

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JEWISH COMMENTARIES AND  
PATRISTIC LITERATURE ON THE BOOK OF RUTH

by

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## Summary

Title : A comparative study of Jewish Commentaries and Patristic Literature on the Book of Ruth

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This dissertation deals with two exegetical traditions, that of the early Jewish and the patristic schools. The research work for this project urges the need to analyze both Jewish and Patristic literature in which specific types of hermeneutics are found. The title of the thesis (“compared study of patristic and Jewish exegesis”) indicates the goal and the scope of this study. These two different hermeneutical approaches from a specific period of time will be compared with each other illustrated by their interpretation of the book of Ruth. The thesis discusses how the process of interpretation was affected by the interpreters’ society in which they lived. This work in turn shows the relationship between the cultural variants of the exegetes and the biblical interpretation.

Both methodologies represented by Jewish and patristic exegesis were applicable and social relevant. They maintained the interest of community and fulfilled the need of their generation. Referring to early Jewish exegesis, the interpretations upheld the position of Ruth as a heir of the Davidic dynasty. They advocated the importance of Boaz’s and Ruth’s virtue as a good illustration of morality in Judaism. Early Christian exegetes were also interested in the basic values of the social community. They maintained the important social value of marriage as an example of the emphasis on virtue. They also paid much emphasis on teaching morality. Concerning the doctrine and value of Judaism, the sage upheld the principle of monotheism and the legitimacy of Davidic dynasty. In turn, patristic fathers urged for the introduction of the gospel through the salvation of Jesus Christ in the process of interpretation.

From our investigation, we can formulate the thesis that both early Jewish and Christian exegetes did not explain the text for its inherent meaning, but rather

used the text for their own purposes. Normally, the main task and mission of an exegete should be to find the meaning inherent in the text. We clearly indicated that both exegetical schools of interpreters did not find meaning in the text of the book of Ruth, but rather read in some agendas and issues into the text from outside, from the exegetes themselves and their surrounding backgrounds. They tend to meet the requirement of the social and political expectations of their reader community. Interpretation was used as a tool for this purpose. They conducted an application rather than explanation. This thesis can be explained by the fact that the meaning of a text depends on the value and pre-set agenda of the exegete who interprets it. Both the text and its interpreters are part of a specific historical, political, social and cultural environment, which imposed influence on them.

**Key terms:** Oral Torah  
Aggadah  
“One Recension” theory  
“Day of the Lord”  
An “*amora*”  
*Middot*  
Exegetical and eisegetical  
“Noahide Laws”  
The Alexandrian School  
The Antiochene School

## Key terms

### 1. Oral Torah

It was transmitted from master to disciple, from God to Moses, Moses to Aaron, Aaron to Joshua, and so on down, until it was ultimately recorded in the documents produced by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries CE. Rabbinic tradition holds that the Oral Torah contained a revelation of all possible interpretations of the written Torah to Moses.

### 2. Aggadah

Aggadah is those parts of Torah including written or oral sections that are narrative in nature. It is meant to include purported biography, theology, exhortation and folklore.

### 3. “One Recension” theory

It refers to a development that the whole range of variants leads to the simple recognition that all surviving codices are relatively late in relation to the *originals*. They all represent one recension and all stem from one source.

### 4. “Day of the Lord”

It is a term for the illustration of destruction of the world and Israel community in older prophecy and as day of salvation in newer prophecy. Apocalyptic group used the last view for interpreting Biblical text.

### 5. An ‘amora’

He is a speaker or interpreter. The word originates from the root *amar*, “say”, “name”, or “explain” He is actually the interpreters or commentators on the Mishnah.

## 6. *Middot*

*Middot* are a number of principles of Jewish interpretation. They refer to the hermeneutic rules used to interpret the Bible in aggadic and halakhic texts so as to produce new religious laws and broaden the application of those already in existence.

## 7. Exegetical and eisegetical

The task of midrashic commentators may be seen as two-fold as both exegetical and eisegetical. The former involves drawing out the meaning implicit in Scripture and the latter reading meaning into Scripture.

## 8. “Noahide Laws”

“Noahide Laws” are incumbent upon all the descendants of Noah that is all of humanity. Originally, 606 commandments are incumbent only upon Jews. An additional seven, called by the sages the “Noahide Laws” is summed up as 613 commandments of the Torah.

## 9. The Alexandrian School

The Alexandrian School of exegesis consisted of fathers who expected to find different layers of meaning within a biblical text. It dealt with typological interpretation, whereby parts of the Hebrew Bible are read as a foreshadowing and prediction of the events of the Gospels.

## 10. The Antiochene School

The first representative of the Antiochene School was the apologist Theophilus of Antioch. The school promoted an environment well known for producing interpreters versed in careful textual criticism, philological and historical studies and the cultivation of classical rhetoric. The Antiochene School and its tradition reacted to the Alexandrian allegorists.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Intent and importance of the study

Recent publications and studies indicate that more and more scholars are bringing their own well defined agendas to the interpretation of the biblical text. However, Gerald Bray imposes a warning that centuries of Christian tradition is ignored having little concern to find an overall hermeneutical framework in which to place the latest findings of critical scholarship.<sup>1</sup> This will lead to a loss of our treasure of hermeneutical traditions during centuries. My thesis plans to fill this gap.

My dissertation deals with two exegetical traditions, that of the early Jewish and the patristic schools. The research work for this project urges the need to analyze both Jewish and Patristic literature in which specific types of hermeneutics are found. The title of the thesis (“compared study of patristic and Jewish exegesis”) indicates the goal and the scope of this study. These two different hermeneutical approaches from a specific period of time will be compared with each other illustrated by their interpretation of the book of Ruth.

Referring to the study of early Jewish interpretation, Richard Longenecker lists some important works and trends. He commented that a great deal of effort has been directed toward identifying, analyzing, and defining the hermeneutical features of ancient Judaism, not only within the Jewish Scriptures themselves, but also within the writings of Early Judaism and the earlier traditions of Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>2</sup> With regard to patristic study, Brian

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Bray, “Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present” (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 7

<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, “Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period” 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), xxiv. Leading the field during the past decades have been such Jewish scholars as Daniel Boyarin (see Daniel Boyarin, “Intertextuality and the reading of midrash”, Michael Fishbane (Michael Fishbane, “The Qumran Peshet and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics,” in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1977, 1.97-114; *idem*, *Biblical Interpretation* (1985); *idem*, “Use, Authority and interpretation of Mikra at Qumran,” in *Mikra: Text, translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, 339-77; *idem*, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*. Bloomington-Indiana University Press, 1989) and David Weiss Halivni (see D. W. Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; *idem*, “Plain Sense and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis,” in *the Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. P. Ochs. New York-Mahwah: Paulist, 1993, 107-41; David Weiss Halivni,

Daley remarks that scholars might wish to note two recent, substantial books that draw on patristic exegetical practice as a stimulus for new engagement with figural scriptural interpretation.<sup>3</sup> During the post-war renewal of biblical studies, Charles Kannengiesser pointed out that the debate was open to a hermeneutics of the reception of Scripture in Christian traditions.<sup>4</sup> Hermeneutic research became a dominant field among patristic studies. The scholars were mainly interested in exegetical trends and methods and their hermeneutical debate was to address the question of biblical typology or allegory as understood by the Fathers.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Kannengiesser then added the concerns of scholars for patristic study. The scholarly discussion brought to the attention of many patristic scholars the need for exploring more carefully the ideological thoughts of the Fathers, in particular in their biblical hermeneutics. Jean Danielou, for instance, described the sophisticated intricacies of patristic symbols, always being rooted in traditional readings of Scripture and molded by a variety of cultural settings.<sup>6</sup>

Most important of all, he commented that the interpretation of Scripture through ages could not remain alien to the social and political transformations of late antiquity. Biblical hermeneutics was affected by the general shift within the traditional culture reaching out towards its own challenging future.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation echoes this view. It discusses how the process of interpretation was affected by the interpreters' society in which they lived. This work in turn shows the relationship between the cultural variants of the exegetes and the biblical interpretation.

## 1.2 Aims and purposes

We concentrate on early Judaism's attitude toward Scripture as evidenced in the principles or axioms, which govern its use. In patristic exegesis, we examine

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Revelation restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997)

<sup>3</sup> Brian E. Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis still Usable? *Some reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* Ed. Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 69; More patristic works are done. See Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001) and John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, "Handbook of Patristic Exegesis", 86

<sup>5</sup> Idem

<sup>6</sup> Idem

<sup>7</sup> Idem, 89

the approaches of the Fathers to the Scripture, especially the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, we focus the emphasis on the process of interpretation with regard to the interpreters' pre-set beliefs when they practice exegesis under specific historical and religious circumstances.

This work attempts to inform the present by examining the past. The approach used is to employ a historical examination of the use of the Bible in the early church to elucidate the contemporary hermeneutical task in order to help us unfold the meaning of Scripture for the contemporary reader.

### **1.3 Philosophical supposition and objectivity**

The major contribution of this research is its reflection on the principles and framework in which the biblical commentaries were interpreted by different groups and individuals during the early Christian and Jewish periods of time. The principles followed then reflect the methodology by which the language of biblical revelation was examined so that it yielded insight into God's plan of redemption and its ramifications for both the life of the rabbinic as well as the Christian community. David S. Dockery made the good point that it will be noted that not only the theology, but also the philosophical presuppositions and hermeneutical concepts were taken over from the literary culture of the surrounding world, often developed into new and creative paradigms of interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

David Dockery commented that the apostles and the church fathers wrote for their own churches against their opponents, both to advance and to defend the Christian faith as they interpreted it. Even though the articulation of their faith was influenced by their context, culture, tradition, and presuppositions, all shared a common belief in the Bible as the primary source and authority for the Christian faith.<sup>9</sup>

The interpretation of the rabbinic and the patristic literature requires some standards of evidence and verifiability. This means objectivity and logic. The exegetes should carry out their interpretation in a way that is independent of their interests and preconceptions by applying disciplined, methodologically rigorous analysis of the evidence offered in the form of texts and human

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<sup>8</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 17

<sup>9</sup> Idem, 15

remains. For this reason, the establishment and interpretation of texts from earlier stages is understood to be an inductive process governed by the rules of logic, the recognition of natural cause and effect, and the assignment of probability based on common human experience.

Brian Daley pointed out that the exegetes of the biblical texts have tended to focus their attention on trying to rediscover what the human author may have intended by the words and what the original hearers or readers would have understood by them, on the assumption that such original intent is the main constituent of the text's single, inherent meaning.<sup>10</sup> Brian Daley also pointed out the consequence that "modern historical criticism including the criticism of biblical texts is methodologically atheistic, even if what it studies is some form or facet of religious belief, and even if it is practiced by believers."<sup>11</sup> However, real objectivity of interpretation does not exist. All and every reading of the Bible is done from a specific set of principles and points of departure. This whole issue of objectivity was severely challenged by the theories of modern scholars. Among them are Popper, Kuhn and Gadamer.

Gadamer offers a much more profound and influential account of hermeneutics. Anthony Thiselton commented that Gadamer provided the theoretical and philosophical groundwork for the view that what count as criteria in interpretation depend, among other things, on the goal proposed for this or that process of interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Most theorists of interpretation today would also agree that a reader's understanding of a text will always, necessarily, be largely conditioned by the reader's own interests and prior experience--- by the horizon of understanding he or she brings to the act of engaging with the words of another. Understanding a text is precisely an event of interpretation of horizon: the author's and reader's horizon, along with the entire set of cultural and community assumptions, intellectual models, and religious value system through which each comes to participate in the world of intelligent discourse.

Brian Daley commented that it can never be a simple matter of the recovery of

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<sup>10</sup> Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Is Patristic Exegesis still Usable? *Some reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* Ed. Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 72

<sup>11</sup> Idem

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Thiselton, "Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics" in *The Cambridge Companion To Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104

objective, “original” meaning through a scientific historical criticism that is free of the concerns and commitments of the later reader.<sup>13</sup> In the process of interpretation, it is impossible to be completely objective.

## 1.4 Interpretation as a product of the exegetes’ culture

Indeed, interpretation varies according to the exegetes’ cultural and political background in which they live. Gerald Bray illustrated the real situation of the interpretation and stated that “Christians today are the product of the history of its interpretation.”<sup>14</sup> It showed that interpretation is no longer purely objective. It is within their specific context that the exegetes conduct hermeneutical work. The history of biblical interpretation begins when the first biblical traditions were created. What is selected in this process is a direct result of the perspectives, social norms, religious belief, political and economic needs of the person or community, which affects the exegetes.

Indeed, Daniel Patte commented that the outcome of interpretation necessarily depends upon the culture of the exegete. For the Church and the Church theologian, on the other hand, the same biblical text is Holy Scripture. The relevance of the text becomes important. It becomes the task of the hermeneutic to express the meaning of biblical texts for contemporary men.<sup>15</sup> Patte further added that any exegesis is dependent upon the culture of the exegetes who have to comply with the demand of their culture.<sup>16</sup>

Gerald Bray also echoed the view and pointed out the purpose of interpretation. A written revelation thus serves the double function of giving those who belong to the community of believers a common focus, and of excluding elements, which do not belong within the community. By establishing norms, a written revelation defines the character of the God whom we worship and closes the door to anything, which is incompatible with it. This double function is one of the chief distinguishing marks of any scriptural religion, and Christianity is no exception to this rule. It is the teaching of the church that its written revelation strikes that balance between individual experience and common confession

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<sup>13</sup> Brian E. Daley, SJ, “Is Patristic Exegesis still Usable? *Some reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* Ed. Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 73

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 8

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Patte, *Early Jewish hermeneutic in Palenstine* (Montana: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1975), 3

<sup>16</sup> Idem



which is the special hallmark of the Christian's relationship with God.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, interpretation serves the reader of the community.

Kirsten Nielsen echoed the same view. He illustrated the role of context in the interpretation. He believed that the interpretation is to be read precisely in that context, which at the time in question, with its particular environment and in its specific situation, seems to be in agreement with the text.<sup>18</sup> As readers we are not independent of our own time and surroundings. We belong primarily to one or to several "interpretive communities", and therefore perceive within that/those particular framework(s) of understanding.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.5 Research Methodology

In this study a deductive method is used to gather the historical facts from which a conclusion can be made. It is based on the material provided by traditional interpretation of ancient Jewish and Christian commentators. Studying their interpretations and comparing Jewish and Patristic exegesis, we may find patterns and principles in their interpretation of the book of Ruth. Through comparison of the two streams of exegesis of Jewish tradition and patristic fathers on the book of Ruth similarities and differences between them are pointed out aiming at formulating some general patterns and features. The formulated patterns give us insights in the concept of hermeneutics and the role of readers in interpreting the texts. Therefore both synthetic and analytic methods are used. Such comparison does not involve any moral judgment.

## 1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter two starts with the question of the forming of the Hebrew text. That is the basis for all interpretation, depending each time on the stage of developing and the form in which it was available at that specific time. We will discuss the theological foundations of the developmental history of the interpretation, since my research is a comparative study of two exegetical schools in antiquity. The model of Farrar<sup>20</sup> on the different periods of interpretation of these writings is used. It next traces out the Second Temple period as an important period for

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<sup>17</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 18

<sup>18</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 11

<sup>19</sup> Idem

<sup>20</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *History of interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961)

the preparation of the formation of early Jewish exegesis. Moreover, the early Jewish documents such as Targumim, Mishnah and Talmud, in which we find indications of how this interpretation was applied in the different periods, are examined. Different Jewish groups are discussed against their backgrounds and the time and circumstances under which they lived. This chapter finally examines the effect of this historical and social background on the Jewish commentators at the time when the interpretative process was carried out.

Chapter three deals with the early Jewish exegetical approach of midrash. Most of the interpretive methods and products of rabbinic midrash could be found centuries earlier in the period preceding the gradual closing of the biblical canon as discussed in chapter two.

Chapter four presents an illustration of Jewish exegesis on the book of Ruth in terms of the social and cultural context of the interpreters. This paves the way for the comparative study of patristic literature in the next chapters. It proves that the pre-set belief system of the interpreters actually dictated their commentaries.

Chapter five studies the development of patristic exegesis, following the same approach used for studying early Jewish interpretation in the previous chapter. We first make a delineation of patristic literature. Once the period of time has been decided upon, the historical, political and social influences on patristic literature are indicated. This may be used to study the influence imposed on commentators of the early Christian church. There was a long tradition of exegetical trends formed during this period. Certain types of patristic exegetical methods were employed by commentators to interpret the book of Ruth. As with Jewish exegesis, we also need to investigate the socio-political and cultural environment of this literature, such as Hellenism, Stoicism and Platonism that affected the patristic interpretation of the book of Ruth in the last part of this chapter.

Chapter six deals with some techniques found, in patristic exegesis. Most scholars will acknowledge some form of development both in exegetical trends and in Christian theology. Various models of development have been constructed in order to characterize what is meant by the idea of development. The most important one is typology. The development of exegetical methods involved the most influential factors that affected the way this method was presented. The context was an influential factor in the early Christian trends of

interpretation. To understand the Christian exegetical features, the context including the historical, political and cultural background has to be understood as playing a major part.

Chapter seven is the illustration of the patristic fathers' interpretation on the book of Ruth. Just like early Jewish commentators, the patristic fathers urged for the protection of their own interests and beliefs under the political, cultural and theological challenges imposed on them.

Finally, chapter eight compares the exegetical patterns and principles found in patristic exegesis of Ruth with the early Jewish exegesis of Ruth. In this chapter the synthesis of the results of the study of two exegetical traditions and some theses are presented in this regard.

## Chapter 2

### Early Jewish commentary

#### 2.1 Introduction

The process of “early” Jewish interpretation originated from Nehemiah’s<sup>1</sup> interpretation of Scripture, in which exegesis was carried out in the Hebrew Bible. Discussing Nehemiah 8:8, Richard N. Longenecker lays out the purpose of the interpreter “to give the sense and make the people understand the meaning”.<sup>2</sup> This involved two activities, reading the word of God and interpreting it for application in Israel’s life. They are also the fundamental principles of biblical studies in Judaism. The dynamic relationship between concern for the sacred character of the words, their transmission to the next generation and their application to the exigencies of life has been the source of renewal for Judaism throughout its history. Charles Kannengiesser had made a good conclusion that it is the source of development of biblical interpretation in Judaism.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the traditional process of forming the Hebrew Bible is definitely determining the development of early Jewish exegesis. It is necessary to have a deeper examination of the way in which the existing tradition both in oral and written form, was used and interpreted. Moreover, the history of the interpretation is continuous. We need to trace out any effects of the continuity on the characteristics of early Jewish exegesis. This chapter deals with the general introduction of early Jewish commentary as follows:

First, in this chapter, we start with the question of the forming of the Hebrew text. That is the basis for all interpretation, depending each time on the stage of developing and the form in which it was available at that specific time. Second, we will discuss the theological foundations of the developmental history of the

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<sup>1</sup> There is a common consensus among the scholars that Nehemiah’s phase played a dominant role in the origin of early Jewish exegesis. The works include Richard N. Longenecker, “Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period” 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999); Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996)

<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 8

<sup>3</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 120

interpretation since my research is a comparative study of two exegetical schools in antiquity. I will trace these developmental foundations using the model of Farrar<sup>4</sup> on the different periods of interpretation of these writings. Third, as the history of interpretation is continuous, I then next trace out the Second Temple period as an important period for the preparation of the formation of early Jewish exegesis. Fourth, following Farrar on the developmental history of interpretation, I will examine the early Jewish documents such as Targumim, Mishnah and Talmud in which we find indications of how this interpretation was applied in the different periods indicated. Fifth, different Jewish groups who are responsible for these different interpretations are discussed against their backgrounds and the time and circumstances in which they lived. Sixth, all the discussions about the different interpretations are set in the specific historical and social context of their time. This means that the interpreters are influenced by their living historical environment. I will examine the effect of this historical background on the Jewish commentators at the time when the interpretative process was carried out. Finally I will draw my conclusion on Jewish exegesis indicating that I would apply the information in this chapter to a study of the way Ruth was interpreted in the chapter that follow.

## 2.2 The Forming of the Hebrew Text

### 2.2.1 Dual Torah

In this part, the Hebrew Bible will be examined showing the way existing tradition, either in oral or written form, was used and interpreted. With regard to the forming of the Hebrew Text, Rabbis believed that revelation consists of a “dual Torah.”<sup>5</sup> One part is the Written Torah, or “written law,” (*Miqra*) more generally called simply *Torah*.<sup>6</sup> The “written Torah” refers to the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel: meaning the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy; the Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets; and the Writings, Proverbs, Psalms, Job, Chronicles, the Five Scrolls, and so on.

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<sup>4</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *History of interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961)

<sup>5</sup> Charles Kannengiesser is concerned with the difficulty of this classification. He said, “In practice, halakah and haggadah can be difficult to distinguish, since individual passages and even entire works (e.g. the Mishnah) often include examples of both categories. Both halakah and haggadah are concerned with resolving questions raised by the Written Torah, and by the reality of observing its commandments.” Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 125

<sup>6</sup> Idem, 121

The other part is the oral or memorized Torah. It was transmitted from master to disciple, from God to Moses, Moses to Aaron, Aaron to Joshua, and so on down, until it was ultimately recorded in the documents produced by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries CE. These compilations then claim to preserve the originally oral tradition.<sup>7</sup> Rabbinic tradition holds that the Oral Torah contained a revelation of all possible interpretations of the written Torah to Moses.<sup>8</sup>

What Moses received on Mount Sinai was not simply a written text that needed to be understood in a straight-forward manner, but rather the Torah, the complete and forever authoritative revelation of God's will for his people Israel and for the world. This revelation was given in both oral and written form, the oral form containing the interpretation of the Torah and teachings not found in written Torah<sup>9</sup>. It was the responsibility of the rabbis to study the entire revelation continually in order to comprehend it ever more fully. Since all of God's will was contained in it, it was necessary that each generation deepen its understanding of the wisdom the revelation contained, applying it to its own age.<sup>10</sup>

Howard Schwartz believed that the ancient rabbis drew on the oral tradition they had received and cultivated it, giving birth, in the process, to a rich and vital legendary tradition. Yet it must never be forgotten that the original impulse out of which these legends were created was exegetical. Great importance was put on resolving contradictions and filling gaps in the narrative.<sup>11</sup>

In the opinion of Charles Kannengiesser, God said to Moses: "Write these things, for it is by means of these things that I have made a covenant with Israel" (Exo 34:27). When God was about to give the Torah, He recited it to Moses in proper order, Scriptures, Mishnah, Aggadah, and Talmud, for God spoke all these words (Exo 20:1), even the answers to questions which advanced disciples in the future were destined to ask their teachers did God

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism*, 6

<sup>8</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

<sup>9</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 497

<sup>10</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, "Introduction and Overview" in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 26 ; Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 34

<sup>11</sup> Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) xi

reveal to Moses! (*Tanuma* Buber (1985), *Ki Tissa* 58b)<sup>12</sup>

The theology of that part of the Torah becomes accessible when we know how to understand language for what it is: this-worldly record of the meeting of the Eternal in time with Israel. This specific type of language indicates some of the philosophies and the beliefs behind the rabbis.

