsky, "Some Terms in the Prologue to Ben Sira and the Hebrew Canon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 483-90.

⁹As is done by Origen; see the list of biblical books excerpted from Origen by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.2 for this very practice. A number of relevant testimonia have been collected by S. Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and*

Midrashic Evidence, 2d ed. (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991), 41–50.

¹⁰A sequential list of the Achaemenian line can be found in R. G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*, 2d ed., AOS vol. 33 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953), 158; also E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, 2d ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 127–28.

¹¹Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.184–296 (LCL 6.402–57).

¹²Compare, however, Josephus, *Bellum* 1.18 (LCL 2.10–11), wherein he states that the “prophets conclude” their histories immediately prior to the advent of Antiochus IV (175–164 B.C.E.).

¹³Note especially *Contra Apionem* 1.37, as well as the remarks of Barton, *Oracles*, 35–95; Mason and Kraft (“Josephus on Canon and Scriptures,” 221): “all of the authors are prophets.”

¹⁴Translation cited from Leiman, *Canonization*, 52–53.

¹⁵J. G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism*, SBLMS 16 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

¹⁶See *b. Meg.* 14a; *Seder 'Olam Rabbah* 20–21. According to these sources, forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses were active during Israelite history.

¹⁷*Targum Canticles* 7:3 synchronizes the careers of Ezra, Mordecai, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and Nehemiah, naming them as members of the Great Assembly. For a comprehensive discussion of this legendary group and its activities, see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1909–1938), 6.447–49 n. 56.

¹⁸See *b. (Meg. 15a; Tg. Mal 1:1*. For the progressive prophetization of Ezra, see R. A. Kraft, “Ezra Materials in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 19.1 (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1979), 127–29. An illuminating intercultural presentation of the postbiblical image of Ezra can be found in H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 50–74.

¹⁹See *i. Sota* 13.2; *b. Sanh.* 11a. An excellently nuanced discussion of this issue is F. E. Greenspahn, “Why Prophecy Ceased,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 37–49.

²⁰See the discussion and sources provided by D. W. Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 134–54.

²¹G. H. Box, “4 Ezra,” in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. ed. R. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2.542–624; B. M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. Charlesworth (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1.516–59. See now the Hermeneia commentary of M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

²²In addition to the obvious correspondences with the revelation(s) vouchsafed to Moses, there are echoes of the prophetic experiences of Jeremiah (15:16) and Ezekiel (2:8–3:4) within this chapter.

²³“4 Ezra,” in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2.624.

²⁴See the sources conveniently collected by Leiman, *Canonization*, 53–56. He considers 4 Ezra 14:45 to be the earliest allusion to the twenty-four book scheme. Note, however, the *Gospel of Thomas* 52: “His disciples said to him, ‘Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel, and all of them spoke in you.’” If the *Gospel of Thomas* is indeed a mid-first-century sayings source, as a number of scholars advocate, it would supplant 4 Ezra as the earliest reference to a twenty-four book biblical canon. The *Gospel of Thomas* logion is cited from *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3d ed., ed. J. M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 132.

²⁵Ulrich, “Bible in the Making,” 78; J. C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 29.

²⁶For an authoritative survey of the contents of the Scrolls, see VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 29–70.

²⁷A list of all the Qumran manuscripts is contained in *Companion Volume to the Dead Sea Scrolls Microfiche Edition*, 2d ed., ed. E. Tov and S. J. Pfann (Leiden: Brill, 1995). For a discussion of the biblical texts found at Qumran, with copious bibliographical documentation, see E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis and Assen/Maastricht: Fortress and Van Gorcum, 1992), 100–117.

²⁸For a brief overview of the chief differences, see E. Tov, “Proto-Samaritan Texts and the Samaritan Pentateuch,” in *The Samaritans*, ed. A. D. Crown (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), 397–407.

²⁹For a clear exposition of these issues, see Ulrich, “Bible in the Making,” 77–93.

³⁰See especially E. Tov, “The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of its Textual History,” in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. J. H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 211–37.

³¹Namely 11QPs”. See J. A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPs^a)*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

³²See E. Tov, “Biblical Texts as Reworked in Some Qumran Manuscripts with Special Attention to 4QRP and 4QparaGen-Exod,” in *Community of the Renewed Covenant* (see n. 1 above), 111–34.

³³The term “rewritten Bible” was apparently first introduced in the seminal researches contained in G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 67–126.

³⁴VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 40. The Cave 4 manuscripts of *Jubilees* have now been published in *Qumran Cave 4, VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part I*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 13; ed. J. C. VanderKam, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 1–185. For the remaining manuscript evidence, see the references supplied by M. E. Stone, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 3 (1996): 278, nn. 22–23.

³⁵J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

³⁶*The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations, Volume 2: Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Tübingen and Louisville: J. C. B. Mohr and Westminster John Knox, 1995), 38.

³⁷One should note the occasional references to the authoritative status of the “law of Moses” and the exhortations associated with the “prophets” within various Qumran texts; e.g., CD 7:14–18; 1QS 1:2–3, 8:15–16; 4QMMT C 10–11. For this last text, see E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4, V: Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah*. Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 10 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 58.