## 2.2.2 The content and foundation of Torah: Halakhah and Haggadah

The torah stands on a dual foundation: on Halakhah and Aggadah. Halakhah should be the Pentateuch, or the body of (originally) oral teaching contained in Talmud and Midrash, that are legal in nature.<sup>13</sup> The word in rabbinic writing for “law” is halakah, from the Hebrew verbal root *halak*, “to go.” Thus, Halakah was “the way”, the ethical norm for how things are to be done.<sup>14</sup> Halakhah can either mean the entire corpus of the legal material or one particular religious law. It aims to define the laws and to discover in them the fundamental principles from which new laws for resolving new problems might be derived, as well as arguments for justifying certain customs, which already were traditional.<sup>15</sup> It lists 39 types of work and other activity types forbidden on the Sabbath day (cf Mishnah). It tries to control every aspect of life, from dawn to dusk, from birth to death, even reaching beyond the Jewish people to all humankind by means of the so-called rules of Noah.<sup>16</sup> It is easy to see the development of halakah as essentially developing from rabbinic disputations in the study-houses. Halakic literature develops in a clearly stratified manner. Each generation of rabbis understands itself as the successor and explainer of the preceding generation.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, Aggadah is those parts of Torah including written or oral sections that are narrative in nature. Abraham Heschel gives a good definition of Aggadah. “Narrative, the best linguistic equivalent of Aggadah, is meant to include also purported biography, theology, exhortation and folklore.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

<sup>13</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations* Edited and Translated by Gordon Tucker (New York: Continuum, 2005) 1; Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 126; Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 49

<sup>15</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33

<sup>16</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 468

<sup>17</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 126

<sup>18</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*, 1; See

Haggadic teachings are not concerned to prescribe correct behavior or to show what is right or correct opinion. In a given haggadah, contradictory sources can be presented together; there is no need to arrive at a final decision or practice. In this way, differing traditions are all preserved. Howard Schwartz echoed this contradictory nature of Jewish legends. He pointed out that the principles of the midrashic method outline the development of the legendary tradition and discusses the tools developed for interpretation of these sacred texts, that permitted multiple interpretations, often of a contradictory nature, which were all regarded as legitimate.<sup>19</sup>

The distinction between homiletical midrash and legal interpretation also requires explanation. Legal midrash is halakhic, how one should walk or conduct himself or herself in life. Homiletical interpretation on the other hand is haggadic, how one narrates a story or explains a problem in the text. Haggadic midrash was much more imaginative in its attempts to fill in the gaps in Scripture and to explain away apparent discrepancies, difficulties and unanswered questions. Legal rulings were not to be derived from haggadic interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

### **2.2.3 How are Aggadah and halakah used?**

Liturgical reading of the Scriptures held a place of honor in the synagogues. It provided the material for the sermon, which followed immediately upon it and was generally a commentary on the Scripture in the form of aggadah lesson. In the schools, this same biblical text was used for instruction; it was studied and commented on and a rule of life or halakah was drawn from it. Hence the Law became the subject matter for daily instruction and tradition.<sup>21</sup>

### **2.2.4 The traditional forming process of Hebrew Bible**

The exegetical trend and tendency of the early Jewish community is closely related to the textual development and transmission history of the Hebrew Bible. Al Wolters affirmed this connection. He emphasized that the field of Old Testament textual criticism deals with the history of the transmission of the text

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also Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33; Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41

<sup>19</sup> Howard Schwartz, *Reimagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) xi

<sup>20</sup> Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992) 118

<sup>21</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33



of the Hebrew Bible and the recovery of an authoritative starting point for its translation and interpretation.<sup>22</sup> In this part, we will first describe the historical line of the textual development of the Hebrew Bible and then using the description of this long process we will identify some exegetical trends and directions, which affected the formation of early Jewish exegesis. Now, we first start with the relationship between the discovery of Qumran scrolls and the Hebrew text.

### **(a) Qumran scrolls and the Hebrew Text**

Basically the Qumran scrolls are into two groups. One group hails from the vicinity of Qumran, which is situated some five miles south of Jericho and two miles west of the shores of the Dead Sea. The place precedes the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE), which is an important event for the textual history of the Old Testament. The scholars identify this group as coming from a Jewish sect of the “New Covenant”.<sup>23</sup> The other<sup>24</sup> group consists of scattered manuscript finds from the region to the south of Qumran, Wadi Murabba‘at (halfway between Jericho and ‘Ein Gedi), Nahal Ze‘elim and Massada, and exhibits the textual tradition of normative Judaism.

Most of the scholars laid emphasis on the Qumran Scroll as indication of the textual development of the Hebrew text. Scholars such as Shemaryahu Talmon found out that new sources of the pre Christian manuscripts from Qumran and from non-biblical writings, which have some pertinence to the issue, have revolutionized scholarly conceptions of the canonical process and of the transmission history of the biblical text, which is intertwined with it.<sup>25</sup> He also discusses the specific question of whether the Qumran finds did indeed shed some light on the crystallization of a closed canon of Hebrew Scripture,

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<sup>22</sup> Al Wolters, “The Text of the Old Testament” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker & Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic & Apollos, 2004) 19

<sup>23</sup> The reader will find a valuable summary of the literature and the ideology of this group in F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (revised edition, New York, 1961)

<sup>24</sup> One often neglects to bring into play biblical fragments discovered at other sites in the Judaean Desert, which are relevant to the matter under review. See the comments in Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Old Testament Text” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 159-99; reprinted in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. F. M. Cross Jr. and S. Talmon (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 182-92

<sup>25</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Crystallization of the Canon of Hebrew Scriptures” in the light of Biblical Scrolls from Qumran” in *The Book as book: the Hebrew Bible and the Judaean desert discoveries*, Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov eds (London: New Castle, DE: The British Library; Oak Knoll Press, 2002), 5

and on the societal and religious significance and function of that canon.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, James Sanders also echoed his point of view. He said that, “the discovery has caused a review of nearly every aspect of biblical study including that of questions relating to the canons of Judaism and Christianity and denominations and groups within them.”<sup>27</sup>

The first importance of Qumran scroll relating to the Hebrew text is that some of the biblical manuscripts from Qumran are, dated by scholars as coming from the third and many from the second and first centuries BCE. This dating has added a new dimension to the criticism of the biblical text and to the study of its history both in the original Hebrew and in the earliest ancient versions. Scholars have consensus that the Qumran scrolls precede the oldest extant manuscripts of any part of the Old Testament in the Hebrew Massoretic tradition by more than a millennium as well as those in Greek or any other translation by several centuries.<sup>28</sup> They are therefore of importance for an investigation into the history of the Hebrew text and into the processes of its transmission.

A second issue of importance is the witness of the formation of an eventual single authorized version from divergent variations of textual tradition. Shemaryahu Talmon pointed out that the biblical scrolls from Qumran are of decisive importance to exhibit practically all types of variants found in later witnesses.<sup>29</sup> This fact indicates that variations as such in the textual transmission cannot be laid exclusively at the door of careless scribes or sometimes unscrupulous and sometimes emendators and revisers. On the contrary, types of variants that have been preserved in the ancient texts both in Hebrew and in different versions may derive from divergent and ancient textual traditions. In the light of all the evidences from Qumran, it is possible to see that authoritative scriptural compositions were often passed from one generation to the next in a variety of text forms or multiple editions.<sup>30</sup>

Becoming aware of this diversity, the text critic can no longer hold on to ideas

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<sup>26</sup> Idem, 6

<sup>27</sup> James A. Sanders, “Canon”, in *ABD*, I, 841

<sup>28</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Crystallization of the Canon of Hebrew Scriptures*, 6

<sup>29</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 1-41

<sup>30</sup> See the detailed and important statements on this diversity by Emmanuel Tov, “The Significance of the Texts from the Judean Desert for the History of the Text of the Hebrew Bible: A New Synthesis,” in *QONT*, pp.227-309, and by Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999

of textual stability<sup>31</sup> and an anachronistic understanding of how scribes were faithful to the letter of the text that they were copying. These divergent traditions are represented in the extant witnesses. Each generation was keen to establish each variation as an officially acclaimed standard text. After the eventual crystallization of an official Massoretic text standard, new copies would have been based from the very start on that so-called *textus receptus*.

## **(b) The role of scribes**

The beginning of the role of scribal learning signifies the end of prophetic inspiration. James Kugel indicated this trend in his work. The scribes being the interpreters of Scripture enjoyed an increasing prominence and authority in the period following the Babylonian exile. They were the guardians of writings preserved from Israel's ancient past.<sup>32</sup> Martin Hengel concluded that Ezra was an important figure during this time.<sup>33</sup> According to Josephus in his apology *Contra Apionem*, the authentic succession of the Prophets lasted from Moses to Artaxerxes. Josephus has Ezra, who in the seventh year of Artaxerxes<sup>34</sup> went up to Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> The rabbis make him a restorer of the Torah. As a pupil of Baruch, Ezra was identified with Malachi. At the same time he is made author of the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. This means that he is the last inspired prophet. On the other hand, he is reckoned among the men of the "great synagogue."<sup>36</sup> Louis Ginzberg further commented that he is "the binding link between the Jewish prophet and the Jewish sage"<sup>37</sup>, which means that he appears as the man of transition who concluded the time of revelation and opened up the era of scribal learning.

Scholars are in agreement about the work of scribes in the transmission. Eugene Ulrich believes that in antiquity certain scribes were engaged in the process of handing on the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures. They intentionally went beyond the simple copying<sup>38</sup> of the text. They worked creatively on the

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<sup>31</sup> George J. Brooke, "The Rewritten Law, Prophets and Psalms: Issues for Understanding the text of the Bible" in *The Book as book: the Hebrew Bible and the Judaeen desert discoveries* Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov ed. (London: New Castle, DE: The British Library; Oak Knoll Press, 2002), 33

<sup>32</sup> James Kugel, *Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Biblical Sage*, 6

<sup>33</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 161

<sup>34</sup> Apion 1.40-41

<sup>35</sup> Ezra 7: 1-2

<sup>36</sup> *Ab.* 1.1

<sup>37</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913) IV, 359

<sup>38</sup> Michael Fishbane's words about the work of scribes are that they not only copied what

traditional sacred text, dared to argument it and enrich it for the community and thus became contributors to the composition of the scriptures.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Shemaryahu Talmon connects the work of scribes with the literary process of the Hebrew Bible. He has described this type of scribe as “a minor partner in the creative literary process.”<sup>40</sup> So, the role of scribes in the canonical process and the exegetical direction of the Hebrew Bible is significant.

Franz Oppenheim elaborates on the role of scribes in formulating and maintaining the growing biblical literary tradition. He defines the tradition as what ‘can be loosely termed the corpus of literary texts, maintained, controlled, and carefully kept alive by a tradition served by successive generations of learned and well-trained scribes.’<sup>41</sup> The creative biblical scribes were actively handling on the tradition but they were also adding to it, enriching it and even making it adaptable and relevant. Insofar as the scribes were handing on the tradition, they became part of the canonical process: handing on the tradition is a constitutive factor of the canonical process. James Sanders refers to this aspect as “repetition.”<sup>42</sup> The repetition in a sense works like a hammer, pounding home again and again that this material is important. The texts were authoritative text and through the “traditioning process” they were being made even more authoritative.

Furthermore, the work of scribes is also closely linked with the community’s interest. These scribes made the received tradition adaptable to their circumstances and thus gave it another of its canonical characteristics. James Sanders terms it as “resignification.”<sup>43</sup> That is the tradition was made important in its setting and concrete situation. Michael Fishbane also shared the same view. He illustrated that the basic role of scribes as custodians and tridents of this *traditum* (in its various forms) is thus self-evident. Scribes received the texts of tradition, studied and copied them, puzzled about their contents, and preserved their meanings for new generations.<sup>44</sup>

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came to hand but also responded in diverse ways to the formulations they found written in earlier manuscripts. Cf. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 23

<sup>39</sup> Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 51

<sup>40</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Textual Study of the Bible: A New Outlook,” in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (ed. F. M. Cross and S. Talmon; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975) 321-400, esp. 381

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Crystallization of the Canon of Hebrew Scriptures*, 6

<sup>42</sup> James Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 22

<sup>43</sup> Idem

<sup>44</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 23

The class of Jewish scribes that emerged in the post-exilic period had a definable historical character. The tasks and procedures of scribes are abundantly referred to in canonical and extra-canonical rabbinical literatures. They had a major part in the epochal transformation of ancient Israel into ancient Judaism and also in ancient Israelite exegesis into ancient Jewish exegesis.<sup>45</sup> However, these scribes were not so much a new class or new beginning in ancient Jewish history but rather the heirs of a long standing and existing multifaceted Israelite scribal tradition, whose own roots in turn were struck in the soil of the great ancient Near Eastern civilizations. Elias Bickerman provides the evidence for this, beginning already in the third millennium BCE, with copies of old Sumerian school-texts. He shows how it continues throughout the second and first millennium BCE using Akkadian text copies from the late first millennium.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the change of ancient Israelite exegesis in to early Jewish exegesis, Elias Bickerman agrees with Fishbane that the origins of the scribes are to be found in older history. Elias Bickerman concluded that the most important result of the Greek impact on Palestinian Judaism since the fourth century BCE was the formation of a Jewish intelligentsia, different from the clergy and not dependent on the sanctuary.<sup>47</sup> “Scribe” was the technical term used for a public official who entered the civil service as his profession. In both Egypt and Babylonia, where the native writing was still used, the priest was now called “the scribe”. The judges and teachers of the people lived at the temples being the centers of native learning. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, there begins a cleavage between the sacerdotal and the secular interpreters of the Divine Law in Judaism.<sup>48</sup> Bickerman pointed out that by about 190 BCE Ben Sira, a Jewish sage, urges his hearers to honor the priest and to give him his portion according to the Law. He does acknowledge the authority of the High Priest over statutes and judicial affairs, but it is the scribe, who advises the rulers and the assembly in the gate where he sits in the seat of the judge and expounds righteousness and judgment.<sup>49</sup> The role of scribe was therefore increasing in importance.

In both Jerusalem and Rome, the administration of justice was no longer in the

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<sup>45</sup> Idem, 24

<sup>46</sup> Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 67

<sup>47</sup> Idem

<sup>48</sup> Idem, 68

<sup>49</sup> Idem, 68-9

hands of the priests in the third century BCE. Bickerman further quoted the words of Ben Sira indicating that Ben Sira mentions the jurisdiction of the popular assembly in the execution of punishment for adultery. But for most of the time he speaks of the “rulers.” Elias Bickerman commented that He advises his reader: “Gain instruction so that you may serve the potentate.”<sup>50</sup> Ben Sira has in mind the agents of the Macedonian kings such as Zenon, well known on account of recently discovered papyri. As servant of his Greek master, the Jewish scribe becomes a legitimate interpreter of the Divine Law.<sup>51</sup> This is the beginning of the foundation of the exegetical and interpretative role of the scribe.

Moreover, the Chronicler also regards instruction in the Law as the privilege and duty of the Levites and considers the scribes as a class of the Levites.<sup>52</sup> In the royal charter given to Jerusalem in 200 BCE the scribes of the sanctuary form a special and privileged body. The foreign rulers of the Orient needed expert advice as to the laws and customs of their subjects. Bickerman pointed out that Antiochus III's proclamation concerning the ritual arrangements at Jerusalem could not be drafted without the collaboration of Jewish jurists.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the lay scribe, who is powerful in the council of the Greek potentates, became an authority in the Jewish assembly owing to his influence with the foreign master.

Daniel, who explains the secrets and meaning of royal dreams at the Babylonian court, is the ideal scribe as visualized by Ben Sira. On the other hand, the scribe is not only counselor of kings and assemblies, but also a wise man and teacher. Elias Bickerman quoted the words of Ben Sira, “Turn to me, you ignorant,” says Ben Sira, “and tarry in my school”<sup>54</sup> He promises as the fruit of his teaching the acquisition by the pupil of “much silver and gold.” But he gives to his pupil “wisdom, and all wisdom cometh from the Lord.”<sup>55</sup> So his scribe and his school of wisdom are the forerunners of the Pharisaic scholar in the next generation. This Pharisaic scholar regards learning as the highest of human values and teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but is prepared to serve his Master not for the sake of reward. We see here the seed and root for the development of Pharisees exegesis in the early Jewish

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<sup>50</sup> Idem, 69

<sup>51</sup> Idem, 69

<sup>52</sup> II Chron. 34:13

<sup>53</sup> Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees*, 69

<sup>54</sup> Idem, 71

<sup>55</sup> Idem, 71

community.

Most important of all, the work of scribes brought about an important exegetical trend for the next generation. Michael Fishbane described this trend. The traditions and teachings from scribal practice were undoubtedly transmitted orally throughout the biblical period.<sup>56</sup> The interpreted tradition may be regarded as non-Scriptural oral traditions of early Judaism. It is only when these materials achieve literary form that a historical inquiry can examine their developments. A fascinating record of these developments has left its traces in the Massoretic Text (MT) as well as in the other principal textual versions (like the Septuagint, Samaritan, and Peshitta texts). This is central for the present purpose of our study since scribal comments found in these developments are formally exhibiting striking exegetical diversity. Fishbane added a point that they may serve as typological prolegomenon to the interpretations found in inner-biblical legal and aggadic exegesis.<sup>57</sup> It is a primary responsibility of scribes to transcribe the traditum, and scribal practice is necessarily a primary locus for textual interpretation and may therefore serve as a point of departure for an examination of exegesis within the Hebrew Bible as a whole. In sum, scribal practice evokes and marks out the two constituent aspects of tradition: the transmission and reinterpretation of received text and traditions.

### **2.2.5 Textual development and Transmission history of Hebrew Bible**

Shemaryahu Talmon demarcates the period in which the textual development and transmission history of Hebrew Bible is to be discussed. The transmission of the Hebrew text lies between the time of its initial inception (varying from book to book), and its eventual form in the days of Origen.<sup>58</sup> Through this period, we will trace out the exegetical trends associated with textual development and the transmission history of the Hebrew Bible as related to the formation of early Jewish exegesis.

#### **(a) Canonical process varying from book to book**

We may discuss the canonical process with respect to the formation of the various books in the Bible. This is important to understand the exegetical development. Martin Hengel advocated that a period of scripture production

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 23

<sup>57</sup> Idem, 23-24

<sup>58</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 164

and many-faceted exegesis are not separated from each other.<sup>59</sup> During the Second Temple Period, the history of interpretation is also the history of the canon. The formation of the canon of the Hebrew Bible took place in a constant process of interpretation.

Now we can go into the issue of canon. There is common agreement that we should rather refer to the “canonical process”, than simply using the term “canon”. Eugene Ulrich defined the canonical process as follows: “It is the process by which the individual traditions were collected and composed as present books of the Bible, by which books of a similar nature were collected into groupings as sections of our present canon and by which differing parties within Judaism struggled for the supremacy of the section of the canon they believed to be more important (e.g., the Law or the Prophets)”.<sup>60</sup> Another scholar, Sid Leiman, has also offered a definition of “a canonical book”: “A canonical book is a book accepted by Jews as authoritative for religious practice and/or doctrine, and whose authority is binding upon the Jewish people for all generations”.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, such books are to be studied and expounded in private and in public. The issue of canon is both a historical and a theological issue and these two perspectives cannot be either totally fused or totally kept separate. Eugene Ulrich made the claim that the method of composition of the Scriptures is a process which goes through the dialectical development of scripture.<sup>62</sup> This means that the Scripture, which began as a result of experience, was produced through a process of traditions<sup>63</sup> being formulated about that experience and again being reformulated by interpreters of that tradition in dialogue with the experience of their own communities and with that of the larger culture.<sup>64</sup> As a whole, scholars emphasize the developmental nature and the reaction to communal interest as background involved when we deal with the canonical process in relation to the textual development.

It is also believed that canon denotes a closed list. Bruce Metzger says, the

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<sup>59</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 158

<sup>60</sup> Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 52

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Idem, 53-4

<sup>62</sup> Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 52

<sup>63</sup> It refers to James Sander's words “tradition being retold and reshaped faithfully but creativity”. See Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 33

<sup>64</sup> Eugene Ulrich and William G. Thompson, “The Tradition as a Resource in Theological Reflection --- Scripture and the Minister,” in J. D. Whitehead and E. E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) 31-52, esp. 36



process by which the canon was formed “was a task, not only of collecting, but also of sifting and rejecting.”<sup>65</sup> He is speaking of the New Testament, but the same process was at work with respect to the Hebrew Bible. Ulrich echoed and expounded the view that the simple judgment that certain books are binding for one’s community is again a matter of authoritativeness. The reflexive judgment that these books are binding while others are not is a judgment concerning canon.<sup>66</sup>

Ulrich argues that there is no canon as such in Judaism prior to the end of the first century CE or in Christianity prior to the fourth century CE, that it is confusing to speak of an “open canon,” and that “the canonical text” is an imprecise term.<sup>67</sup> Prior to the end of the first century, we do not have a canon in either Judaism or Christianity. We do have a canon-in-the-making but we do not have a finalized canon. We may approve this point by Qumran evidence. Martin Hengel insisted that the Old Testament canon was still open because the Essenes as far as the Christians spirit-inspired revelation is concerned was still continuing. No fixed canon can be ascertained at this stage.<sup>68</sup>

Do we have a canonical list prior to the end of the first century? It depends and varies. We may make a simplification. Torah is surely already included. Most of the Prophets is likely to be included whereas some parts of the Writings may already exist. However, Ulrich believe that the list was not stable.<sup>69</sup> The contemporary believers were not fully conscious of and were not in agreement on this aspect of the sacred texts. It is better to describe the situation this way: there was a category of sacred, authoritative books to which further entries could be added, and this category contained a number of books that were always included and always required to be included. The contents of “the Law” seem clear: the five books of Moses. However, there is still some controversy about the contents of the Prophets. Barr recommend that, “instead of the three-stage organization familiar to us, there probably was for a considerable time a two-stage conception, using only the two terms, the Torah and the “Prophets”.<sup>70</sup> This view will be further discussed later.

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<sup>65</sup> Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 7. Note Athanasius’s directive (cited by Metzger, 212): “Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away from them.”

<sup>66</sup> Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 57

<sup>67</sup> Idem, 56

<sup>68</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their Interpretation in Second Temple Judaism*, 159

<sup>69</sup> Idem, 60

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 61

## (b) The Tripartite Division of the Old Testament

The three-stage canonization theory comprises the final canonization of the Law at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah at 400 BCE<sup>71</sup>, the Prophets about 200 BCE and the Hagiographa by the rabbinic academy of Jamnia (Yabne) 90 CE. H. Graetz apparently was the first to attribute to Jamnia the role of 'closing' the canon: Both the Law and the Prophets were confirmed by the assembly of Nehemiah since the departure of the Samaritans was occasioned in part by the introduction of readings from the Prophets. The majority of the Hagiographa were confirmed by, a rabbinic assembly in 65 CE and the final two books, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, by the school at Jamnia.<sup>72</sup>

Undoubtedly, this theory that the three divisions of the Hebrew Old Testament represented three successive acts or stages of final canonization was increasingly attractive to nineteenth-century scholars.<sup>73</sup> They had consensus that a collection of the Prophets was probably made by Ezra at the return from the Exile and added to the existing sacred Law. Afterwards the collection of the Hagiographa was completed during the period of Persian supremacy.<sup>74</sup> It also rapidly gained and continued to have widespread acceptance.<sup>75</sup> The Torah received its final recognition by the fifth century BCE and the Prophets by 200 BCE.

However, there are some reservations to this theory. One of the scholars, W. R. Smith, had some criticism on Graetz's work on the formation of the Hagiographa. He stated that the work of Graetz is 'a model of confused reasoning.'<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the third collection (of Hagiographa) was formed after the second division, had been closed by a sifting process not easily explained.<sup>77</sup> Besides some reservation against the three-stage theory, there is also much opposition against it. The scholars made some telling points and

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Neh 8-10

<sup>72</sup> H. Graetz, *Kohelet*, Leipzig 1871, 147-173; However, Graetz, who was followed by S. Zeitlin, offered only a makeshift reconstruction designed to accommodate his first century CE dating of Ecclesiastes and the Maccabean dating of other Hagiographa (12f., 148). Cf. R.T. Beckwith, 'The Formation of the Hebrew Bible', *Compendia*, II, 1 (1988), 58-61

<sup>73</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 37

<sup>74</sup> For criticism of the nineteenth-century consensus cf. B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia, 1982, 52ff.

<sup>75</sup> G. Wildeboer, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, London 1895, 144; F. Buhl, *Canon and Text of the Old Testament*, Edinburgh 1892, 9-12, 25 ff.; H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, London 1909, 105, 119

<sup>76</sup> W. R. Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, (London 1892), 169

<sup>77</sup> *Idem*, 179

showed a commendable caution.<sup>78</sup> They demonstrate that we have no positive evidence when or by whom the sacred books were collected and arranged. There is only little evidence for the hypothesis that the second division of the canon grew with each prophet adding the book until Malachi completed the collection.

E. Earle Ellis pointed out that the three-stage theory was lacking recognition.<sup>79</sup> First, it was not based on concrete historical evidence but on inferences. It was criticized that it was only based superficially on the estimate of the evidence of Josephus, Ben Sira and the academy of Jamnia (Yabne). However, the testimony of Josephus in 96 CE to a universal, clearly defined and long settled canon<sup>80</sup> contradicts any theory of an undetermined canon in first-century Judaism. Second, for certain books it presupposed a late dating that especially since the discovery of the Qumran library can no longer be entertained.

With the failure of the three-stage canonization theory, at least in its traditional form, the origin and meaning of the tripartite division of the Hebrew Bible remain a very open question. F. F. Bruce rightly describes recent developments as ‘the collapse of the century-old consensus.’<sup>81</sup> The following suggestions may contribute to a more satisfactory answer. Arrangements other than the tripartite were known in Judaism. Ellis prompted that the Septuagint preserves a fourfold division --- Pentateuch, Historical Writings, Poetic (Wisdom) Literature, Prophets --- that is probably pre-Christian, and other sources indicate that a tripartite pattern was not a fixed or necessary conception.<sup>82</sup> We may witness that the later Masoretic Bible in a number of ancient manuscripts shows a fourfold division: Pentateuch, Megillot, Prophets, Hagiographa.<sup>83</sup>

However, the tripartite scheme was well recognized by the Jewish community. It was attested by Ben Sira, Josephus and the rabbinic tradition and perhaps by the community at Qumran, the New Testament and Philo. It was apparently

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<sup>78</sup> W. J. Beecher, ‘The Alleged Triple Canon of the Old Testament,’ *JBL* 15 (1986), 118-128; W. H. Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament: the Canon*, London 1899, 19-118

<sup>79</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 38

<sup>80</sup> James Barr, *Holy Scripture* (Philadelphia 1983) 49-74, 51. He views ‘canonization’ as explicit acts of choosing and listing some books and excluding others concludes that early Judaism had no ‘canon’. He seems to confuse the concept with a particular terminology and process.

<sup>81</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove IL 1988) 9; For attempts to reconstruct the history of the reception of the Old Testament canon cf. Childs, 54-57

<sup>82</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 44-5

<sup>83</sup> *Idem*, 45

the prevailing form in which it was used in first century CE Judaism. The prevalence of the tripartite system is upheld because it seems to have arisen from the role of Scripture in the cultic community, in the synagogue readings if the activity and traditional picture of Ezra are accurate guides in this matter.

From the first century CE and probably much earlier the Law and the Prophets were read in the synagogue every Sabbath on a systematic basis.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the Hagiographa were used only on special occasions or in the case of the Psalms for different parts of the service. Certain rabbis rearranged the Masoretic Bible into four divisions 'for liturgical or ritual purposes,'<sup>85</sup> and others who at an earlier time transferred two of the Megillot (Ruth and Lamentations) and the book of Daniel from the Prophets to the Hagiographa may have been motivated by similar considerations.<sup>86</sup> That is if Ruth, Lamentations and Daniel were excluded from the cycle of weekly readings or were designated for reading only on special occasions such as holy days, this would on the above analogy have resulted in their transferal to the Hagiographa.

Ellis affirmed the importance of cultic use in the classification of the canon.<sup>87</sup> Jewish tradition associates Ezra and the priests all with the establishment of the public reading of Scripture and with the ordering of the canon. If it in part represents a later idealized picture, it supports nonetheless an early and close connection between the canon and its cultic usage.<sup>88</sup> It also supports the supposition that between the time of Ezra (400 BCE) and of some letters and epistles from Qumran (150 BCE) and the prologue of Ben Sira (132 BCE), when the tripartite canon is first attested, priestly circles or another body or bodies related to them, classified the biblical books to accord with their use in worship. When the use varied, these circles apparently reclassified the affected book within the canonical divisions - a relatively simple procedure before the advent of the codex. They thereby maintained the relationship established by Ezra between the canonical structure and the hermeneutical context.

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<sup>84</sup> Acts 13:15, 27; 15:21; Luke 4:16

<sup>85</sup> Ginsburg, 3

<sup>86</sup> Anti-apocalyptic tendencies in post-70 rabbinic Judaism could have occasioned the transfer of Daniel to the Hagiographa and consequently its removal from the Haftara readings. E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 45

<sup>87</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 46

<sup>88</sup> Cf. G. Ostborn, *Cult and Canon* (Uppsala, 1950) 15ff., 96F.

### (c) Oral tradition and written transmission of textual development

Shemaryahu Talmon appropriately delineates the initial stage of the biblical literature as an oral phase, which precedes written documentation.<sup>89</sup> Jacob Neusner pointed out that the oral tradition refers to the memorized Torah. It was transmitted from master to disciple, from God to Moses, Moses to Aaron, Aaron to Joshua, and so on down until it was ultimately recorded in the written documents produced by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries CE. These compilations then claim to preserve the original oral tradition.<sup>90</sup> Rabbinic tradition holds that the Oral Torah contained a revelation of all possible interpretations of the written Torah to Moses.<sup>91</sup> We may witness the trend from the relative preponderance of the two vehicles of transmission of literary material, the oral and the written through the development of Hebrew text.

Talmon described the transition of the process as a gradual one.<sup>92</sup> The period of the Babylonian Exile after the destruction of the First Temple, i.e. the middle of the sixth century BCE could be taken as a rough dividing line. The definite shift of emphasis from oral to written transmission of the biblical books would thus have become clearly apparent during the period of the Return, i.e. at the end of the sixth and in the fifth century BCE. From a wider historical viewpoint, it may be termed the Persian period. These considerations indicate that social and political phenomena contributed to this development.

During the early third century BCE, the written transmission of biblical literature gradually started to gain importance. With this transition went along the compilation and final fixation of the text. This brought about firstly the issue of preserving and handing down the text as faithful as possible and secondly interpreting the text. A new era of basically different literary standards and norms had begun.

During the period under review, the Jewish scribes and sages decided on and carried out the minute fixation of the consonantal text of the scriptures in the original Hebrew tongue. At this stage, we may also witness the favorable conditions for various kinds of exegetical developments. First the absence of

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<sup>89</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 164

<sup>90</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism" (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005) 6

<sup>91</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

<sup>92</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 165

vowels meant that many a Hebrew consonant group could be differently pronounced<sup>93</sup> and from this resulted the fact that a variety of meanings could be attached to one and the same word in the text. When ultimately vowels were introduced into the Hebrew text of the Bible, these pronunciation variants sometimes became the bases of *variae lectiones*.<sup>94</sup>

The lack of any system of inter-punctuation in written Hebrew at that time was another factor, which gave rise to different interpretations of many passages. These diverging interpretations may also in the end turn up as variants in versions, which are based on fully inter-punctuated manuscripts.<sup>95</sup> The full establishing of these features of the text, which are complementary to the basic Hebrew consonantal text, namely the vowel system, inter-punctuation, and the subdivision of the text into paragraphs, was carried out later on by the various schools of Massoretes, when vocalisers and inter-punctuations flourished in the last quarter of the first millennium CE.<sup>96</sup>

The Massoretic notes found in the margin of present day editions of the Hebrew Bible are a collection of official rabbinic critical and informational notes on the Hebrew text of the Bible. Jacob Weingreen interprets the Hebrew noun as an inflected form of the verb *masar*, meaning “handed over” or “delivered”<sup>97</sup>. *Massoreth* means “that which “tradition” has handed on from one generation to another. This collection of textual notes is attributed to the rabbinic authorities of Tiberias in the seventh and eighth centuries CE who are designated as “the keepers of the traditions”. From this Hebrew word *Massoreth*, the term *Massoretes* was coined to denote the Tiberian textual authorities and the adjective *massoretic* to indicate the traditional and authorized recension of the Hebrew Bible, which has come down to us from them.

Jacob Weingreen emphasized that the Massoretes were not innovators in providing critical and informational notes on the text of the Hebrew Bible. Their contribution rather represents the orderly arrangement of details - the culmination of a literary process, which was in operation centuries earlier. Therefore, this rabbinic preoccupation with the text of the Hebrew Bible may

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<sup>93</sup> The vowels had been called *matres lectionis* in the text to help them with correct pronunciation.

<sup>94</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 165

<sup>95</sup> Idem, 160

<sup>96</sup> Idem

<sup>97</sup> The Latin equivalent is *trado*, from which the English word “tradition” comes. See Jacob Weingreen, *Introduction to the Critical Study of the Text of the Hebrew Bible*, 11

be traced back stage by stage at least to the late post-exilic period of the history of Israel.<sup>98</sup> Weingreen found records in the Talmud, which indicate an established tradition in history, which culminated in these Talmudic records.<sup>99</sup> We therefore have evidence of this kind of literary activity already during the formative years of the Hebrew Bible, which we can even be traced back to the period antedating the Greek version, the Septuagint that is before the third to second centuries BCE. The antiquity of this literary process becomes evident from the presence in the texts of both the Hebrew Bible and of the Septuagint incorporating textual notes. As conclusion, the tradition brought about in late post-exilic period may mix with exegetical direction and tendency and finally shape the final text of Hebrew Bible.

We now go to the final phase in the textual history of the Old Testament. It may be reckoned to extend from the end of the last century BCE to the beginning of the third century CE. It is regarded as a vigorous process of textual standardization, which affected practically all renderings. Shemaryahu Talmon urged us to take into account the impact of socio-political events on the history of the text, especially the emergence of Christianity and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.<sup>100</sup> The finalization of the rift between the Synagogue and the Church was incomparably more important and decisive than any preceding clash of the main stream of Judaism with deviating movements. The insistence of both Jews and Christians on basing the cardinal tenets of their beliefs on the sacred scriptures necessitated a clear definition of the text on which these claims were to be grounded. Further, the destruction of the Second Temple seriously impaired the social cohesion of Jewry. Where the temple had previously ensured some unity of the text or at least had prevented its dissolution it now divided into innumerable streamlets of textual tradition.

The existence of quotations differing widely from each other in rabbinic writings and therefore differing in their exegetical comments as well, particularly in Midrash literature, indicates the use of texts deviating from the reading of the later Massoretic text. This fact not only deals a severe blow to the so-called *Ur-text* hypothesis, but also to the less rigorous “one recension”<sup>101</sup> theory.

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<sup>98</sup> Idem, 11-12

<sup>99</sup> Idem, 12

<sup>100</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 176

<sup>101</sup> “One Recension” theory refers to a development that the whole range of variants leads to the simple recognition that all surviving codices are relatively late in relation to the *originals*. They all represent one recension and all stem from one source. Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Old Testament Text,” in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and

Rival theories for these differences have been presented. All of these set out to account for the co-existence of divergent text traditions of the Old Testament in the pre-Christian rabbinic and the early Christian period, both in Hebrew as well as in Aramaic, and also in Greek and possibly also in Latin translations. Shemaryahu Talmon identified three textual developments in this phase of the tradition.<sup>102</sup> They are illustrated in:

- (a) divergent textual traditions exhibited in quotations in rabbinical literature;
- (b) parallel Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch. It stems from a period later than the one under discussion here. They are most probably from pre-Origenic prototypes. We refer here to the Targum Onkelos (which possibly originated in Babylonia, and certainly was redacted there), Pseudo-Jonathan, of Palestinian origin, and a third Aramaic version which until recently had been unknown but only now has been proved to represent in fact a fully fledged Jerusalem Aramaic translation;
- (c) the propagation of diverse Greek translation exhibited in an almost codified form in the parallel columns of the *Hexapla*, and sometimes preserved in the form of variant-quotations from the Old Testament in the Apocrypha, the New Testament and the writings of the early Church Fathers, and also in Jewish hellenistic culture, especially in the works of Flavius Josephus.

There is common consensus among scholars that the further back the textual tradition of the Old Testament is traced, i.e. the older the biblical manuscripts examined are and the more ancient the records which come to the knowledge of scholars proves to be, the wider is the overall range of textual divergence between them.<sup>103</sup> The existing variants available to us cannot be simply explained as having arisen solely from the cumulative effect of imperfect copying and faulty recopying of the text over many centuries. Rather, we may explain this phenomenon by referring to the nature of a *textus receptus*. The later on accepted Masoretic *textus receptus* was the result of concerted efforts by rabbinic academy, especially that of Jamnia. The eventual emergence of a commonly used *textus receptus* should be conceived of as the end result of a protracted process, which culminated in a *post factum* acclamation during the first or probably at the latest in the second century CE. The already extant form of each single rendering in turn marked the apex of a long chain of developments. In the course of history, however, divergent text-traditions had

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Shemaryahu Talmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 14

<sup>102</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 176-7

<sup>103</sup> *Idem*, 162-3



been progressively abolished.<sup>104</sup>

## 2.3 The “Early” Stage of Jewish exegesis

### 2.3.1 Farrar’s historical approach

To be more systematic, we start out with the problem of dividing the exegetical process into periods from a scholarly historical approach. Most influential here is the work of Farrar. As far as the long history of hermeneutics is concerned, scholars had divided it into different historical developmental phases. Frederic Farrar proposed a seven-period system of biblical interpretation in his famous work *History of Interpretation*.<sup>105</sup> His classification of the time framework seems to be basically historical and chronological. There are seven main periods of Biblical interpretation. Roughly speaking, the *Rabbinic* phase lasted for 700 years, from the days of Ezra (180 BCE) to those of Rab Abina (498 CE). The *Alexandrian*, which flourished from the epoch of Aristobulus (BCE 180) to the death of Philo, and which was practically continued in the Christian Schools of Alexandria, from Pantaenus (CE 200) down to Pierius. The *Patristic*, which in various channels prevailed from the days of Clement of Rome (CE 95) through the Dark Ages to the *Glossa Interlinearis* of Anselm of Laon (CE 1117).

The classification of the Rabbinic period coincides with the Patristic period under Farrar’s scheme. This delineation of time closely resembles the rabbinic and Jewish period of interpretation. This is why we can make a comparison of interpretation strategies on the book of Ruth in this shared social and cultural framework and context. The dating and specific delineation of patristic literature will be discussed in Chapter Five.

However, Frederic Farrar’s classification still needs to be modified and clarified some more. Moises Silva states that the most influential work in English has been Frederic W. Farrar’s *History of interpretation*. However, he criticizes his

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<sup>104</sup> Talmon cited the creation of the Septuagint as an example. The creation of the Septuagint as portrayed in the pseudepigraphical *Letter of Aristeas*, the compaction of the Aramaic Targums, the eventual forming of the Massoretic text and also the creation of the Samaritan Version are all the crowning event of parallel processes of textual tradition. The Samaritan Version is the crowning event in a process of textual unification. These processes had been set on foot by the needs of socio-religious organizations such as —the Synagogue, the Samaritan community and the Christian Church. See Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Old Testament Text*, 178

<sup>105</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *History of interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961) 12

work as “impressive and learned but also very misleading.”<sup>106</sup> His criticism is mainly aimed at Farrar’s negative approach to the history of interpretation. Farrar sets no connection between the periods of biblical interpretation. Indeed, we should be alarmed that there are limitations to his scheme of chronological development of biblical interpretation. The usual chronological approach is convenient and for certain purposes pedagogically more effective. Unfortunately, Silva believed that surveys of this type lead to a somewhat atomistic and item-by-item description that fails to uncover some of the more interesting and suggestive connections.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the criticism, Farrar’s theory on the classified and chronological nature of the development does still provide a framework for the comparative study of Jewish and Patristic literature because Jewish commentary and Patristic literature fall in the same period of development and share the same political and socio-cultural environment. In this research, we lay emphasis on the continuity of social and cultural influences on two types of biblical interpretation, both the Jewish and Patristic ones.

With regard to Jewish commentary concerned, modern scholars have made a great contribution to the delineation of the periods of the rabbinic texts.<sup>108</sup> They believed that determining the stages of how rabbinic texts evolved as part of an ancient tradition, embraces identifying specific generations of rabbis with the emergence of particular texts. For example, texts in the Mishnah are identified with Rabbi Judah the Prince. Furthermore, many texts cite the names of important rabbis in connection with specific opinions. Some modern scholars treat such attributions as historically accurate and take their attributions at face value. Other modern scholars rather evaluate these texts, in terms of the historical evolution of rabbinic literature or as apologetics by the later rabbinic elite.<sup>109</sup> Despite the problems involved in historical

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<sup>106</sup> Moises Silva, *Has the church misread the Bible*, 32

<sup>107</sup> Idem

<sup>108</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 122

<sup>109</sup> The “historical” approach to rabbinic literature would be represented in the writings of S. Safrai ed., *The Literature of the Sages, Part 1*, *Compendia rerum Iudaicarum and Novum Testamentum*, section two (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). The minimalist approach is taken by the school of Jacob Neusner, “The Use of the Mishnah for the History of Judaism Prior to the Time of the Mishnah: A Methodological Note,” *JSJ* 11 (1980): 177-85, and in his many books. For a survey of the problem, one may consult the summary, “Handling Rabbinic Texts: The Problem of Method,” in September, *Introduction*, 45-55. Stemberger also provides a *status questionis* discussion of the redaction and textual histories of the major texts of rabbinic Judaism.

reconstruction of rabbinic history up to the eleventh century, it is possible to describe genres of rabbinic literature in their chronological sequence. In order to simplify the discussion we shall assign them to the eras, which the medieval rabbis utilized when they described them. The work of Stemberger in the bibliography will provide guidance for the discussions of rabbinic chronology by modern scholars.<sup>110</sup>

As said before, the continuity from the Second Temple period to the early Jewish period is clearly witnessed. David Dockery also elaborated this point and said that, “the developments in early Christian interpretation, noting both continuities and discontinuities were experienced”.<sup>111</sup> As stated above we are of opinion that Jewish and Christian exegesis followed more or less the same trends in the same periods. This means that continuity refers to the previous ages and periods whether social or cultural. Both impose influences on biblical interpretation. This causes the history of the interpretation to be continuous. The period of time before the “early” phase of exegesis imposes some variables that all affect the existing era of interpretation. The previous era surely contributes to the tradition and the presupposition of the commentators. On the other hand, discontinuity means that a certain period or age, has its own distinctive features that are different from the previous period. Dockery’s work attempts to look at the present by also looking at the past. His approach is to employ a historical examination of the use of the Bible in the early church to elucidate the contemporary hermeneutical task in order to help us unfold the meaning of Scripture for the contemporary reader.<sup>112</sup> It is fair to suppose that the development of early Jewish rabbinic interpretation can be the same as Christian interpretation because they share the same socio-cultural framework and history as framework within a specific set of time. Continuity is a main feature of the historical approach to exegetical development. Frederic Farrar also shared Dockery’s view for the study of the interpretation with regard to the view that a certain age should learn from the past.<sup>113</sup>

### 2.3.2 The age before Nehemiah

The time frame of the early Jewish period is now discussed. It starts with the

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<sup>110</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, 122

<sup>111</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 16

<sup>112</sup> Idem, 16-17

<sup>113</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *History of interpretation*, 15

early age before Nehemiah. We should make clear how “early” is defined and delineated. A historical and developmental perspective is used as methodology. We first define the early stage of Jewish commentaries by comparing it to the time frame of patristic literature.

The early stage of Jewish tradition urged for a type of hermeneutics, in which its tradition could be upheld and re-interpreted for each following generation of Jews. By the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Jewish interpretation started to standardize after a long process and time of development. We may describe the foundation of Judaism, in terms of “revelation” (Written Torah) and “tradition” (Oral Law). Concerning the concept of revelation, Gerald Bray states that, “the Jewish tradition is distinguished from the great religions of humankind by two fundamental characteristics.”<sup>114</sup> First, it is monotheistic. This means that there is one God who is the creator of the universe and who is sovereign over everything in the created order. Second, it is scriptural, believing that this God has revealed his will in a written text, which can be read, studied and applied by those who believe in him.<sup>115</sup>

With the reference to the first aspect of monotheistic sovereignty, the laws are seen as having full divine authority. They exert moral rules on those who interpret and receive them. In terms of the second nature of written tradition, the public character of a written revelation forms the basis for the community of Israel. It is always possible for individuals to read and interpret the written revelation in their own fashion. This is what actually happens to those who were literate in the Israelite community. Moreover, it also served as a legacy of each generation of interpreters long after their theories have come and gone. Gerald Bray emphasized the applicability of the text in a communal situation. This is also the case with the Jewish community. The text itself would be ready to speak anew to the next generation with the same freshness it originally had in the past.<sup>116</sup> James Kugel also echoed this relevance texts have to the community's readers. Kugel's assumption shared by all ancient interpreters was that “Scripture constitutes one great Book of Instruction, and as such is a fundamentally *relevant* text.”<sup>117</sup> The biblical figures were held up as models of conduct and their stories regarded as a guide given to later human beings for

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<sup>114</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 18

<sup>115</sup> See also the four assumptions of James Kugel for the ancient interpreters' own understanding of Scripture. James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 14-19

<sup>116</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 18

<sup>117</sup> James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 15

leading their own lives. Moreover, biblical prophecies were similarly read as relevant for the interpreter and his audience.