³⁸Note *b. Sukk.* 20a: “Formerly when all Israel had forgotten the Torah, Ezra came up from Babylon and reestablished it.”

³⁹“There seem to have been a number of pseudo-Mosaic writings at Qumran...” (Stone, “Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha,” 293). *Jubilees* and the Temple Scroll are obvious examples. See especially the discussions of J. Strugnell, “Moses-Pseudepigrapha at Qumran: 4Q375, 4Q376, and Similar Works,” in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement 8, ed. L. H. Schiffman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 221–56; D. Dimant, “New Light from Qumran on the Jewish Pseudepigrapha—4Q390,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March, 1991*, 2 vols., ed. J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 2.405–48.

⁴⁰See especially Stone, “Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha,” 277–88.

⁴¹1QpHab 2:8–9; cf. 7:4–5; 1QS 1:3; CD 7:17; 4QpHos (4Q166) 2:5.

⁴²Note also *Leviticus Rabbah*, 1.14; *b. Yebam.* 49b.

⁴³David is explicitly accorded prophetic status within certain Qumran manuscripts, Josephus, early Christian literature, and rabbinic tradition. For an illuminating discussion of the prophetization of David, see J. L. Kugel, “David the Prophet,” in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. J. L. Kugel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 45–55.

⁴⁴Such lists of “true prophets” are extraordinarily important for certain Jewish Christian sects, classical gnosticism, Manichaeism, Mandaeism, and Islam. For extended discussions, see J. E. Fossum, “The Apostle Concept in the Qur’an and Pre-Islamic Near Eastern Literature,” in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*, ed. M. Mir and J. E. Fossum (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993), 149–67; J. C. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); idem, “Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Traditions: Some Initial Soundings,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30 (1999): 148–77.

⁴⁵D. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, *Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad novum testamentum* 2.1, ed. M. J. Mulder (Assen/Maastricht & Philadelphia: Van Gorcum & Fortress, 1988), 381-84.

⁴⁶An analogue may exist in early Muslim literature and its usage of the Qur'an. In the ninth-century chronicle of al-Ya'qubi, "he [al-Ya'qubi] makes no attempt to identify a Qur'an verse through formal language, but rather weaves the words of Scripture into his own commentary...some have considered this to be evidence for a late date for the [canonical status of] Qur'an." Citations from R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 54, 200, n. 11.

⁴⁷Or, as David Kraemer has bluntly observed, "People do not publish comments on texts that they deem unimportant." Quotation is from his *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 65.

⁴⁸"[The canonization of scripture] meant that new explanatory or expansive understandings of the Hebrew Bible could no longer be folded into the text." Quotation is from J. M. Harris, "From Inner-Biblical Interpretation to Early Rabbinic Exegesis," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* (see n. 7 above), 258.

⁴⁹According to Meir Sternberg, "...form has no value or meaning apart from communicative (historical, ideological, aesthetic) function." If this is so, the expositional form of biblical commentary communicates volumes about the perceived authority of the scriptural text. Quotation taken from M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), xii.

⁵⁰The Mishnah is the earliest formal collection of oral Torah. According to tradition, it was compiled by R. Judah ha-Nasi around 200 C.E. This date also marks (roughly) the division between the Tannaitic and the Amoraic eras of Sages.

⁵¹Nowhere does the Bible issue practical instructions regarding how prayer is to be performed. Where can one pray? Can one pray anywhere? Or are certain locales (e.g., a privy) inappropriate? When does one pray? How often should one pray? What sort of physical posture should one assume when praying? What language should one use in prayer? Only Hebrew? Is the local vernacular acceptable? And so on. Questions such as these are the chief motivation for the practice of midrash halakhah.

⁵²Three biblical paragraphs (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41; with preceding and concluding blessings) that encapsulate the basic teachings of Judaism. The name *Shema* stems from the first word ("Listen!") in Deuteronomy 6:4.

⁵³A *baraita* (literally, "outside") is a Tannaitic tradition not found in the final edition of the Mishnah.

⁵⁴Compare *Gen. Rab.* 4.7 (Theodor-Albeck 31) where the tradition is attributed to the third-century Amora Rav.

⁵⁵This follows the Hebrew word sequence, not the English.

⁵⁶*Mek., Yitro, Bahodesh* §9 (Horowitz-Rabin 236).

⁵⁷I have marked the key terms above with an italic font.

4

The Context and Development of the Christian Canon

Bruce M. Metzger

The Christian canon refers to the books that the church regards as Holy Scripture. Etymologically the word canon comes from an ancient Semitic root meaning "reed," or "stalk." The word came to be used as something that could be used to measure lengths and make a straight line, and if it had dots along the edge it could measure different lengths. When applied to a group of different literary pieces, a canon of literature is the established critical standard of that material. The canon may be simply drawn up as a list of the titles of several different texts, or the word canon may refer to the assembled texts themselves. So the term canon has both these connotations: It is a list as well as the contents of what is comprised in that list.

Preliminary Considerations

Some preliminaries need our attention before we consider the writing of the books of the New Testament and their collection as the New Testament. There is certain background material that perhaps we take for granted, but don't always appreciate. First of all, after the Holy Spirit,

Living Traditions
of the
Bible

Scripture in Jewish, Christian,
and Muslim Practice

James E. Bowley, editor

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