The age of early hermeneutics started before the final canonization of the Scriptures. From about 500 BCE commentaries and interpretations in writing started to appear in which it can be assumed that an authoritative body of Scriptures had already existed in some or another form. Bray made a conclusive statement about these writings that they were “the accumulation of rabbinic sages’ interpretation of the sacred texts, that were not intended to be contributions to that sacred literature, but were commentaries on it.”<sup>118</sup> They were not continuing the scriptural tradition itself but rather functioned as parallel literature to that tradition.

Scholars indicated the vivid exegetical features of the Jewish community. Nahum Sarna states that the sacred text can yield a multiplicity of meanings when we carefully interpret it. The full richness of rabbinic exegesis cannot be expressed through a single body of doctrine or by any unified system that is logically self-consistent. To the contrary, the intrinsic and endless variety of interpretations reinforced the reality of the divine inspiration behind the text. The sages of the Talmud vividly expressed the matter this way:

*The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed: “Behold, My word is like fire --- declares the Lord ---- and like a hammer that shatters rock” (Jer. 23:29).*

From the text Jer. 23:29, just as a hammer shatters rock into numerous splinters, so may a single biblical verse yield a multiplicity of meaning.<sup>119</sup> This concept is expressed in several ways. It is stated as: “There are seventy facets to the Torah.”<sup>120</sup> The number “seventy” of course is being typological and communicating comprehensiveness. Another manifestation of this phenomenon of creating a multiplicity of meanings is shown in the words of the Tanna Ben Bag-Bag, “Turn it over, turn it over, for everything is in it.”<sup>121</sup> In fact, for more than two thousand years, the Hebrew Bible has been accepted and studied by Jews as the seminal body of religious literature, which has been filtered through a continuous process of rabbinic interpretation and reinterpretation within the community of practice and faith whence its

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<sup>118</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 47

<sup>119</sup> TB *Sanh.* 34a, cf. *Shab.* 88b

<sup>120</sup> Num. R. *Naso*, 13:15

<sup>121</sup> M. *Avot* 5:26

immediate authority derived.

### 2.3.3 The historical period of exegetical influence

The Second Temple period is an undeniably important phase in the affect it had on the formation and development of early Jewish exegesis. It may be divided into the Nehemiah phase (Soferim) and the Knesset Gedolah phase. The latter phase started in 174 BCE and ended with the time of the Talmud. Initially there were five “Zugot” that lasted up to 34 CE. This was the time of the Pharisees and other groups like the Saduccees, Qumran community and Essenes. The sectarian development will also be included in this section. After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE the time of the Tannaim and of Jabneh followed (40-200 CE) leading to the forming of the Mishna. Then followed the time of the Eretz Israel Amariam (200-500CE) with its different Rabbis and their followers at Tiberias and Sepphoris. Then follows the Babylonian Amaraim at different places like Surah and Pumbedita, paralleled by the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud.

#### (a) Second Temple Period (516 BCE-70 CE)

The second temple was inaugurated in 516 BCE. This temple was, destroyed by the Roman Titus in 70 CE. We refer to this time as the Second Temple Period (516 BCE-70 CE). It was an important period imposing tremendous effect on the formation of early Jewish exegesis. Undeniably, the developmental process is a continuous one. Early Jewish exegetical method was therefore not a sudden innovation. The scholar, Jacob Weingreen, witnessed this point. He illustrated that there are distinct points of similarity between earlier expository notes and certain categories of exposition found later in the Talmud, being a product of Jewish exegesis. He points to a continuity of pattern from the earlier to the later.<sup>122</sup> He further elaborated the pattern of continuity as a basic nature of Jewish exegetical development. He believed that the third century CE Mishna by Rabbi Judah did not imply sudden innovations of editorial activity. It rather marks the culmination of a cultural

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<sup>122</sup> His main theme is that certain attitudes, practices, and regulations, which found their mature expression in the Talmud and which have been generally regarded on that account as Rabbinic in character and origin, are in fact to be detected in the literature of the Old Testament already. Jacob Weingreen, “Exposition in the Old Testament and in Rabbinic Writings” in *Promise and Fulfillment: essays presented to Professor S. H. Hooke in celebration of his ninetieth birthday, 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 1964*, Society for Old Testament Society, F. F. Bruce edi. (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1963), 187

process, which stretches far back into the history of Israel.<sup>123</sup> We can trace this continuity of exegetical development back to the Second Temple period and even the early Jewish period.

There is common consensus that the Second Temple period is an important period for the formation of the Hebrew Bible, knowledge of which simultaneously enrich our knowledge of the development of early Jewish exegesis. Though scholars differ on the exact period, all are agreed that we are dealing here with a specific period in Jewish tradition.

Eduard Nielsen started his work with the discussion of oral tradition during the post-exilic period. He stated that the written Old Testament is a creation of the post-exilic Jewish community; of what existed earlier than that undoubtedly only a small part was in fixed written form. That is to say that the Old Testament as written literature may in all probability be ascribed to the period between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the time of the Maccabees".<sup>124</sup> Undeniably, this period gives us more information about the relationship between oral tradition and the written record of the Old Testament. In turn, this relationship will impose influence on the form of early Jewish exegesis. This issue will be discussed in a later part of the chapter.

## **(b) Since Ezra**

Why do we start with the post-exilic period? First, Jewish tradition attributes the introduction of script to Ezra, about 430 BCE. Ernst Wurthwein implied that it was a postexilic innovation.<sup>125</sup> Accordingly Jewish tradition tells how the Torah was first given in square script, but because of Israel's sin the script had been changed. In Ezra's time the original form was restored. Though this was obviously apologetic and without any historical value, it clearly reflects the awareness of a change of script in the postexilic period. Moreover, Wurthwein pointed out that most probably the Jews' gradual adoption of the Aramaic

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<sup>123</sup> Though he emphasized this Mishnaic-type tradition as consistent with the functioning of an organized social, political and religious order during the pre-exilic period, which is not my main concern here, his work had to prove the validity of continuity for the significance of early Jewish exegesis. Jacob Weingreen, "Oral Torah and Written Records" in *Holy Book and Holy Tradition*, F. F. Bruce & E. G. Rupp ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 56

<sup>124</sup> Eduard Nielsen, "Oral Tradition Studies" in *Biblical Theology* No. 11 (London: SCM Press, 1954), 39

<sup>125</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* translated by Erroll F. Rhodes, Second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 2

language, the lingua franca of the ancient Near East, was followed by their adoption of the Aramaic script so that by way of influence it was in this script that the sacred writings were first written and only eventually in the square script which developed from it.<sup>126</sup>

The entire life of Israel was reorganized around Scripture, which began to be codified into a canon of sacred Scripture. Renee Bloch witnesses to this essential event where the most remarkable activity of this period, which conditioned the whole future and the entire structure of the religious life of Judaism, was the definitive form given to the Pentateuch as a sacred text having the value of a law for the whole community.<sup>127</sup>

The postexilic period is an important period for the interpretation of ancient Scripture. The Jews had been in exile from approximately 587 to 538 BCE. Being away from their homeland and no longer having any temple or cultic center in Jerusalem, they had to concentrate on the preservation of and reflection on their literary legacy. This introduced a new phase of conserving texts and reflecting exegetically on these religious traditions. This new type of activity was continued when they were, informed by the Persians in 538 BCE that they were free to return home. This right was granted to them by an edict of the Persian king Cyrus. As a result, this new distinctive approach to interpretation was developed and refined further when they were back home again. There began to develop in the following centuries individual interpretations of biblical laws, stories, and prophecies slowly accumulated and coalesced into a great body of lore that came to be known widely throughout Israel. James Kugel gives more attention to these ancient biblical interpretations found in books that did not end up being included in the Jewish canon. These books include expansive retellings of biblical stories, first-person narratives put in the mouths of biblical heroes, pseudonymous apocalypses, the sayings and proverbs of ancient sages. Biblical commentaries, sermons and the like were composed from the third century BCE through to the first century CE.<sup>128</sup> These old texts allow us to reconstruct in some detail the way the Bible was interpreted and understood during this crucial period.

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<sup>126</sup> Idem

<sup>127</sup> Renee Bloch, "Midrash" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice*, ed. William Scott Green (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 35

<sup>128</sup> James L. Kugel, "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Sage" in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, James L. Kugel ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001) 17. See also the detailed illustration of these examples in Fishbane's work *Biblical interpretation in Israel*, 46



Why do indicate this phase as ending in 70 CE? We need to trace the formation of present available fragment of the Old Testament back to about 100 CE. Originally, the Hebrew Bible was a mere consonantal text, as it is preserved in medieval manuscripts forming the basis of our present editions. According to the older theory of Ernst Würthwein a great Jewish revival occurred, in the decades after the catastrophe of 70 CE in which the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. In this time, the canonical status of certain disputed books of the Old Testament was defined at the school of Jamnia, in the late first century CE. Moreover, standardized text of the Scriptures was more or less established at that period.<sup>129</sup> Such a fixed text became a necessity, not only to gain uniformity on what exactly was the contents of holy scriptures, but also in distinction to the opinion of so-called “minni'im” (heretics) and the Christian collection. Thus the standard text of about 100 CE should be considered the result of historical developments following the fall of Jerusalem. As already stated this period of influence during the, Second Temple Period should also be seen as the development of the still earlier Jewish period.

## 2.4 Jewish documents and groups in the Second Temple Period

From the time of the Second Temple Period (516 BCE – 70 CE), a series of Jewish documents can be identified that contributed to the formation of early Jewish exegesis. In this part, we focus on the exegetical development indispensably linked with the political, social and cultural context of that age. As previously set out in my thematic statement, the social and political changes undoubtedly impose their effect on interpreters when the process of exegesis is carried out.

### 2.4.1 Targum

#### (a) Origin, dating and character

The word *targum* signifies “translation” and derives from the verb *tirgem* meaning “to translate”, “to explain”, or “to read out”(Ezra 4:7). It is a denominate of *turgeman* (interpreter) to which an Akkadian origin is generally attributed.<sup>130</sup> In rabbinic usage *tirgem* is employed to designate a version

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<sup>129</sup> Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 12

<sup>130</sup> Steven T. Katz ed., *The Cambridge History of Judaism* Vol. Two (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),563

translated from the Hebrew into any language. This period is the Targumim or Aramaic translations of Hebrew scripture, which were read alongside the sacred texts and used to interpret it to the people.

It is known that in postexilic Judaism Hebrew ceased to be used as the common language and was gradually replaced by Aramaic, which had become the official written language of the western Persian Empire. Aramaic remained the common language from Egypt to the borders of India for the next twelve hundred years. Aramaic was displaced by Arabic after the Arab conquest of the seventh century CE.<sup>131</sup> Aramaic gained gradual importance after the post-exilic period. James Kugel stated that Aramaic was the language used not only in diplomatic circles but also in the whole host of activities that confer a culture's prestige.<sup>132</sup> John Bowker also provided the reasons for this change.<sup>133</sup> The Jews accepted Aramaic partly for practical reasons, but also because Aramaic and Hebrew are closely related to each other belonging to the family of Semitic languages. Furthermore, as early as the book of Nehemiah there is a query that Hebrew is inadequately known<sup>134</sup>. It is also obvious that some later parts of the Bible are written in Aramaic (cf Dan 2:4b-7:28). However, Hebrew was of course still understood and used in intellectual circles especially among theologians. Bowker continued to defend the position that Hebrew was still an important language in the Jewish community. The Jews never lost sight of the fact that Hebrew was the language of revelation. The Scrolls recovered from the Dead Sea area indicate how important Hebrew remained to be.<sup>135</sup>

The dating of these Targumim, a collection of Targum, is extremely controversial. Most scholars agree that they contain very early material. Therefore, it is possible to regard them as typical of exegesis in the Tannaitic period. Gerald Bray concluded that recent research has shown that at the time 538-70 the absence of the Targumim may help in dating them more

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<sup>131</sup> Stephen M. Weylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah: The Jewish Way of Reading the Sacred Scriptures* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005) 3-4.

<sup>132</sup> James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, Library of Early Christianity 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986) 29

<sup>133</sup> John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish interpretation of Scripture* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1969) 3

<sup>134</sup> "In those days also I saw Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." (Neh. 13:23-24)

<sup>135</sup> John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 3

accurately.<sup>136</sup> Though the exact date cannot be confirmed yet, targumic translation was done at an early date and certainly pre-Christian. In addition, Ernst Wurthwein believed that the Jewish tradition associating it with Ezra (cf. Neh. 8:8) should well be correct.<sup>137</sup> In Nehemiah 8:8 Richard N. Longenecker lays out the purpose of the interpreters “to give the sense and make the people understand the meaning”.<sup>138</sup> This involved two activities, reading the word of God and interpreting it for application to Israel of life. They also indicate the fundamental principles of biblical studies in Judaism. The dynamic relationship between concern for the sacred character of the words, their transmission to the next generation and their application to the exigencies of life have, been the source of renewal for Judaism throughout its history.<sup>139</sup> Charles Kannengiesser had made the logical conclusion that it is the source of development of biblical interpretation in Judaism.<sup>140</sup>

However, Steven Katz pointed out that the meaning “to give sense” is controversial. Some maintained that at that point in time a translation was not called for. However, in W. Rudolph’s commentary, he adopts the opinion of H. H. Schaefer, who understands this as a translation into Aramaic.<sup>141</sup> This term indicates the practice of the chancelleries of the Persian empire of translating an Aramaic document into the language of the country or vice versa. We may therefore suppose that a certain kind of translation went hand-in-hand with this conscious effort to put the Torah within the grasp of the people as a whole.

Now we go into the function of Targum. In the worship service, Wurthwein rightly described the nature of Targum as being only oral, not written in a scroll.<sup>142</sup> This was because the rabbis wanted to preserve its distinction from the sacred text, which was written in Hebrew, and being read in the Synagogue. The development of the synagogue liturgy included a public reading from Scripture. The Scripture was read aloud with translations given verse by verse. As Targum was a collection of these interpretative paraphrases or explanatory translations, Wurthwein pointed out that the rabbis had a habitual practice to “incorporate frequently later theological concepts and their own *haggadoth* for

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<sup>136</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*,50

<sup>137</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*,79

<sup>138</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999),8

<sup>139</sup> Cf. note 3 & 4

<sup>140</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*,120

<sup>141</sup> W. Rudolph, *Ezra and Nehemia*, HAT I, 20 (Tubingen, 1949),149

<sup>142</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*,79

purposes of clarification and edification.”<sup>143</sup> A. Shinan added the point that these targumim were almost certainly oral in nature when these aggadic pluses were inserted. There are traces within them of the “live performance” which the synagogue translator gave.<sup>144</sup> We may now see from this that Jewish exegesis is a “value-added” product originating from its previous influences.

Kannengiesser illustrated clearly the relationship between the Targum and the sacred text in view of serving the community’s purpose in the Synagogue. He stated that, “the Synagogue was the home of the Targums because a reader read from the Hebrew Scriptures and an interpreter paraphrased the text into Aramaic to bring out its meaning and explicate its significance for the congregation.”<sup>145</sup> John Bowker also affirmed the close relationship between Targum and synagogue. He stated that, “the origin of the Targums is closely connected with the synagogue.”<sup>146</sup> He traced back the origin and function of the synagogue. The origin of the synagogue in Judea was closely connected with the *ma’amadoth*,<sup>147</sup> which were divisions of the people throughout Judaea, which were intended to correspond to the twenty-four courses of the priests in the Temple. In this way all the people were involved in the duties and sacrifices of the Temple, even though they could not be present in Jerusalem. Each *ma’amad* assembled when its turn came to read passages of scripture corresponding to the sacrifices taking place in Jerusalem. It was from these assemblies that synagogues in Palestine seem to have developed. So, the origin of the synagogue was closely connected with the reading of Torah from its earliest days. From these beginnings it developed into places where Torah was read and studied in a much wider way, and that remained its function and purpose until the fall of Jerusalem. In Heinemann’s and Petuchowski’s work, targum may be regarded as “literature of the synagogue”, in which he states that literature of the synagogue is brought to our knowledge by means of prayer and liturgical poetry, as well as the Targum and different public sermons

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<sup>143</sup> Idem, 80

<sup>144</sup> Cf. A. Shinan, “Live Translation: On the Nature of the Aramaic Targums to the Pentateuch”, *Prooftexts* 3 (1983), 41-49.

<sup>145</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 129. Moshe Benstein also shared the same view. He believed that the Aramaic versions of the Bible may indeed have found their existence in the synagogue, the *bet ha-keneset* as is likely, or in the study hall, the *bet ha-midrash*, which is less likely. See Moshe J. Bernstein, “The Aramaic Targumim: The Many Faces of the Jewish Biblical Experience” in *Jewish Ways of Reading the Bible*, 137

<sup>146</sup> John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 9

<sup>147</sup> It literally means as “places of standing.”

incorporated in rabbinic literature.<sup>148</sup>

## **(b) Edition and compilation**

We now go to details of the edition and compilation of Targumim. Whereas the ancient practice of the oral Targum was not in doubt, scholars are in common agreement that the *written* Targums could not be anterior to the Talmudic period (200 BCE-500 CE)<sup>149</sup> We know that the Jews of the Greek Diaspora had not hesitated to translate the Scriptures. Steven T. Katz pointed out that where Aramaic had become the language of the people in Palestine and Babylonian, they must have done likewise in these areas and that “written Aramaic translations of most of the biblical books did certainly exist under the Hasmoneans”. It was the targumic activity in Palestine, which might have stimulated the composition of the LXX.<sup>150</sup> Other scholars, like Karen Jobes and Moises Silva confirmed the corresponding relationship between Targum and Septuagint in term of the date of formation. They quote Kahle’s insistence that “originally simultaneous Greek translations were produced over time, in a manner not unlike that of the Aramaic Targumim.”<sup>151</sup> They further elaborated the close relationship between Targum and Septuagint in the role of the Synagogue. They again quote Kahle’s word that “various versions originated in the synagogues in a situation analogous to that of the Aramaic Targumim, so that more than one independent translation of the same Hebrew book would have been produced.”<sup>152</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the written Targum’s formation period is associated with the version of the Greek Septuagint.

With regard to the characteristics of the composition of the Targumim, Ernst Wurthwein gives us a good picture. There was not any first or single original standard and authoritative Targum text but rather a whole series of different Aramaic versions.<sup>153</sup> John Bowker further elaborates the characteristics of variant Targums. He pointed out that there was a continuous process of exegesis, which produced traditions of interpretations in different areas of

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<sup>148</sup> Cf J. Heinemann and Petuchowski, *Literature of the Synagogue* (New York, 1975)

<sup>149</sup> Steven T. Katz ed., *The Cambridge History of Judaism* Vol. Two (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),568

<sup>150</sup> C. Rabin, “The translation process and the character of the Septuagint”, *Textus*, 6 (1968), 20

<sup>151</sup> Karen H. Jobes and Moises Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005),36

<sup>152</sup> Idem,275

<sup>153</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 80; See also John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*,15

Judaism and the synagogue targums undoubtedly reflected that process. Bowker claimed that “there was no such thing as the Targum, but only a Targum tradition, or perhaps more accurately Targum traditions.”<sup>154</sup>

In the collections of Targumim, running Aramaic translations are found of all the books of the Hebrew Bible with the exception of Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah. They both contain texts in Aramaic and perhaps for that reason have no targum.<sup>155</sup> Of the varied profusion of Aramaic versions that once existed only a small fraction has survived. Two basically different forms should be distinguished: those texts, which represent the early Palestinian, and those which were revised in Babylon --- Onkelos for the Pentateuch and Jonathan for the Prophets.

### **(i) The Palestinian Targum**

Wurthwein made a brief description of Targum composition as follow. The Palestinian Targum was never edited officially and consequently it has never had any single authoritative form of text. All the manuscripts differ from each other to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>156</sup> Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch is also called Targum Jerusalem I. It is peculiar in combining along with the text of the official Targum also Onkelos midrashic material, which was usually omitted. Earlier on it was thought that the midrashic material had been introduced into the Targum Onkelos only after it was accepted as standard in Palestine --- the people were accustomed to it and missed it in the new Targum.<sup>157</sup>

The Fragment Targum, also known as Targum Jerusalem II, is called a “fragment” because it contains only the midrashic comments on individual verses, omitting the continuous translation of the text itself. Actually, Moshe Bernstein on the other hand states that it contains “aggadic expansions of biblical narratives, shared with other representatives of the Palestinian targum tradition.”<sup>158</sup> Wurthwein quoted Kahle’s word that it was regarded “as a collection of midrashic material from the Palestinian Pentateuch Targum, which was considered too valuable to ignore when Targum Onkelos was introduced

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<sup>154</sup> John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 15

<sup>155</sup> See Moshe J. Bernstein, “The Aramaic Targumim: The Many Faces of the Jewish Biblical Experience” in *Jewish Ways of Reading the Bible*

<sup>156</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 81

<sup>157</sup> Idem

<sup>158</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, *The Aramaic Targumim*, 143

as the standard Targum for Palestine as well.”<sup>159</sup>

Pseudo-Jonathan represents a Palestinian Targum more or less thoroughly revised from the Onkelos text. Possibly both were derived from an earlier Palestinian Targum apparently going back to pre-Christian times. It contributes significantly to our understanding of Judaism in the period of Christian beginnings. Its language is the Aramaic spoken in Palestine, so that we can find here valuable material for the study of Aramaic as it was spoken in the Palestine of Jesus' time.<sup>160</sup>

## (ii) Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan

Targum Onkelos for the Pentateuch and Targum Jonathan for the Prophets are the best known of the Targums, being authoritative for Judaism. They are quite distinct from the Palestinian Targums with their differing forms. These are *official* Targums, whose definitive wording was evidently established in Babylon in the fifth century CE after a long history of development.<sup>161</sup>

They are based on older material that probably derives ultimately from Palestine.<sup>162</sup> Their names are probably derived (erroneously) from the Greek translators. Aquila (Onkelos) and Theodotion (Jonathan in Hebrew), who were known for their literal versions of the Bible. Actually these two Targums can hardly have been the work of single individuals. They were more probably produced by commissions appointed to replace the various forms of the text then in circulation with an official version conforming to orthodox Jewish interpretation, revised according to the Hebrew text, and largely purged of midrashic elaborations. Thus they mark a definitive point in the history of the Targums and only later came to establish themselves firmly in Palestine. Both Targums attempt to reproduce the Hebrew text quite literally, so that as in the earlier Greek versions of Aquila the language had to suffer. They also contain

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<sup>159</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 82

<sup>160</sup> Idem

<sup>161</sup> Idem, 82-3

<sup>162</sup> On the debate over the Palestinian origin of Onqelos, see Philip S. Alexander, "Targum, Targumim", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6,321, where he concludes "that Onqelos originated in Palestine in 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE. The Babylonian redaction of Onqelos probably took place in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century CE". On this theme, see most recently P. V. M Flesher, "Is *Targum Onqelos* a Palestinian Targum? The Evidence of Genesis 28-50", *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 19 (1999), 35-79. It is important that we should not view the arguments for a Palestinian origin for Onqelos as dissociating it too strongly from its traditional Babylonian context.

numerous subtle interpretative differences from the Septuagint.<sup>163</sup>

The Targum Onkelos appears to have been in use as early as the first century after Christ, though it attained its present form only about CE. 300-400.<sup>164</sup> It explains the Pentateuch, adhering in its historical and legal parts to a type of Hebrew text, which is, at times, nearer to the original of the Septuagint than to the Massoretic, but straying in the prophetic and poetical portions so far from the original as to leave it hardly recognizable.

Another paraphrase of the Pentateuch is the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, or the Jerusalem Targum. Written after the seventh century of our era, it is valueless both from a critical and an exegetical point of view, since its explanations are wholly arbitrary. The Targum Jonathan, or the paraphrase of the Prophets, was written in the first century, at Jerusalem but it owes its present form to the Jerusalem rabbis of the fourth century CE. The historical books are fairly faithful translation from the original text; in the poetical portions and the later Prophets, however, the paraphrase often presents fiction rather than truth.

### **(iii) Hagiographa**

Moshe Bernstein gives a clear definition of the Hagiographa. It is a mélange of Targumim with differing exegetical agenda, translation techniques and probably provenances.<sup>165</sup> The paraphrase of the Hagiographa deals with the Book of Job, the Psalms, Canticle of Canticles, Proverbs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and the Paralipomena.

In the present form of Targum, the latest are those on the Hagiographa. Sperber advances the argument that the so called Targums on the Hagiographa in fact represent a transition from genuine Targum method to midrash on the various books. That is to say that they are commentaries on the books, which at first sight resemble Targums, rather than presenting genuine Targums as such.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 83

<sup>164</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 129

<sup>165</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, *The Aramaic Targumim*, 135

<sup>166</sup> Quoted at John Bowker, 14-5



## 2.4.2 Targum and Midrash

This part is the main theme of the discussion of Targum. There is widespread scholarly recognition of the close connection between Targum and midrash. Richard N. Longenecker even commented on the contribution of Targum to midrash exegesis. He said that, “they are of great significance to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis”.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, Miss Bloch also echoed the view. She suggested that, “it was the synagogue targumim that provided the basis for the later rabbinic haggadah”<sup>168</sup>

Most important of all, the exegetical work of Targum places its greatest emphasis on the paraphrase of the texts in the Hebrew Bible. Some of the Targumim provide elaborations in order to explain “gaps” in the biblical text. Charles Kannengiesser confirmed that the Targumim had to share a common characteristic with that body of rabbinic literature called midrash.<sup>169</sup> Wurthwein also shared the same view with Kannengiesser. He described Targum that “the interpreter paraphrased and added explanatory phrases and they reinterpret the text according to the theological temper of their time and relate the text to contemporary life and political circumstances.”<sup>170</sup> He laid greater emphasis on the value of exegesis than the textual witness. He stated that “this approach to the text of the Targums, which occasionally almost ignores the meaning of the Hebrew text, reduces their value as textual witnesses but makes them important documents for the history of Old Testament exegesis.”<sup>171</sup> Undeniably, we can see again this continuity of the earlier exegesis of Targum to the later development of the midrasic method. This will be further elaborated later.

It is obvious that the Targum is not a halakic midrash with legislative modality and it cannot be compared with homiletic midrashim, in which a biblical verse is developed with a long, haggadic and edifying speech. However, scholars witness midrashic tendencies in Targum. Josep Ribera found out that in all ancient versions there is evidence of midrashic tendencies.<sup>172</sup> He further

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<sup>167</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 9

<sup>168</sup> Cf. G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* Leiden: Brill, 1961, 9ff

<sup>169</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 129

<sup>170</sup> Wurthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 80

<sup>171</sup> Idem

<sup>172</sup> Josep Ribera, “The Targum: From Translation to Interpretation” in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 225

commented that the exegetical method has its own continuity. Of course, every book has its own textual evolution and also its translations. Notwithstanding, there are common exegetical rules available in all ancient translations. The translators employed literary devices, which are found in all ancient versions and which belong to the Jewish hermeneutic method called *derash*.<sup>173</sup>

In terms of Jewish aggadic study, Avigdor Shinan's paper studied thousands of aggadic traditions in the Targums that are found in Midrash as well.<sup>174</sup> He stated that the common assumption is that the Aggadot reflected in Talmud and Midrash are the source from which the Targums drew. Moreover, this is in effect the assumption propelling the disregard with which many scholars tread the path of Aggadah or otherwise deal with the world of rabbinic literature and ideas.<sup>175</sup>

The affinity between Targum and Midrash is clear and it is with hundreds of such examples that I would shape the first part of this paper. Since it is difficult to believe that Targum and Midrash shared the same tradition and language by taking separate and independent roads, we can of course advance one of two possibilities:

(a) direct dependence between Targum and midrashic tradition (in this direction or that);

(b) indirect dependence: that is, use of a common source (written or oral) which stood before the author of the Midrash and the Meturgeman. Yet the difference between these two answers is not all that is significant. Both postulate an intertextual affinity, whether direct or indirect, based on a written or oral source.<sup>176</sup>

Next we will discuss the aims of interpretation of Targum compared to that of midrash. Moshe Bernstein defined this kind of technique as "an approach to the solution of syntactical awkwardness, which is typical of the targumim and of rabbinic midrashic readings and conveys the meaning of the Hebrew prose

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<sup>173</sup> Idem, 218

<sup>174</sup> Avigdor Shinan, Ann Brener trans. "The Aggadah of the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch and Rabbinic Aggadah: Some Methodological considerations" in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 204

<sup>175</sup> Idem, 205

<sup>176</sup> Idem, 207

in sensible Aramaic for the audiences.”<sup>177</sup> If we examine the nature of some of the translations, the emphases in some of the paraphrases and the subjects of some of the expansions, we see that the theological themes, which the translator brings to the texts are those, which he/she wishes to teach his readers.<sup>178</sup>

Bowker elaborated on the aim of the interpreters and showed that the tendency in translations to express meaning rather than merely being literal, was reinforced by the efforts of Jews in every generation to interpret scripture and apply it to their own situation and time. Scripture was the foundation of life because it was the self-revelation of God, a particularly vital way in which he had made himself known. But scripture had been revealed in the past and it was essential for one generation after another to penetrate its meaning.<sup>179</sup> He added one more point with regard to the aim of the interpreters. All these exegetical methods of making the text of scripture relevant and meaningful to later generations were in use in Judaism generally.<sup>180</sup>

### 2.4.3 In a specific historical and religious context

Undeniably, any biblical translation is the product of its socio-cultural context. Targum is no exception. We can say that Onqelos is much closer to being a straightforward translation than the other recensions of the Palestinian Targum. It stays as it does closer to the Hebrew text and it contains abbreviated interpretations, which seem to be a slightly variant form of the Palestinian Targum-tradition.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, John Bowker pointed out that Onqelos is something of a compromise and perhaps it was deliberately intended to be so. He provided a possible solution for this.<sup>182</sup> It was a deliberate attempt to make an Aramaic translation and that it may well have been a part of the general attempt in Judaism from the second century CE onward to provide authoritative translations as a safeguard against Christian interpretations of scripture based on LXX. This would perhaps explain and justify the ascription of the Targum to Aquila (Onqelos) and it would also explain the distinct nature

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<sup>177</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, *The Aramaic Targumim*, 145

<sup>178</sup> Idem, 161

<sup>179</sup> John Bowker, 5

<sup>180</sup> Idem, 6

<sup>181</sup> The Palestinian Targum-tradition, whatever stage it had reached at the time when Onqelos was produced, was not a translation: its purpose was to expound the Hebrew text as well as to represent it. See John Bowker, 24

<sup>182</sup> Idem, 24-5

of its Aramaic. This discussion is closely related with the socio-political culture in affecting the Jewish exegetical trends and will go on in deep with the illustration of examples on the book of Ruth in Chapter Four.

## 2.5 Dead Sea Scrolls and the history of Judaism

### 2.5.1 Importance

Scholars agree that one of the most important events in recent history of the Old Testament study is the successive discovery of different manuscripts in the caves at Qumran by the Dead Sea since 1947. They regard these discoveries as a precious treasure because the manuscript materials found were several centuries older than any known before. Discoveries of the Dead Sea scrolls may contribute to various fields of study in the Old Testament and Judaism. Ernst Würthwein related his work on the text of the Old Testament and the formation of the Hebrew Bible, to the study of the Qumran scrolls.<sup>183</sup> We may also say that the Qumran scrolls are closely related to the development of Judaism. Scholars attempted to place the scrolls within contemporary Judaism.<sup>184</sup> This is particularly true of the work done on the textual character of the biblical scrolls, the study on the relationship between Qumranic Bible exegesis and Jewish exegesis, and on the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha discovered at Qumran. The Hebrew language and orthography used in the Scrolls were also investigated.<sup>185</sup> As a whole, a variety of focuses in the study of Dead Sea Scrolls may be evident. It is especially important for us to also find the continuity between the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Jewish exegesis. The exegetical trends and tendencies formed in Qumran community definitely had to impose influence on early Jewish exegesis.

### 2.5.2 Dead Sea Scrolls, Second Temple Period and Judaism

Qumran's Jewish character and links to Second Temple Judaism are well

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<sup>183</sup> Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 30-38

<sup>184</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The history of Judaism, the background of Christianity, the lost library of Qumran* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 16

<sup>185</sup> On the biblical text, see Cross, *The Ancient Library*. On biblical exegesis, see G. Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), and W. H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Peshar of Habakkuk* (SBLMS 24; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). One of the first scholars to review the scrolls and Judaism was G. Vermes, "The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls on Jewish Studies During the Last Twenty-Five Years," *JJS* 26(1975) 1-14; reprinted in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (ed. W. S. Green; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 201-214

recognized. The recent more advanced carbon-14 tests dated most of the Qumran manuscripts to two or one centuries before the birth of Christianity.<sup>186</sup> Würthwein stressed the importance of archaeological evidence<sup>187</sup> as a proof for the Qumran texts dated before 70 CE. The jars found in the caves are from the Roman period. A piece of linen found in Cave 1 has been dated by its radioactive carbon-14 content between 167 BCE and 233 CE. The results of the excavation of Khirbet Qumran since 1952 under the direction of G. L. Harding and R. de Vaux make it most probable that the manuscripts were hidden during the first Jewish war during 66-70 CE.<sup>188</sup> They must all therefore have been written before then. This dating is supported by the texts from Wadi Murabba'at, which may be dated with certainty at the time of the revolt of Bar Kochba (132-135 CE). Würthwein quotes the words of de Vaux: "The script is more developed, the biblical text is definitely that of the Masora. It must be concluded from this that the documents from Qumran are older and earlier than the second century."<sup>189</sup>

Most scholars agree on the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls to study the political, cultural and social background during the Second Temple Period. Eugene Ulrich believed that the biblical manuscripts found in the Judain Desert represent the Scriptures of general Judaism during the late Second Temple period. They show us what the Scriptures probably looked like in the last few centuries BCE and the first century CE.<sup>190</sup> The biblical manuscripts found at Qumran are representative of the books, which the wide spectrum of first century CE Jews would have called 'the Law and the Prophets' ---- including the High Priest and the Sadducees, the Rabbis, Jesus and those Jews who preached the well-intentioned folk at Qumran, and yet others. Ulrich make a conclusion that the scrolls found at Qumran are the sacred texts of Second Temple Judaism in general.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> See G. Bonani et al., 'Radiocarbon Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls,' *Atiqot* 20 (1991) 27-32; J. A. Timothy et al., "Radiocarbon Dating of Scrolls and Linen Fragments from the Judaean Desert,' *Atiqot* 28 (1996) 85-91. However, isolated attempts to identify the scrolls as Christian always rested on a dubious literary and theological analysis, typified by the recent publication of R. Eisenman. See the Introduction to R. H. Eisenman and M. O. Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1992) 1-16.

<sup>187</sup> Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of Old Testament*, 31

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Roland de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973)

<sup>189</sup> de Vaux 1953: 267

<sup>190</sup> Eugene Ulrich, "The Scrolls and the Study of the Hebrew Bible" in *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty* Robert A. Kugler and Eileen M. Schuller ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1999), 35

<sup>191</sup> Idem

Scholars also paid attention to identifying the contemporary groups in Palestine and compare them to the Qumran community. Devorah Dimant believed that the Qumran community was regarded as a group existing at the fringes of Judaism in open antagonism to the political rulers and the official priesthood of Jerusalem.<sup>192</sup> The non-sectarian writings of Qumran community, however, have much in common with the more general Jewish literature of the time.<sup>193</sup>

### 2.5.3 Dead Sea Scrolls and exegetical trends

#### (a) Rewritten/rework bible

We may identify as one of the specific types of exegetical trends the so-called “Rewritten Bible” in the Qumran community. This was atypical trend during the late Second Temple Period (cf Jubilees). This had direct influence on early Jewish exegesis. The term “Rewritten Bible” was coined by Geza Vermes to indicate the earliest forms of haggadah interpretation. His famous work *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* first published in 1961,<sup>194</sup> has been one of the most influential works in a number of the fields, which were represented at which this paper was originally read, particularly those of Qumran and early biblical interpretations.<sup>195</sup> G. Vermes stated that “in order to anticipate questions and to solve problems in advance, the midrashist inserts haggadic development into the biblical narrative – an exegetical process which is probably ancient as scriptural interpretation itself.”<sup>196</sup> There are instances where “midrash” appears in the Qumran texts (e.g., 1QS 6.24; 8.15, 26; CD 20.6; 4QFlor 1, 14) though in these cases the word is used in a non-technical

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<sup>192</sup> Devorah Dimant, “The Scrolls and the Study of Early Judaism” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty* Robert A. Kugler and Eileen M. Schuller ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1999), 44

<sup>193</sup> The earlier tendency of Qumranic research to emphasize the uniqueness in the scrolls is now being replaced by the emphasis on the common ground they share with contemporary Judaism. This shift is already reflected by a few of the recent surveys. Typically represented by Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Scrolls*. Some recent encyclopedia articles devote space to the theme of “the Scrolls and Judaism”; e.g. J. J. Collins, “Qumran” and A. Lange and H. Lichtenberger, “Qumran,” *TRE* 28 (1997). See also the recent survey of H. Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993); ET, *The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist and Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans / Leiden: Brill, 1998) where an effort is made to understand the Qumran community against its Jewish environment.

<sup>194</sup> Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadah Studies*, *Studia Post Biblica*, 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Leiden: Brill, 1973)

<sup>195</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, “Rewritten Bible”: A Generic Category Which Has Outlived its Usefulness? In *Textus: Annual of the Hebrew University Bible Project* ed. Alexander Rofe, Vol. XXII (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 2005), 169

<sup>196</sup> Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 95

sense to mean only "interpretation" in general. Moreover, scholars continued to lay emphasis on the studies of Rewritten Bible. There are some excellent introductory studies on various aspects of the Rewritten Bible compositions.<sup>197</sup>

The original and common practice of Rewritten Bible originated from inner-biblical exegesis itself.<sup>198</sup> The inter-textual framework of smaller units of biblical material has, been examined in detail within the framework of Old Testament studies by Michael Fishbane in his book *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Fishbane offers numerous detailed examples of what he calls 'inner-biblical' exegesis. These are instances in which, to use Fishbane's own terminology, a later biblical (Old Testament) writer takes up an earlier biblical text in order to 're-use', 're-contextualize', 'extend', 'reformulate', 're-interpret' or 'transform' it.<sup>199</sup> Thus the pre-existing text as 'deposit of tradition' (*traditium*) is pressed into the service of the active ongoing tradition (*traditio*).

Other scholars such as James Kugel also believed that "the very fact that texts written in the eighth or tenth or earlier centuries BCE must have been recopied many times within the biblical period in order to reach us suggests that these ancient writings must have been pondered and mulled over even then."<sup>200</sup> In these ways, the interpretation of the Bible goes back as far as the oldest texts represented in it. Indeed, evidence of this process is to be found within the final Hebrew Bible itself. Later biblical books frequently mention or allude to words and issues found in earlier books. They often modify or change the apparent sense of the earlier text. For example, the book of Daniel specially interprets a prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10), in which Jeremiah's reference to

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<sup>197</sup> See George W. F. Nickelsbrg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded", in *Jewish Writing of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo and Josephus*, ed. by Michael E. Stone, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum (vol. p12) (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 89-156; Philip Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," in *It is written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays Honor of Barnabes Linders, SSF*, ed. by D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 99-121

<sup>198</sup> For the discussion of inner-biblical exegesis, see Michael Fishbane, "*The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*" (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) However, He notes that inner-biblical and non-biblical exegeses are fundamentally different from each other. Rabbinic midrash is formally and stylistically different from inner-biblical exegesis; Gary G. Porton, "Rabbinic Midrash" in *Judaism in Late Antiquity* Vol. 1 Edited by Jacob Neusner, 219

<sup>199</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 1, 140, 410, 414, 440, 473 *et passim*.

<sup>200</sup> James L. Kugel, "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Sage" in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, James L. Kugel eds (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001), 2

“seventy years” is asserted to mean in reality 490 years (Dan. 9:2, 24).<sup>201</sup> In a lesser dramatic fashion, the entire book of Chronicles might be seen not only as an independent writing but also as an interpretation of the biblical books of Samuel and Kings with numerous additions or modifications of the earlier material plus a few omissions by the author(s) or redactor(s). We may evidently see that there are some kinds of exegesis already developed in the Bible itself.

Now we look again at the re-written narratives in the Qumran library. Scholars indicated the sources of the retold narratives in the Qumran library. George J. Brooke pointed out that the dependence of a rewritten scriptural text on its source is such that the source is thoroughly embedded in its rewritten form, not as an explicit citation but as a running text.<sup>202</sup> Philip Alexander further elaborates the distinctive features of the running text. It may resemble word for word that which may be deemed to be its source. Otherwise it may be more free in its handling of the supposed source --- paraphrasing, abbreviating, omitting, glossing and expanding it as may be deemed appropriate by its composer. In Alexander’s word, it is stated that “the Bible is serially in proper order but they are highly selective in which they represent.”<sup>203</sup> This shows that this exegetical approach is dominated by the interpreters’ own belief and his perception about the text they received. It imposed great influence on the development of midrashic exegetical interpretation.

Philip S. Alexander commented that within the corpus of post-biblical Jewish literature there are a number of texts devoted to retelling in their own words the story of the Bible. He regarded these texts as constituting a literary genre.<sup>204</sup> He emphasized the relationship of Rewritten Bible to Scripture and to the midrashic tradition as a whole. We may find some connection and continuity between them. First, The Rewritten Bible texts read the Bible with close attention to noting obscurities, inconsistencies and narrative lacunae. The methods by which they solved the problems of the original are essentially

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<sup>201</sup> Idem; See also the detailed illustration of these examples of Fishbane’s work *Biblical interpretation in Israel*.

<sup>202</sup> George J. Brooke, “The Rewritten Law, Prophets and Psalms: Issues for Understanding the text of the Bible” in *The Book as book: the Hebrew Bible and the Judaeen desert discoveries* Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov ed. (London: New Castle, DE: The British Library; Oak Knoll Press, 2002),32

<sup>203</sup> Philip S. Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament” in *It is written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 117

<sup>204</sup> Idem, 99



midrashic, i.e. similar to those found in the rabbinic midrashim.<sup>205</sup> Second, Rewritten Bible texts make use of non-biblical traditions and draw on non-biblical sources, whether oral or written. By fusing this material with the biblical narrative the rewritten Bible texts appear to be aiming at a synthesis of the whole tradition (both biblical and extra-biblical) within a biblical framework: they seek to unify the tradition on a biblical base. Their intention may be seen as both exegetical and eisegetical: they seek to draw out the sense of Scripture and to solve its problem, and at the same time to read non-biblical material into Scripture, thereby validating it and preventing the fragmentation of the tradition.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, the rewritten Bible introduces a format and pattern to the structure for midrashic tradition. The narrative form of the texts means that they can impose only a single interpretation on the original. The original can be treated only as univalent. By way of contrast, the commentary form adopted by the rabbis and by Philo allows them to offer multiple interpretations of the same passage of Scripture, and to treat the underlying text as a polyvalent.<sup>207</sup>

One of famous Jewish commentators, Flavius Josephus extensively used this genre. His famous work *Antiquities*, spans the whole of biblical history. They are basically centrifugal. Rewritten Bible texts are centripetal: they come back to the Bible again and again. The rewritten Bible texts make use of legendary material, but by placing that material within an extended biblical narrative (in association with passages of more or less literal retelling of the Bible), they clamp the legends firmly to the biblical framework, and reintegrate them into the biblical history. The single legendary expansion constitutes a separate genre.<sup>208</sup>

This approach of retold narratives is widespread in Jewish literature. Devorah Dimant pointed out that the technique of 'rewriting the Bible' was used in a wide range of writings.<sup>209</sup> Close re-workings of the biblical text are such as the *Temple Scroll*, *Jubilees*, and the *Reworked Pentateuch* which are the representative of the time before Christianity, i.e. third-second century BCE. It seems that during Second Temple times there exists a considerable body of Hebrew literature, which reworked the Bible. Yet none of these texts displays

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<sup>205</sup> Idem, 117

<sup>206</sup> Idem

<sup>207</sup> Idem

<sup>208</sup> Idem

<sup>209</sup> Devorah Dimant, *The Scrolls and the Study of Early Judaism*, 50

any sectarian element.<sup>210</sup> Obviously this type of literature was not authored by the Qumranites but probably taken over from other, non-sectarian sources. It remains to be explained why the Qumranites had such a keen interest in reworked Bible texts.

There were other writings modeled on the Bible in a looser way such as *Pseudo-Ezekiel* and the *Apocryphon of Jeremiah*. Even apocalyptic visions such as those of *1 Enoch*, the *Testament of Levi* and *Pseudo-Daniel* depended on biblical motifs and forms, and often closely reworked specific passages from the Bible. Each of these re-workings and re-modelings displays its own exegetical framework. Thus the Qumran manuscripts offer a whole gamut of evidence ranging from small textual variants to major reworking and loose modeling. It seems that in the phase mirrored by the Qumran documents not only was the canon not fixed but also the dividing lines between textual corrections, textual amplifications and full-fledged reworking or exegesis was still in flux.

We may conclude that the openness to various kinds of interpretation is a phenomenon suitable for the development of various streams of exegetical approach in coming ages. Therefore, it is obvious that early Jewish exegesis bears continuity of the vivid and diversified scholastic atmosphere in Second Temple Period. We may note that this initial trend had influence on midrashic and rabbinic exegesis indeed.

### **(b) Pesharim**

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the middle of the twentieth century, another hermeneutical method common in Judaism has come to our attention. This approach, known as “peshar”, which stems from the Aramaic word *pishar* meaning “solution” or “interpretation”<sup>211</sup>, is usually described as an exegetical method or collection of such interpretations (*pesharim*) that suggests that the prophetic writings contain a hidden eschatological significance or divine mystery. Philip R. Davies identified the structure of peshar as “formulated in a series of phrase-by-phrase commentaries on consecutive scriptural text where text and commentary are set side by side in

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<sup>210</sup> Some groups are deviant from main social and cultural environment and tend to move away from the center to have a distinctive and separated life. We will discuss in terms of Qumran and non-Qumran groupings.

<sup>211</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Biblical Exegesis in Apostolic Period*, 23

the manner of a modern scholarly commentary.”<sup>212</sup>

The commentaries appear to have been written during the second half of the first century BCE and are extant in only one copy of each --- perhaps in some cases the autograph (original copy). George W. E. Nickelsburg further elaborated that they are evidently a compilation of the sect’s history, from the Teacher’s conflict with the Wicked Priest to the Roman occupation of Palestine.<sup>213</sup> We may conclude that the commentaries are the earliest examples of a literary genre that became popular in rabbinic circles from the second century CE and later on. Nickelsburg identified some similarities.<sup>214</sup> There are the techniques of commenting on lengthy blocks of Scripture, the format of quotation and interpretation and the quotation of parallel passages from Scripture. However, the differences are just as significant and help us to understand the peculiar nature of the Qumran commentaries. The rabbinic commentaries concentrate on the Torah and the Writings. The exposition is of two types: halakhic and haggadic. This will be discussed in the Chapter of Midrash. The commentaries compile the opinions of many rabbis, who are mentioned by name. In Qumran commentaries the interpretations are anonymous and reflect community interpretation.

Devorah Dimant believed that the peshet was continued in the development of Jewish hermeneutics. The peshet was also implemented in the rabbis’ interpretation. She stated that some of these methods are similar to those used by the rabbis<sup>215</sup>, connecting two different biblical verses through the occurrence of the same word in both.<sup>216</sup> B. Nitzan has included a perceptive discussion on the interpretative method of the pesharim in her edition *Peshet Habakkuk: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea (1QpHab)*.<sup>217</sup> Yet other methods used by the pesharim such as symbolism and allegory are analogous to the methods of Jewish apocalypses and Ancient Eastern interpretation of dreams.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, George Nickelsburg also witnessed that such a method

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<sup>212</sup> Philip R. Davies, “Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 149

<sup>213</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 127

<sup>214</sup> Idem.

<sup>215</sup> Devorah Dimant, *The Scrolls and the Study of Early Judaism*, 52

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Brooke’s comment at *Exegesis at Qumran*.

<sup>217</sup> B. Nitzan eds., *Peshet Habakkuk: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea (1QpHab)* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986 [Hebrew]) 29-80.

<sup>218</sup> M. Fishbane, “The Qumran Peshet and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics,” *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 6 (1977) 97-114; idem, “Use, Authority and Interpretation of Mikra at Qumran,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient*

of interpretation was used in various forms in a number of second century texts.<sup>219</sup> The author of the *Testament of Moses* rewrites Moses' prophecy so that it makes explicit reference to contemporary events. In Jubilees 23, Daniel 10-12, and 1 Enoch 85-90 phrases from the prophets and allusions are employed to describe contemporary events and to flesh out descriptions of the imminent *eschaton*. The author of Daniel 9 reinterprets Jeremiah's seventy years as seventy weeks of years that reach their culmination in the author's own time.

However, for modern scholars this exegetical method has a negative connotation. David S. Dockery criticizes the structure of the biblical text found in Qumran library as "a forced and even abnormal construction of the biblical text."<sup>220</sup> Moreover, F. F. Bruce in his detailed work on the texts of the Qumran community has discovered that "pesher often involved manipulation of textual intricacies and can be frequently described as atomistic interpretation."<sup>221</sup> In fact, the pesher may be strange to us in terms of structure and methodology. However, we can't separate this distinctive method from the communal context in its historical environment. They used it for its theological purpose. Indeed, the pesher played an important role in shaping Jewish exegesis as Devorah Dimant declared. The continuity was undeniably present in the formation of rabbinic interpretation when Judaism took over its form.

Referring to the comparison between Pesher and midrash, we should know that the pesher is not identical to midrash. Indeed, we can also identify the difference between pesher and midrash. There was a close relationship between pesher and midrash that is difficult at times to distinguish.<sup>222</sup> Other scholars, Richard Longenecker comments that Qumran's pesher interpretation of the Old Testament is neither principally "commentary" nor "midrashic exegesis," though it uses the forms of both.<sup>223</sup> Scriptural study in Qumran is no longer the privilege of a few leaders, but the duty of all those who belong to the true Israel. Because of this, the verb *daras*<sup>224</sup> becomes a keyword for scriptural studies. It signifies the search for the secrets, which are concealed in

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*Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. M. J. Mulder; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 339-77.

<sup>219</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg, 127

<sup>220</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation: Then and Now*, 30

<sup>221</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 14

<sup>222</sup> William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Pesher of Habbakkuk*, SBLMS 24 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1979), 25

<sup>223</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Biblical Exegesis in Apostolic Period*, 97

<sup>224</sup> Cf. 1 QS 1.1-2; 5.9, 11; 6.6-7; 8.12, 24; 1QH 4.6; CD 6.6-7; 7.18.

the scriptures. But since not all students are able to grasp these secrets in the same way, some must be given prominence as “successful researchers.”<sup>225</sup>

Isaac Rabinowitz offers a more specific understanding of pesher: “a literary composition which states in ordinary language the realities thought to be presaged, that is prefigured or portended by the works of some portion of the Hebrew Bible, words regarded whether as already fulfilled or as still awaiting fulfillment.”<sup>226</sup> Dockery illustrated that Rabinowitz’s argument is built upon the accepted consensus of the connection between pesher and dream interpretation as found in Genesis 40:5-22; 41:8-18 and Daniel 2:1-45; 4:4-27; 5:5-17, where the word pesher was actually used within the context of dream interpretation.<sup>227</sup>

It is believed that pesher as used in these Old Testament sources provides the foundation and background for its meaning in Qumran literature. In both settings, the dream or prophecy was perceived to contain a divine mystery, which required interpretation, whether by Joseph, Daniel, or the Teacher of Righteousness. Pesher, therefore, was a form of interpretation presenting a solution that could be reached only through divine revelation. We can distinguish pesher from midrash by understanding midrash as a contemporizing treatment of Scripture that sought to make God’s Word relevant to the present circumstances and ongoing situations whereas pesher looked upon the biblical material from the standpoint of imminent apocalyptic fulfillment. We can describe midrash as “this has relevance to this” while pesher is “this is that.”--- “that” is our present situation depicted in what is written in Scripture.<sup>228</sup> The time dimension in terms of the fulfillment of God’s will revealed by exegetical methods found in. Pesher may have affected the typological exegesis by Christian interpreters. This relationship will be examined in the following chapter.

### (c) Conclusion

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<sup>225</sup> Martin Hengel, “The Scriptures and their Interpretation in Second Temple Judaism” in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 169

<sup>226</sup> Isaac Rabinowitz, “Pesher / Pittaron: Its Biblical Meaning and Its Significance in the Qumran Literature,” *RevQ* 8 (1973): 219-32. Additional helpful discussions are found in Elieser Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding of the Exegesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *RevQ* 7 (1969): 3-15; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament,” *NTS* 7 (1961): 297-333

<sup>227</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation: Then and Now*, 31

<sup>228</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Biblical Exegesis in Apostolic Period*, 43

The main aim of scriptural interpretation should be kept in mind. In the Qumran community, as Philip Davies pointed out, scriptural explanation was regarded as a historical lesson to the people of God.<sup>229</sup> He believes that a large number of texts present figures from the past who, issue warnings about the behavior of Israel, exhorting Israel to observe the will of God and avoid catastrophe. While such compositions at times contain predictive elements and anticipating future events, their main function is usually exhortation. In other words, eschatological judgment and salvation are not the subjects of detailed prediction but rather are prompts to ethical behavior.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, from the perspective of its communal context the aim of exegesis and interpretation of the scriptural text, is ethical behavior according to the will of God. It is the task of commentators in Jewish and even Christian exegesis to present values and norms. Also in Qumran exegesis, modeling is the main aim of interpretation. We will show that the emphasis on morality in Midrash Ruth is rooted in this trend. We will discuss this in a next chapter.

## 2.6 Sectarian Development

The Dead Sea scrolls are regarded as valuable literature for understanding the different Jewish groups active during the late Second Temple period. Lawrence H. Schiffman indicated that the Dead Sea library could reshape our understanding of all the groups of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>231</sup>

First, we go into Schiffman's definition of a sect. A sect can be defined as a religious ideology that may develop the characteristics of a political party in order to defend its way of life.<sup>232</sup> The way the term is generally used in the study of ancient Judaism differs from its usual usage in religious studies, wherein sect commonly denotes a group that has somehow split from a mainstream movement.

Competing sects or groups each sought adherents among the people. Although all were Jewish and regarded the Torah as the ultimate source of Jewish law, Schiffman made a point that each had a different approach or

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<sup>229</sup> Philip R. Davies, *Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 157

<sup>230</sup> Idem

<sup>231</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The history of Judaism, the background of Christianity, the lost library of Qumran* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 72

<sup>232</sup> Idem

interpretation of Jewish law and considered other groups' approaches illegitimate.<sup>233</sup> The various sects also held differing views on such theological questions as the nature of God's revelation, the free will of human beings, and reward and punishment. The greatest conflict, however, arose over the most important symbol of Jewish life --- the Temple itself.

In this part, we may identify several Jewish groups, who impose their influence on the interpretation of Biblical texts. These influences may be explained against the historical and social changes that occurred in the context. Sadducees and Pharisees were the major participants in the Jewish religious and political affairs of Greco-Roman Palestine. In fact, the gradual transfer of influence and power from the priestly Sadducees to the learned Pharisees went hand in hand with the transition from the Temple to Torah that characterized the Judaism of this period. At the same time, a number of sects with apocalyptic or ascetic tendencies also contributed to the texture of Palestinian Judaism. Some of these sects played a crucial role in creating the backdrop against which Christianity arose. Others encouraged the messianic visions that led the Jews into revolt against Rome. Still others served as the locus for the development of mystical ideas that would eventually penetrate rabbinic Judaism. Each of these groups was characterized by its adherents' extreme dedication to its own interpretation of the Torah and the associated teachings it had received. The following groups can be identified.

### 2.6.1 Apocalyptic group

Traditionally, some theologians are often reluctant to admit that the apocalyptic material in antiquity played a formative role in early Christianity. There is consequently a prejudice against apocalyptic literature, which is deeply ingrained in biblical scholarship. However, John Collins restored the right place and role of apocalyptic groups in the development of Judaism and Christianity. He elaborated that apocalyptic ideas undeniably played an important role in the early stages of Christianity and Judaism. It played an important role in the works of Ernst Käsemann<sup>234</sup> and Klaus Koch<sup>235</sup>, who has made tremendous and significant contributions to apocalyptic studies.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, we may

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<sup>233</sup> Idem

<sup>234</sup> It was stated that, "Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology." See Ernst Kasemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," *JTC* 6 (1969) 40

<sup>235</sup> English trans., *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1972)

<sup>236</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1

trace back the development of early Jewish exegesis to the apocalyptic groups, who adopted a specific kind of exegesis during the Second Temple Period.

### (a) Origins

The origins of apocalyptic seem to be controversial.<sup>237</sup> First, apocalyptic exegesis is found in an approach in which Scripture is used as history to disclose and warn about the future. During the Second Temple Period, most of the Qumran texts from the Dead Sea discoveries that explicitly treat Scripture as predicting the future<sup>238</sup> adopt a different hermeneutic, which is called “mantic.”<sup>239</sup> Manticism is the culture of divination and a major science in the ancient world especially in Babylonia. It took the form of examining natural or unnatural phenomena interpreted as heavenly “clues” to what would happen.<sup>240</sup> Devorah Dimant added the point that Babylonian Manticism may not include the component apocalypses usually have to contain forecasts for the final eschaton or for an eschatological future.<sup>241</sup> This future is cosmological and transcendent. Second, some may argue that Jewish apocalyptic trends originated from and were influenced by Persian culture. This thought was strengthened when it was shown that the Qumran scrolls pay much attention to dualism.<sup>242</sup> Others, however, may link Hellenistic influence to the development of apocalyptic ideas. Martin Hengel is an advocate of this stance.<sup>243</sup>

Most important of all it is to be remembered that apocalyptic development originated from Jewish ideas and culture. Frank M. Cross pointed out the valuable fusion of apocalyptic transformation of the old and new in Jewish origins.<sup>244</sup> The events of Exile and Return caused the old functions of the

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) Chapter. One: The Apocalyptic Genre

<sup>238</sup> In interpretation “the future” often means the “last days”.

<sup>239</sup> The wisdom of Daniel and Enoch has close affinities with the mantic wisdom of the Babylonians. See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (HSM 16; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977) 67-88; J. C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (CBQMS 16; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984) chapter 3

<sup>240</sup> Philip R. Davies, *Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 157

<sup>241</sup> Devorah Dimant, *The Scrolls and the Study of Early Judaism*, 58

<sup>242</sup> Cf. N. Cohen, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993)

<sup>243</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 210-218

<sup>244</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997) 343-346



prophetic office to be replaced by a new form of faith. Apocalyptists would salvage the ancient faith but in radically new forms.<sup>245</sup> F. M. Cross indicated the distinctive traits of this development.<sup>246</sup> One is the democratizing and eschatologizing of classical prophetic themes and forms. A second is the doctrine of two ages, an era of “old things” and an era of “new things”. We detect here the beginning of a typological treatment of historical events. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, especially patristic exegesis on the book of Ruth. The significance of history was increasingly discovered in future fulfillment. New things were imminent. A third element is the resurgent influence of myths of creation used to frame history and to lend history transcendent significance not apparent in the ordinary events of horizontal history.

### **(b) An Apocalyptic group in the Qumran community**

Apocalyptic literature should be examined in a Jewish context, Frank M. Cross identified four Jewish groups from extant classical texts during the second century B.C.E. in Judaea: the Hasidim, a pious “congregation” which disappeared in the Maccabaeen era, and three other orders which emerged no later than the early Hasmonaeen era and presumably have their roots in the Maccabaeen period. These are the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Saducees.<sup>247</sup> Of these three, only the Essene order can be described as separatist in the radical sense that they regarded themselves as the only true Israel and separated themselves fully from contact with their fellow Jews.<sup>248</sup>

The community at Qumran was organized precisely as a new Israel and a true sect, which repudiated the priesthood and cultus of Jerusalem. F. M. Cross identified the Qumran community as Essene. He believed that neither the Pharisees nor the Saducees can qualify. The strongest argument, which has been raised against the identification of the Qumran sect with the Essenes is as follows. Its own sectarian literature was enormous, exercising considerable

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<sup>245</sup> F. M. Cross gave some examples of the “old faiths” in new form. The Second Isaiah and later oracles of the book of Ezekiel induced a vast transformation in the character of prophecy. Old oracle types persisted but were radically altered. Moreover, the myths of creation were given an eschatological function (Isa. 25:6-8; 65:17-25) Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 345.

<sup>246</sup> Idem, 346

<sup>247</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 330

<sup>248</sup> Josephus informs us that the Essenes rejected even the sacrificial service of the Temple as unclean and “offered their sacrifices by themselves.” Pliny (or rather his sources) tells us of their “city” in the wilderness.

influence upon later sectarian, literature including Christian literature. Two major parties formed communal religious communities in the same district of the desert of the Dead Sea. They lived together for two centuries, holding similar bizarre views, performing similar or rather identical lustrations, ritual meals and ceremonies.<sup>249</sup>

We may find the characteristics of the Essenes coincident with other apocalyptic groups. The constitution of the Essene community crystallized in an apocalyptic vision. Each institution and practice of the community was a preparation for and anticipation of a realization of life in the New Age of God's rule. On the other hand, their communal life was a reenactment of the events of the end-time both the final days of the Old Age and the era of Armageddon. Moreover, their community, being heirs of the kingdom, participated already in the gifts and glories, which were the first fruits of the age-to-come.<sup>250</sup> On this basis, the Essene camp in the wilderness found its prototype in the Mosaic camp of Numbers. Here the Essene retired to "prepare the way of the Lord" in the wilderness as God established his ancient covenant in the desert.<sup>251</sup>

The community may be regarded as an anti-political and anti-social group. They arose against the existing system and law of order. This is characteristic of the apocalyptic vision. The community referred to its priesthood as "sons of Zadok," that is members of the ancient line of high priests established in Scripture. At the same time, they heaped scorn and bitter condemnation upon the ungodly priests of Jerusalem who were illegitimate in their eyes. This animosity against the priests in power in Judah in opposition to the part of the priests at Qumran, did not stem merely from doctrinal differences. The animosity rather reflected a historical struggle for power between different high priestly families. The Essenes withdrew in defeat and formed their community in exile, being organized as a counter-Israel led by the true Israel of God and the legitimate priesthood. Even in exile, according to their view, the theocrat of Jerusalem, the so-called Wicked Priest, attacked the Essenes and made an attempt on the life of the Righteous Teacher their priestly leader. For their part, the Essene priests confidently expected divine intervention to establish their cause. F. M. Cross pointed out the expectation of the Essenes that they searched Scripture for prophecies of the end of days when they would be

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<sup>249</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 331

<sup>250</sup> Idem, 333

<sup>251</sup> Idem

re-established in a new and transfigured Jerusalem.<sup>252</sup>

The above arguments can easily be explained in a social and historical context. The political vicissitudes caused by external forces in part coincided with an internal socio-religious disintegration, which resulted in the emergence of diverse separatist communities and sects.<sup>253</sup> This mesh of centrifugal challenges threatened the unity of Judaism and demanded centripetal responses, which at first were intuitive and determinate. The more deeply disruptive the factors which impacted the socio-political and religious structure of Judaism, the stronger was the will to counter the negative effects by cultivating stabilizing values.<sup>254</sup> It is generally agreed that apocalypse is not simply “a conceptual genre of the mind”<sup>255</sup> but is generated by social and historical circumstances. On the broadest level “the style of an epoch can be understood as a matrix insofar as it furnishes the codes or raw materials --- the typical categories of communication --- employed by a certain society.”<sup>256</sup> More literature review will be included.<sup>257</sup>

### (c) Apocalyptic exegetical method

We may regard apocalyptic exegesis as an inspired method, in which one had only to read the biblical prophecies with the understanding given to the inspired interpreter. That means a type of pneumatic exegesis exploring all the secrets of events to come in the last days, as they were, foretold by God through the mouth of his holy prophets.<sup>258</sup> In this way the Essenes searched

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<sup>252</sup> Idem

<sup>253</sup> The roots of this intense process of socio-religious diversification can be traced in the early post-exilic historiographies (Ezra-Nehemiah), and prophetic literature (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, esp. ch. 3). See Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Emergence of Jewish Sectarianism in the Early Second Temple Period”, in *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 165-201

<sup>254</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Crystallization of the Canon of Hebrew Scriptures*, 14

<sup>255</sup> R. Knierim, “Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered,” *Int* 27 (1973) 438. Knierim suggests that “myth” may be considered such a genre.

<sup>256</sup> Idem, 464

<sup>257</sup> J. G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975); P. R. Davies, “The Social World of the Apocalyptic Writings”, in R. E. Clements, ed., *The World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 251-71; L. L. Grabbe, “The Social World of Early Jewish Apocalypticism,” *JSP* 4 (1989) 27-47; S. L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1-84

<sup>258</sup> As in early Christianity, the teacher in order to interpret the inspired texts of the prophets depends on the gift of the Holy Spirit, a charisma which is passed on to all members of the sect because they all shall become ‘scripture scholars.’ Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 170. We meet with a hermeneutic principle, which we find again in Paul and which has analogies in Greek thought also: what has been revealed by,

the Scriptures. Not only does the priestly messiah become the inspired interpreter of Holy Scripture but the teacher of righteousness is also himself inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret the texts of the prophets with regards to their fulfillment in the present time. According to the Habakkuk peshar the teacher is the representative of the new covenant. He is the priest to whom God has granted permission to interpret all words of the prophets, his servants<sup>259</sup> because to him alone “God made known all secrets of his servants, the prophets”.<sup>260</sup> Martin Hengel commented that the teacher becomes the model eschatological exegete.<sup>261</sup>

The Essenes developed a body of traditional exegesis. This was no doubt inspired by patterns laid down in their biblical commentaries, called pesharim, in which their common tradition was fixed in writing.<sup>262</sup> This eschatological exegesis is basically an actualizing type of allegory, which ignores the context and wording. The texts are directly related to concrete events in the present time or the awaited end. They therefore disclose information, as the book of Daniel does, not only about the eschatological anticipation of the sect, but also about its history.<sup>263</sup>

Unlike the Pharisees’ interpretation, the Essene exegesis does not refer to an oral tradition of interpretation. They made the Torah more accessible to the people. This does not exclude the fact that with regard to eschatology, the sect, because of their common Chasidic origin, is more closely connected with the Pharisees than with the Sadducees, though they also have a priestly leadership. Thus an obvious high regard for the book of Daniel is evident in both groups.<sup>264</sup>

In apocalyptic exegesis, F. M. Cross summarized and advocated that there are three principles to be kept in mind. First, prophecy openly or cryptically refers to the last days. Secondly, the so-called last days are in fact the present, the days of the sect’s life. And, finally, the history of ancient Israel’s redemption, her offices and institutions, are prototypes of the events and figures of the new

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the Spirit can only be understood through the Spirit. Like can only be known by like (1 Cor. 2:13)

<sup>259</sup> 1QpHab 2.1-10

<sup>260</sup> 1QpHab 7.4-5

<sup>261</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 170

<sup>262</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 333

<sup>263</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 170

<sup>264</sup> Idem, 171

Israel.<sup>265</sup>

#### **(d) Messiah**

Scholars thoroughly studied the concept of the Messiah in apocalyptic and Qumran literature. We next focus on this exegetical trend of the Messiah as it was developed from the Second Temple Period to early Judaism. Lawrence H. Schiffman advocates that the messianic idea in Judaism has a complex history and commented that within this history, we can distinguish certain patterns or trends of messianic thought.<sup>266</sup> F. M. Cross agrees with Schiffman that the messianic idea had been central to the development of post-biblical Judaism in all its various forms.<sup>267</sup>

Generally speaking, the Messiah concept envisions the eventual coming of an anointed redeemer, a descendant of David, who will bring about major changes in the world, leading to world peace, prosperity and the end of evil and misfortune. Essential to the messianic idea in Judaism is the expectation that when the time comes, the ancient glories of the Davidic kingdom will be re-established in the Land of Israel. This worldly messianism expresses its ideas in concrete terms. It looks forward to the messianic era when the spiritual level of humanity will rise, resulting in and from the ingathering of Israel and the universal recognition of Israel's God. This will help me understand the exegetical trends and tendencies in both early Judaism and Christianity.

#### **(i) Terminology**

It is necessary at the outset to define the term, Messiah. The Hebrew word means simply "anointed." It is used some thirty times in the Hebrew Bible with reference to kings, but it can also refer to other figures, especially the anointed high priest. In the Dead Sea scrolls, it is sometimes used with reference to the prophets of Israel (CD 2:12; 6:1; 1 QM 11:7). John Collins states that "the English word "messiah," however, has a more restricted meaning in common usage and refers to an agent of God in the end-time, who is said somewhere in the literature to be anointed."<sup>268</sup> Not all eschatological agents are

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<sup>265</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 333

<sup>266</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 317

<sup>267</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 333

<sup>268</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London; New York: Routledge,

messianic.<sup>269</sup> It is important to recognize that messiahs can be referred to by titles other than Messiah. So, for example, the Branch of David is simply another way of referring to the Davidic messiah. Even in the eschatological sense of the word, messiahs may be of various kinds.

Scholars advocated that two basic ideals of Jewish messianism could be identified: the restorative and the utopian.<sup>270</sup> The restorative seeks to bring back the ancient glories and the utopian to bring about an even better future surpassing all that ever came before. First we discuss the former one. The restorative represents a much more rational messianism, anticipating only the improvement and perfection of the present world.

Moreover, Philip Davies uses a similar definition and describes the classification of the Qumran haggadic texts. They can be broadly divided into two kinds: those reflecting on the past and those deducing the future, describing prophetic exegesis as a distinct type.<sup>271</sup> His classification also implies the dimension of the past and future, which coincides with the restorative and utopian idea of Jewish messianism.

The utopian messianism on the other hand is much more apocalyptic inclined and looks forward to vast, catastrophic changes with the coming of the messianic age.<sup>272</sup> The perfect world of the future can be built only upon the ruins of this world after the annihilation of its widespread evil and transgression. Collins also agrees with Schiffman's classification. John Collins classified Messiah as indicating two main messiah figures. They are the messiah of David origin and the heavenly messiah.<sup>273</sup> In Collins' words, the royal and Davidic messiah may also be referred to as the messiah of Israel, the Branch of David, the Prince of the Congregation, or even the Son of God. There I also a priestly messiah. He is the messiah of Aaron, but he is also known as the

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1997), 72

<sup>269</sup> E.g. the archangel Michael and Melchizedek are never called Messiah. See idem.

<sup>270</sup> Gershom Scholem, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism", *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 1-36. See also S. Talmon, "Types of Messianic Expectation at the Turn of the Era," *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 203-5. Contrast the approach of W. S. Green, "Introduction: Messianism in Judaism: Rethinking the Question," *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (ed. J. Neusner, W. S. Green and E. Frerichs; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-13. An article by the writer continues the analysis presented here through the rabbinic period (L. H. Schiffman, "The Concept of the Messiah in Second Temple and Rabbinic Literature," *Review and Expositor* 84 [1987] 235-46

<sup>271</sup> Philip R. Davies, *Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 150

<sup>272</sup> On the apocalyptic genre, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1-32

<sup>273</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 72

Interpreter of the Law, and may be described on occasion without the use of a specific title. One may also speak of a prophetic messiah, but the role of the eschatological prophet is somewhat elusive.<sup>274</sup> Collins' second type of messiah is the heavenly messiah such as the heavenly judge who is called both messiah and Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch. Heavenly agents (Michael, Melchizedek and the Prince of Light) play a prominent part in some of the scrolls but they are not called messiahs and are not anointed and so we shall not consider them as messianic figures.<sup>275</sup>

## (ii) Biblical Background

Although we are concerned mainly with messianism of the Second Temple period, we first need to examine briefly how the concept was understood in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, we can view all Jewish concepts of messianism as interpretations of biblical traditions.<sup>276</sup>

The primary form of messianic expectation in ancient Judaism focuses on the restoration of the Davidic line. Nathan's oracle in 2 Samuel 7 promised David that his kingdom endures forever.<sup>277</sup> The messianic ideal emerges from the biblical doctrine that David and his descendants were chosen by God to rule over Israel forever. God also gave the Davidic house dominion over alien peoples (II Samuel 22:44-51 = Psalm 18:44-51; Psalm 2). In II Samuel 22:50-51 (=Psalm 18:50-51), we read of King David as the "anointed one", whose descendants shall rule forever.

In general the scrolls follow Deuteronomy 17:14-19 in emphasizing that the king must be a native Israelite and in setting limits to his power in various ways. It elaborates the commandment that he should not multiply wives: he must be monogamous. It adds a provision that he should not pervert judgment. Most of the passage, however, is concerned with the conduct of war against the enemies of Israel.<sup>278</sup>

In the Psalms, the king is sometimes given a superhuman status. Psalm 2, which refers to the king as the Lord's anointed, tells of the decree of the Lord:

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<sup>274</sup> Idem

<sup>275</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 72

<sup>276</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 318

<sup>277</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 73

<sup>278</sup> Idem, 80

“You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Psalm 110 bids the king sit at God’s right hand, and tells him that he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. An oracle in the book of Isaiah announces the birth of a royal child, who is named “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6; cf. 1 QH 11:9-10). These three texts, Psalms 2 and 110 and Isaiah 9, have all been plausibly related to enthronement ceremonies in ancient Judah. An oracle in Isaiah 11 predicts that “a shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse” in whose wonderful reign the wolf shall live with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid. It is uncertain whether this oracle was, uttered by Isaiah while the Davidic line was still intact, or whether it was composed later after it had been, dethroned by the Babylonians.<sup>279</sup>

After the Israelite kingdom split when Solomon died and the size of the kingdom dwindled, hope arose among the people that the ancient glories of the past would one day be restored. Such a reunited Davidic monarchy would also control the neighboring territories that were originally part of the Davidic and Solomonian empires. Isaiah describes the qualities of the future Davidic king, especially the justness of his rule (Isaiah 11:1-9).<sup>280</sup> This trend is brought about by Ruth’s pretended historical situation. This will be further examined in the chapter of Early Jewish Exegesis on the Book of Ruth.

The Babylonian exile and the subsequent restoration of Judah as a Persian province without its own king, created a glaring discrepancy between God’s promise to David and historical reality. The concern for the fulfillment of prophecy is apparent in Jeremiah 33:14-16. The “good word” refers to an earlier prophecy in Jeremiah 23:5-6.<sup>281</sup> The passage continues emphatically. The historical failure of the promise led to the hope that it would be fulfilled at some time in the future.<sup>282</sup>

The idea of a return to the bygone days of Davidic rule and to Israel’s place as a world power typifies the restorative tendency: That which was and is no more

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<sup>279</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 73

<sup>280</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 318

<sup>281</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 73

<sup>282</sup> Idem



will be again. On the other hand, the notion of the Day of the Lord<sup>283</sup>--- that catastrophic upheaval that will usher in a new age --- is utopian, calling for the utter destruction of all evil and wickedness, something never before seen in the history of humanity: That which never was will be. These two approaches together molded the eschatological speculation on the part of all Jewish groups.<sup>284</sup>

It is important to note that in the Hebrew Scriptures these ideas were still separate. It was their combination in Second Temple times that unleashed the powerful forces that eventually propelled the Jews to revolt against Rome and led the Christians to embrace a messianic figure.<sup>285</sup>

We may say that the root of early Judaism and Christianity can be found in the apocalyptic vision. Early Judaism and Christianity have the same common historical and religious background. At the turn of the first century CE, they were divided into two main streams practicing various exegetical methods but shared the same origin. Jewish exegesis trends focuses on the Davidic line as the hope of the Jewish community while Christians projected their destiny to Jesus, as Messiah by using various exegetical methods. To this I will return later.

### **(iii) The Second Temple Period**

These two messianic trends could both be found in the Second Temple period. Restorative views and utopian views of the Jewish future vied with one another as part of the melting pot of ideologies forging the varieties of Judaism in this era. The restorative trend emphasized primarily the reconstitution of the Davidic dynasty; the more utopian and apocalyptic varieties, taking their cue from the biblical notion of the Day of the Lord, focused mainly on the destruction of the wicked.<sup>286</sup>

In early Second Temple times, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah anticipated that the Davidic kingdom would be renewed under Zerubbabel, a scion of King David who governed Judaea in the Persian period. At the same time,

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<sup>283</sup> "Day of the Lord" is a term for the illustration of destruction of the world and Israel community in older prophecy and as day of salvation in newer prophecy. Apocalyptic group refers to the last view.

<sup>284</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 318

<sup>285</sup> Idem

<sup>286</sup> Idem, 319

Zechariah prophesied about two “messianic” figures --- the high priest and the messianic king (Zechariah 6:9-16). This essentially restorative approach would eventually be combined with some more apocalyptic ideas in the thoughts of the Dead Sea sect.<sup>287</sup>

Despite the clear biblical basis for a messianic hope, however, there is little evidence for such an expectation for much of the Second Temple period. There is reason to believe that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah regarded Zerubbabel, the governor at the time of the Persian restoration, as a figure who would fulfill the promises and who would restore the Davidic line. Haggai, speaking in the name of the Lord, refers to Zerubbabel as “my servants, the branch” (Zech 3:8, a reference to the prophecy of Jeremiah). While we do not know what eventually happened to Zerubbabel, it is clear that the prophets’ hopes were disappointed.<sup>288</sup>

Messianic oracles are rare in post-exilic prophecy. There is a famous messianic prophecy in Zechariah 9 (“Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”; cf. Matt. 21:5). This oracle has often been related to the campaign of Alexander the Great in 333 BCE, because of a reference to “your sons, O Greece” in 9:13; but the reference is suspect on grounds of meter and parallelism and can easily be explained by dittography. The provenance of the oracle is quite uncertain. Remarkably, we find no messianic references in the literature from the time of the Maccabean revolt. The book of Daniel uses the word messiah with reference to Joshua, the high priest of the Persian period (cf Dan 9:25) and again with reference to the murdered high priest, Onias III (9:26), but it makes no mention of a messianic king. The savior figure to which it looks is the archangel Michael (Dan 12:1) who comes on the clouds like a human being (Dan 7:13)<sup>289</sup>. Neither is there any clear reference to a messiah in the books of Enoch from this period (although 1 Enoch 90:37, which refers to a white bull in the eschatological period, is sometimes interpreted as messianic).<sup>290</sup> The bull is better explained as a new Adam. The absence of any messianic expectation in the apocalyptic writings of the early second century BCE is a strong indication that such expectation was dormant in this period. Apart from the Dead Sea scrolls there is only one clear messianic

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<sup>287</sup> Idem

<sup>288</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 74

<sup>289</sup> See Collins 1993: 304-10

<sup>290</sup> See Tiller 1993: 20, 384.

passage in the literature of the last two centuries BCE. This is in the Psalms of Solomon, from the middle of the first century BCE.<sup>291</sup>

#### (iv) Conclusion

John Collins admitted that the importance of messianic expectation in the Dead Sea scrolls should not be exaggerated. There is no evidence that such expectation played a causal role in the origin of the sect.<sup>292</sup> Moreover, Kenneth Pomykaka's dissertation also echoed this view that there did not exist in early Judaism a continuous, widespread, or dominant expectation for a Davidic messiah.<sup>293</sup> It was not the central and continuous theme despite sporadic description of messianic hopes in Jewish literature and biblical texts. However, we do indeed find some lines of the images of Davidic dynasty in a series of literature. Despite no continuous and dominant expectation for a Davidic messiah, the analysis of the Davidic dynasty tradition in the biblical material prior to the late Persian period indicated that the tradition of a Davidic dynasty was marked by diversity.<sup>294</sup> It is undeniably that the thoughts on this issue are not in agreement but was an important theme. This means that one and the same thought is presented in different ways.

One of Jewish scholars, Josephus, paid much attention to it. Josephus' view of the Davidic dynasty tradition does not seem to have attracted the attention of scholars. There are more general studies treating Josephus' use of the Jewish scriptures<sup>295</sup> examining his portrayal of various scriptural heroes.<sup>296</sup> It can be shown, however, how Josephus' interpretation of this biblical tradition fits well into the early Jewish approach to biblical literature.

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<sup>291</sup> John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 74

<sup>292</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>293</sup> Kenneth Pomykaka formulated some observations about the Davidic description in the texts. He concluded that the exilic and post-exilic usage of the Davidic dynasty tradition illustrated ways in which the tradition could be interpreted in the absence of the Davidic monarchy, and indicated that at the dawn of the early Jewish period evidence for an ongoing Davidic royalist or messianic hope was very limited. Moreover, evidence for the use of the Davidic dynasty tradition in texts from the early post-exilic period was sparse. Kenneth Pomykaka, "The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism" *JBL Early Judaism and its literature* 7 (Atlantic: Scholar Press, 1995) 265-6; 270

<sup>294</sup> Pomykaka further elaborated the diversity by "providing later authors with a rich array of concepts and terminology upon which to draw." Kenneth Pomykaka, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 265-6

<sup>295</sup> See for example H. W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (HDR 7; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); L. H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship* (1937-1980) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984) 121-130

<sup>296</sup> See Feldman, *Modern Scholarship*, 143-190

Josephus' comments about the Davidic dynasty all appear in his work *The Jewish Antiquities*, a history of the Jewish people written in 93-94 CE, which is essentially a paraphrase of biblical material. Taken together the various references to the Davidic dynasty indicating it as a glorious phase in the history of Israel, shows that it nevertheless came to an end because of the failure of the Davidic kings to obey the Law of Moses. This construal is evident in the very first reference to the story of Ruth, where Josephus paraphrases Ruth 4:17 as: "Of Obed was born Jesse, and of him David, who became king and bequeathed his dominion to his posterity for one and twenty generations."<sup>297</sup> Josephus' point here is to show how God can promote a person, like David, descended from ordinary folk like Ruth and Boaz, to greatness.<sup>298</sup> The failure of the Davidic dynasty thereby provided a moral example of how God punished disobedience.<sup>299</sup>

On the other hand, we can interpret the tradition of a Davidic line through different ages within a historical and social context. During the early Jewish period around 60 BCE, the literature from Pharisaical circles provides the first evidence in the early Jewish period of hope for a Davidic messiah, being the Son of David.<sup>300</sup> This hope was based on an interpretation of the Davidic dynasty tradition that posited an eternally valid dynastic promise on the basis of which God would raise up an ideal Davidic king --- a king who would rule Israel and the world.<sup>301</sup> The catalyst for this interpretation was the rise of the Hasmoneans and their claim to kingship. As opposition to the Hasmoneans increased, this reading of the Davidic dynasty tradition functioned to attack the legitimacy of the Hasmoneans, exploiting the contradiction between an eternally valid Davidic dynasty and a Hasmonean rule. Moreover, the characterization and role of this Son of David served to articulate the author's vision of an ideal social and political order, free from foreign oppression and full of righteousness, holiness, and wisdom. Indeed, the Davidic king, who was ascribed every kind of charismatic endowment --- but especially wisdom and righteousness would be the mediator of these divine blessing. On the other hand, temple and priest-had no place in this ideal Israel.

The Davidic messiah would act as God's agent of salvation in the final conflict

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<sup>297</sup> *Ant.* 5. 336

<sup>298</sup> *Ant.* 5.337

<sup>299</sup> Kenneth Pomykaka, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 270

<sup>300</sup> *Pss. Sol.* 17

<sup>301</sup> Kenneth Pomykaka, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 268

against Israel's enemies and therefore was an important component in the author's vision of the eschatological landscape.<sup>302</sup> This is to investigate specifically how the Davidic dynasty tradition was interpreted and applied in various early Christian and rabbinic texts in terms of the particular characterizations and functions ascribed to the Davidic messiah. Only in this way would one be able to explain how and why Davidic messianism became an important idea for these two religious traditions that emerged from early Judaism.

## 2.6.2 The Pharisees

### (a) Origins

Lawrence H. Schiffman quoted from rabbinic sources to trace the origins of the Pharisees back earlier to the Persian and early Hellenistic periods when the Men of the Great Assembly were said to have provided Israel's religious leadership. It was believed that the Men of the Great Assembly should be identified with the *soferim* (scribes), thereby making them the forerunners of the Pharisaic movement.<sup>303</sup>

Scholars believed that the Pharisees and Essenes were the successors of the Hasidim. This was the trend during the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>304</sup> Those who held this view form an endless list of persons.<sup>305</sup> The argument for historians was to look for connections between the Hasideans and the scribes, being an enigmatic category in Second Temple Judaism. They were supposed to be the tactical core of resistance to the hellenization of Jewish Palestine. However, these hypotheses gave way to a rather simple identification of the scribe-Hasideans with the resistance viewpoint as it is expressed in apocalyptic literature.<sup>306</sup> This oversimplification of the forces at play in Jewish life during the second century BCE has found some resistance. The simple explanation of "hellenization" to be the mere explanation for the origins of the

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<sup>302</sup> Idem, 269

<sup>303</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 77

<sup>304</sup> John Kampen, "The Hasideans and the Origin of Pharisaism: A Study in 1 and 2 Maccabees" *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 24. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 33-38

<sup>305</sup> Please refer to Kampen's list in footnote 145 on p. 38

<sup>306</sup> John Kampen, *The Hasideans and the Origin of Pharisaism*, 41; See also L. H. Feldman, "Hengel's Judaism and Hellenism in Retrospect," *JBL* 96 (1977) 371-82; F. Millar, "The Background to the Maccabean Revolution: Reflections on Martin Hengel's "Judaism and Hellenism", *JJS* 29 9(1978) 1-21; L. H. Feldman, "How Much Hellenism in Jewish Palestine," *HUCA* 57 (1986) 83-111.

Pharisees and the Essenes was found to be deficient.

The Pharisees derived their name from the Hebrew *perushim* meaning “to be separated”. Lawrence H. Schiffman connected this designation to their probable self-imposed separation from ritually impure food and from the tables of the common people, termed *‘amha-‘aretz* (people of the land) in Talmudic sources. In their eyes the people, were not scrupulous regarding laws of Levitical purity and tithes.<sup>307</sup>

### **(b) Who are Pharisees?**

Lawrence H. Schiffman identified the Pharisees as the middle and lower classes.<sup>308</sup> As a consequence of their lower social status, they really did not become Hellenized but seem to have remained primarily Near Eastern in culture because those attached to Hellenistic power were regarded as the upper class. To be fair, they may have adopted Greek words or intellectual approaches but they viewed as authoritative only what they regarded as the ancient traditions of Israel. Martin Hengel also shared the same view. He believed that the leading Pharisees were indeed also scribes who formed an elitist movement. They turned to the people to educate them in the observance of the law.<sup>309</sup>

### **(c) Exegetical method**

Schiffman pointed out that the Pharisees accepted what they termed the “traditions of the fathers” --- non-biblical laws and customs believed to have been passed down orally through the generations.<sup>310</sup> These teachings supplemented the written Torah and were part of what the Rabbis later would call the Oral Law. They are said to have been extremely scrupulous in observing the Torah and to have been experts in its interpretation.

They tried therefore to extend the holiness of the Temple to the whole “Eretz Israel”. Furthermore they gradually tried to impose their understanding of the laws on the people. In order to do this it was necessary to interpret the laws in such a manner that they could be practiced in every-day life. Therefore, Josephus as well as the New Testament emphasizes the influence and the

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<sup>307</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 76

<sup>308</sup> *Idem*, 77

<sup>309</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 172

<sup>310</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 78

high esteem the Pharisees enjoyed among the people.<sup>311</sup> The thoroughness in exegesis and observance of the laws was a typical characteristic of them.<sup>312</sup> The Pharisees' popularity<sup>313</sup> together with their unique approach to the Jewish law laid the groundwork for their eventual ascendancy in Jewish law, and also laid the groundwork for their eventual ascendancy in Jewish political and religious life. The Oral Law concept that grew from the Pharisaic 'traditions of the fathers' allowed Judaism to adapt to the new and varied circumstances it would face during Talmudic times and later. In time, Pharisaism would become rabbinic Judaism --- the basis for all of subsequent Jewish life and civilization.<sup>314</sup>

Furthermore, D. I. Brewer has tried in his dissertation<sup>315</sup> to describe the exegetical methods of the Pharisees on the basis of about 100 tannaitic texts, ascribed to experts before 70 CE. These stem from discussions of Pharisees, Sadducees and the Schools of Shammai and Hillel. He comes to the conclusion that the 'scribal exegesis' of the Pharisees must be clearly distinguished from the 'inspired exegesis' of Qumran, the apocalyptic texts and Philo.<sup>316</sup> We are to give credit to Brewer's conclusions having point out two main streams of ancient Jewish exegetical methods. The scribes considered all of the scriptures as law dictated by God, in which the exact wording was extremely important and in which every detail was of great significance. In this context, Brewer speaks of 'nomological exegesis'.<sup>317</sup> Any search for a deeper meaning in a text (*deras*), which went beyond the literal, for example through allegorical interpretation, would have been rejected. Martin Hengel further qualified both types of exegesis, the scribal "nomological" *pesat* and the sectarian "inspired" *deras*, to proceed from two identical presuppositions:

- (1) holy scripture is consistent and
- (2) every text in scripture is significant.

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<sup>311</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 172

<sup>312</sup> Cf. A. I. Baumgarten, "The Name of the Pharisees", *JBL* 102 (1983), 411-28 (413)

<sup>313</sup> Josephus stresses the popularity of the Pharisees among the people. Given his firsthand knowledge of the last years of the Second Temple people, we should credit this view, although we also need to acknowledge Josephus's definitely pro Pharisaic prejudices.

<sup>314</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 78

<sup>315</sup> Cf. D. I. Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Texte und Studien zum Antike Judentum 30; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992)

<sup>316</sup> Idem, 173

<sup>317</sup> Idem

However for “scribal exegesis” every text supposedly has only one meaning.<sup>318</sup>

Hengel affirmed that Brewer’s observations are worthwhile but too one-sided.<sup>319</sup> He found that a mixture of *pesat* and *deras* exegesis, as it occurred in the literature of later rabbis and already existed before 70 CE. The reason for the predominantly nomological interpretation among the scribes was that they were most of all jurists of the Torah. The literal interpretation of law texts was therefore part of their daily praxis as judges or advisers. This does not exclude the possibility that such a scribe could be an apocalyptic or mystic at the same time. On the other hand, that the Essenes also were able to argue on this nomological basis is evident in QMMT as well as in the legal parts of the Damascus Document.<sup>320</sup> One must conclude that the exegesis of the Pharisaic scribes was surely not as one-sided as Brewer suggests. The scribes made use of multifarious exegetical forms, which were current in Jerusalem before 70 CE.<sup>321</sup>

Both forms of exegesis, the nomological and the inspired, were present right from the start in the Torah and in the prophetic corpus. It stood in the conflict between the idea of the salvific presence of God in the cult and in the observance of the law and the expectation of the coming of God’s reign on the other hand. Both types of interpretation were fruitful in universal history. Early Christianity developed with the help of this inspired eschatological exegesis. Rabbinic Judaism indeed preferred the nomological interpretation.<sup>322</sup>

### 2.6.3 The Sadducees

#### (a) Who are Sadducees?

The Sadducees were a recognizable group by about 150 BCE. Predominantly aristocratic, they were mostly either priests themselves or had intermarried with the high priest families. They tended to be moderate Hellenizers whose primary loyalty was to the religion of Israel but whose culture was greatly influenced by the Greek environment in which they lived.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 173

<sup>319</sup> Idem

<sup>320</sup> Idem

<sup>321</sup> Idem, 174

<sup>322</sup> Idem, 175

<sup>323</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 73



The Sadducees derived their name from Zadok, the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple in the time of Solomon. The Zadokite family of high priests served at the head of the priesthood throughout First Temple times except when foreign worship was brought into the Temple --- and again during Second Temple times --- until the Hasmonaeans wrested control of the high priesthood from them.<sup>324</sup>

### **(b) Sadducees' teaching**

The Sadducees rejected the “traditions of the fathers” that the Pharisees considered as law. For this reason, later rabbinic sources picture them as rejecting the Oral Law. However, the notion promulgated by some church fathers that the Sadducees accepted only Torah as authoritative, rejecting the Prophets and the emerging corpus of Writings, is unsubstantiated.<sup>325</sup>

The Sadducean approach had a major impact on political and religious developments in the Judaism of the Second Temple period. Sadducean offshoots played a leading role in the formation of the Dead Sea sect. There is even evidence that some Sadducean traditions remained in circulation long enough to influence the Karaite sect, which came to the fore in the eighth century CE. Yet despite their important role in these phenomena, the Sadducees ceased to be a factor in Jewish history with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. The sacrificial system, in which they had played such a leading role, was no longer practiced. Their power base, the Jerusalem Temple, was gone, and their strict legal rulings augured poorly for the adaptation of Judaism to the new surroundings and circumstances of the years ahead.<sup>326</sup>

### **(c) Sadducees and Pharisees**

Why did the Sadducees disagree so extensively with Pharisaic tradition? What made the two diverge on so many matters of Jewish law?

Later Jewish tradition claimed that all the differences revolved around the Sadducean rejection of the Oral Law. Based on this assumption, modern scholars have argued that the Sadducees were strict literalists, who followed the plain meaning of the words of the Torah. Yet such an approach does not

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<sup>324</sup> Idem

<sup>325</sup> Idem, 74

<sup>326</sup> Idem, 76

explain most of the views on legal matters attributed to the Sadducees.<sup>327</sup>

The Sadducees also differed from the Pharisees on theological questions. They denied the notions of reward and punishment after death and the immortality of the soul, ideas squarely accepted by the Pharisees. They did not believe in angels in the supernatural sense, although they must have acknowledged the “divine messengers” mentioned in the Bible. To them, because of human beings’ absolute free will, God did not exercise control over human affairs.<sup>328</sup>

As recorded in rabbinic literature, the primary dispute separating the Sadducees from the Pharisees pertained to the calendar. The Sadducees held that the first offering of the Omer (barley sheaf; Leviticus 23:9-14) had to take place not on the second day of Passover, in accord with Leviticus 23:11, “on the morrow of the Sabbath.” To ensure that this Festival was observed on the proper day of the week, the Sadducees adopted a calendar that, like the one known from the Dead Sea sect and the Book of Jubilees, was based on both solar months and solar years.<sup>329</sup>

## 2.6.4 Wisdom groups

### (a) Who are the wise?

James L. Crenshaw gave four accounts for the rise of wisdom group.<sup>330</sup> The existence of a professional class of sages in Israel has been postulated in analogy to Egypt and Mesopotamia. Their presence is confirmed by a literary corpus that reflects sapiential concerns, attacks upon the wise within prophetic texts<sup>331</sup> and the general probability that any royal court would need the special talents of sages.

Among them, Egyptian origin is given high priority. A professional class of intelligentsia arose in the third millennium BCE in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. In Egypt these courtiers instructed the children of the pharaohs and other potential bureaucrats. Their insights concerning proper speech,

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<sup>327</sup> Idem, 74

<sup>328</sup> Idem

<sup>329</sup> Idem, 75

<sup>330</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 20

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Isa. 5:21; 31:2; 29:14; Jer. 8:8-9

correct etiquette and interpersonal relationships proved indispensable to aspiring rulers. Consequently a monarchical system of private education developed and instructors composed texts that survived for centuries in a tradition-oriented culture. Similarly, schools in or near temples became the instrument by which Sumerian and Babylonian scribes acquired special skills that enabled them to assist the government in its various projects and to provide numerous services for wealthy private citizens.<sup>332</sup>

The division between the wealthy and the vast majority of people in society was much greater in antiquity than at present. There was really no middle class. Most wealth came from the land. There seem to have been few who made a fortune by trading or commerce. Therefore, wealth and a high position in society usually went together. Many of those with wealth would also have been involved with the court and administration in some way or the other. Such people had the opportunity for education and the interest in pursuing or promoting intellectual activities for personal gain, for advancement of status among their peers, for entertainments, and for their own personal interest.<sup>333</sup>

A second group who had interest in intellectual pursuits was the priests. It is often assumed that priests had no concerns beyond the cultic. On the contrary, with a secure income and plenty of spare time when not serving directly in the temple, they were the ideal group to be concerned with preserving the tradition and composing theological and other works.

The third main group of people able to devote time to reading and composing literature was the scribes. They were the main group involved in administration.<sup>334</sup>

The wise were not a specific class or profession but encompassed all sorts of individuals from various strata of society. The wise par excellence are the learned, the advisers, the counselors, the viziers --- whether spiritual, political, or even private.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 21

<sup>333</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, "Priests, Prophets, Diviners and Sages", 169

<sup>334</sup> Idem, 170; See also James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 22-3

<sup>335</sup> Idem, 176

## (b) Ben Sira as Scribe

The first scribal personality we meet once Ezra had receded into the shadows is Ben Sira of the second century BCE. The fact that his grandson made this collection of wisdom poetry under his grandfather's name is a sign of the new epoch although it was prevented from becoming part of the eventual Hebrew canon.<sup>336</sup> Sira appears as author of wisdom sayings in the sense of traditional experienced-wisdom, but he is in fact a scribe that acted as exegete of Holy Scripture.<sup>337</sup> Lester Grabbe also confirmed this connection by elaborating on the definition of the wise. He stated that the association of the scribe with wisdom and the wise counselor is found in *Ahiqar* as well. He is referred to as "a wise and skillful scribe" (*Ahiqar* 1.1), "the wise scribe, counselor of Assyria" (*Ahiqar* 1.12) and "the wise scribe and master of good counsel" (*Ahiqar* 2:42).<sup>338</sup> The sage was inseparable from the scribal tradition. Ability to read and write was confined to the relatively small elite group of trained scribes.<sup>339</sup> Scribes were needed in the court and economic administration, the temple, and even the army. Because of the need for administrative staff, schools were established in the royal court. They were devoted to the production, study and preservation of texts, especially religious texts.<sup>340</sup>

Just as *hakham* and *sofer* are merged in one person, we meet for the first time in Sira's work with a revolutionary identification: true universal wisdom, which comes from God and permeates creation is identical with the law given only to Israel. The "Creator of the universe" himself has allocated wisdom to Zion as its dwelling place so that it will bear fruit in his people.<sup>341</sup> But this is not all; wisdom is put on a level with the deed of the covenant, which was handed to Moses as Holy Scripture. This means that the five books of Moses truly "embody" the unfathomable wisdom of God. The task of Torah exegesis must therefore become an unending and always new exercise. Through interpretation the exegete participates in God's universal wisdom.<sup>342</sup>

This thought proved to be very fruitful in that it not only became the root of the

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<sup>336</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of life in Israel and Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12

<sup>337</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 164

<sup>338</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners and Sages*, 163

<sup>339</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and law in the Old Testament*, 10

<sup>340</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners and Sages*, 164

<sup>341</sup> Sir. 24. 1-12

<sup>342</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 164

rabbinic idea that the Torah is the “instrument through which God created the world”<sup>343</sup> but also that in the Torah, all divine secrets have been revealed. Consequently the rank of scribe was exalted to a metaphysical level.<sup>344</sup>

Ben Sira still understands the exegesis of the Torah as a priestly privilege. The offices of priest and prophet do not exist in opposition to one another because for him prophets had only a temporary function between Joshua and the construction of the Second Temple. In the present time the priestly exegete of the Holy scripture, enlightened by God’s Spirit has replaced the prophets.<sup>345</sup>

Ben Sira thus forms a spiritual-intellectual pivotal point. He is a wise man of synthesis, who unites contrary aspects: Wisdom and Torah, universal knowledge and observance of the scriptures, sapiential reason and faith based on revelation, priestly concern with order and prophetic inspiration, Temple cult and ethical action. But he finds himself faced with a threatening crisis. This daring synthesis cannot hold in this form. Therefore his emphatic warning to all the priests to remain united.<sup>346</sup>

This crisis becomes evident in the experiment of the “Hellenistic reform” in Jerusalem during the second century BCE, which was initiated by some of the leading priests. This reform led the community in Jerusalem to the brink of self-destruction as it is witnessed in the book of Daniel.<sup>347</sup>

In effect he has arrived at a crossroad: how can it continue to be true that exegesis of scriptures remain only a privilege of the priests, when he himself does not any more regard wisdom as a privilege of an aristocratic group, but instead invites all who want to learn into his school?<sup>348</sup> And if he himself describes his activity as exegete and poet in prophetic terms and claims to do his work by the divine charism of the Spirit, will this not lead to a new form of “inspired exegesis”, such as one meets in the apocalyptic texts?<sup>349</sup> And if the priestly aristocracy rejects the commandments of the Torah, must not the laity step into the breach and take over the exegetical task? The crisis, which soon

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<sup>343</sup> Ab. 3.14 R. Aqiba.

<sup>344</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 164

<sup>345</sup> Idem, 166

<sup>346</sup> Sir. 41.8-9; cf. 2.3; 4.19 etc; Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 271

<sup>347</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 166

<sup>348</sup> Sir. 51.23; cf. 51.29

<sup>349</sup> Idem

followed shows that trust in salvation in the cult and in the traditional action-consequence rule, broke down with the desecration of the Temple, which referred to the acts of Antioch Epiphanes in the years 167 BCE and the bloody persecution. New answers had to be found whereby prophetic preaching of the coming of God's kingdom would be of central importance.<sup>350</sup>

Reference to these Chasidic scribes are found in Daniel 11 and 12<sup>351</sup> where the maskilim are mentioned as those who are acting as teachers and exegetes, who "inform" many among the people and "lead them to justice" and who suffer persecution because of their actions.<sup>352</sup> In this respect, we found an important point about how the interpreter is affected by his/her pre-conceptions and belief. The communal leader has a moral need to lead his community to take right actions. This may lead to induce exegesis with a moral end of the interpreters.

### **(c) The teaching of the wise**

The literature of the sages covers a wide range, much of it with parallels to the OT wisdom writings: instructions, admonitions based on traditional Egyptian concerns for order, skeptical literature, treatises in praise of the scribe, religious writings, and what might be termed magical literature. Both of these question traditional beliefs and expectations about afterlife and the mortuary cult, showing that at least some sages were not afraid to go against established beliefs.<sup>353</sup>

Wisdom literature, however, reflects a different type of writing. It comes in the category of attempts to understand the world and how it works. It can be called philosophical literature in the broadest sense. It may be theological literature in the narrow sense. It shows a desire to reflect on life and to ask questions, to wonder why, to seek out specialized (or hidden) knowledge. Despite the difficulties of defining "wisdom" and the justified criticism about finding wisdom influence too widely (Crenshaw), there is common consensus that a wisdom tradition exists.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Idem, 167

<sup>351</sup> Dan. 12:33, 35; 12:3, 10

<sup>352</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Scriptures and their interpretation in second temple Judaism*, 167

<sup>353</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners and Sages*, 164

<sup>354</sup> Idem, 171

## 2.7 Developmental period of Early Jewish and Rabbinic exegesis

Covering nearly a millennium (1<sup>st</sup> century-11<sup>th</sup> century CE), the rabbinic period is a lengthy and complex era, during which exegetical approaches and traditions developed that link up with inner-biblical and early post-biblical interpretation at one end and with medieval interpretation at the other. Rabbinic tradition developed primarily in two centers: the land of Israel and in Babylonia, with the latter gradually becoming more important and influential.<sup>355</sup>

### 2.7.1 Schools and Academies

Schools or academies were the locus of Jewish religious education. Charles Kannengiesser commented that the origin of these schools may be discovered in the scriptural commandment to provide religious education for children (Deut. 11:19).<sup>356</sup> On the basis of rabbinic literature, we may reconstruct how this commandment was fulfilled in the early period of rabbinic Judaism. A communal tutor met the students in the house of the book. These academies probably consisted of a small number of students who lived near the residence of the rabbi. The schools were formed due to the religious persecution. Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus and he expelled all Jews from the city. The prosecution led to the establishment of some learning centers. That contributed largely to the forming of schools all over the country. The most famous one was at Jamnia. There are two types of learning places. The schools may distinguish between synagogues erected as local centre for religion and education and schools erected around Rabbis.

There were two rival schools of thought among the rabbis. The more conservative of these schools was led by Shammai whereas the more liberal by Hillel. It was Hillel's school, which eventually triumphed and left its mark on later Jewish exegesis.<sup>357</sup> Hillel and Shammai and their schools (1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE to 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE) argued points of law during the late Second Temple period, up to the time of the Temple's destruction in 70 CE. That date is a convenient marker for the start of the classical rabbinic era, which is conventionally divided into the four periods following, with overlapping beginnings and endings. These

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<sup>355</sup> Yaakov Elman, "Classical Rabbinic Interpretation", in *Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1844

<sup>356</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 122

<sup>357</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1844

periods are subdivided into generations, with a “generation” generally indicating the passing of a school of teaching from master to student.<sup>358</sup>

## 2.7.2 The Rabbinic Period

The rabbinic writings of this period fall into two broad periods of time: tannaic (or tannaitic) and amoraic.<sup>359</sup>

### (a) *Tannaitic* period

The tannaic period extends roughly from 70 C.E. to 300 C.E.,<sup>360</sup> that is, from the establishment of the early academies, Bet Shammai (“House of Shammai”) and Bet Hillel (“House of Hillel”), to the compiling and editing of the Mishna under Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (“the Prince” or “Patriarch”: 135-217 CE) in the first decade of the third century CE<sup>361</sup>

A *tanna*’ is one who “repeats” tradition,<sup>362</sup> i.e., a transmitter or tradent of oral teaching. There are five generations of *tanna’im*, beginning with the schools of Hillel and Shammai and extending to the era of Gamaliel III.<sup>363</sup> The achievement of the tannaic period was the production of the Mishna (Mishnah). Tannaic sayings found in later writings outside of Mishna are called *baraitot*<sup>364</sup>

### (b) *Amoraic* period

The second period is that of the *amora’im*. An *amora*’ is a “speaker” or interpreter.<sup>365</sup> The Amoraim were the interpreters or commentators on the Mishnah. The compiling of the principal commentaries on the Mishnah and the

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<sup>358</sup> Idem

<sup>359</sup> Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 115

<sup>360</sup> Jacob Neusner and many other scholars argue that it is difficult to make any definitive statements about teachings, which are prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. The Mishnah itself defines the end of the Tannaitic period. This would mean that by the mid-third century C.E., the Tannaitic period came to an end. See Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 124

<sup>361</sup> Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 115

<sup>362</sup> The earliest group of the sages in Rabbinic Judaism is called *Tannaim*. The term *Tanna* is an Aramaic word associated with the Hebrew root, *shanah*, “repeat,” or “learn”. See Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 123; Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 115

<sup>363</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1845

<sup>364</sup> An Aramaic word literally means “standing outside”

<sup>365</sup> It originates from the root amar, “say”, “name”, or “explain” Cf. Craig A. Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 115



two Talmuds define the Amoraic period. This definition implies the development of two groups of scholars in Eretz Israel and Babylonia and the eventual redaction of two Talmuds, the Palestinian and the Babylonian.<sup>366</sup> This material is divided into halakah, which covers matters of behavior and conduct, and haggadah, which is meant to illustrate scriptural texts and edify the reader, though this distinction is not always maintained in practice.<sup>367</sup> The Babylonian *'amora'im* is divided into seven “generations” and in the land of Israel *'amora'im* is divided into five.<sup>368</sup> This period, beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, lasted until about the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Midrashim are concerned mainly with scriptural exegesis. They are largely but not entirely halakic in content. Eventually this material was gathered together and supplemented by still later commentaries into the Talmudim, which were produced independently at Jerusalem and at Babylon towards the end of the Amoraic period (ca 500 CE). Dating is a major problem with all of this material. The codifications were relatively late, but in a highly traditionalist society there is no doubt that much of the contents goes back to New Testament times or earlier.<sup>369</sup>

The Amoraic period in Eretz Israel follows the contours of the political developments in the eastern Roman Empire. After Constantine's final conquest of Israel in 324 CE, Roman legislation became increasingly anti-Jewish, and by the end of the fourth century the Patriarchate and synagogues were principal targets of anti-Jewish laws.<sup>370</sup> In mid-fourth century there was a rebellion, followed by a decline of the capital cities (Tiberias, Sepporis, Lydda) noted in the archaeological records. Tradition recorded that many rabbis emigrated to Babylonia at this time, possibly as a result of these events. The Patriarchate was abolished by Roman edict by 429 BCE, and in the latter half of the century the academies declined, and, perhaps responding to these political turns, the Jerusalem Talmud (JT) was redacted and the Amoraic period in Erez Israel came to a close ca. 400 CE. In Babylonia, it extends another century, since the Babylonian Talmud (BT) received

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<sup>366</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 124; Craig A. Evans stressed the importance of this period as that the achievement of the amoraic period was the production of the two Talmuds and several of the Midrashim, Craig A. Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 115

<sup>367</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 50

<sup>368</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1845

<sup>369</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 51

<sup>370</sup> see Codex Theodosianus 16.8.1, 5, 6, 13, 26, and 16.9.1,2

significant redactions ca. 500, only to assume its final form in the following period.<sup>371</sup>

The Amoraic period in Babylonia extends from the third through the fifth centuries C.E. Relations between the Jewish communities and their non-Jewish rulers there seem to have been more harmonious than in the Roman Empire.<sup>372</sup>

### (c) Other periods

The third, little-known period is that of the *savora'im*. A *savora'* is an “expositor.” These rabbis were members of academies in Babylonia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

The fourth period, which at its end crosses over into medieval interpretation, is that of the *ge'onim*. A *ga'on* is the leader of one of the academies in Babylonia; *ga'on* means “pride” and is a short form of the title *ro'sh yeshivat ga'on Ya'akov* “head of the academy [that is] the pride of Jacob.” The geonic period extends from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and saw the first efforts at systematic legal commentary of the Talmud. The greatest among the Rabbis was Saadia ben Joseph Gaon (10<sup>th</sup> century), who began rabbinic study of philosophy and literature, as well as study of the Bible (rather than only study of the Talmud).<sup>373</sup>

## 2.8 Foundational Documents of Rabbinic Literature

The major works of the rabbinic period are of two types: those arranged topically, of which the main ones are the Mishnah and the Talmud; and those arranged around the biblical text, Midrash, including the ten collections in the so-called *Midrash Rabbah*.<sup>374</sup>

### 2.8.1 Works arranged topically

#### (a) Mishnah

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<sup>371</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 125

<sup>372</sup> Idem

<sup>373</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846

<sup>374</sup> Idem

The Mishnah is a compilation of the written records of oral discussions on various laws. “Mishnah” means “oral instruction”.<sup>375</sup> The Mishnah is, believed to have been compiled in its final form by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi<sup>376</sup> around 200 CE,<sup>377</sup> though it contains material from generations long before the Rabbi’s time.<sup>378</sup> The Mishnah is the basic halakic document, containing sixty-three tractates (*Massektoth*) of material not necessarily attached to a text of Scripture and organized under six major headings (Sedarim). All the later halakic developments in Judaism were built on or related to the Mishnah.<sup>379</sup>

The Mishnah constitutes a seminal collection of the traditions, which answered the community’s needs for guidance regarding religious practice, ethics, and social problems. The Mishnah is organized into six divisions, or sedarim, “orders”.<sup>380</sup> Each seder is then divided into masekhtot, “tractates”, which are then divided into paraqim, “chapters”), and, finally, into the smallest unit, which is called mishnah.

- (1) The first order, Zeraim (“Seeds”), focuses on acknowledgement of the Divine (prayer) and, primarily, on the holiness of the land of Israel, which is demonstrated through providing tithes to the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>381</sup>
- (2) The second order, Moed (“Set Festivals”) treats the Sabbath and the festivals of the year.
- (3) *Nashim*, deals with “Women” (primarily marriage laws)<sup>382</sup>
- (4) “Damages”, the third seder, focuses on property and personal injury.<sup>383</sup>
- (5) *Kodoshim*, deals with “Holy Things” (Temple procedures)<sup>384</sup>
- (6) *Teharot*, deals with “Purities” (ritual impurities and purification)<sup>385</sup>

<sup>375</sup> From Heb. *Shanah*, “repeat,” equivalent to Aramaic *ten*”, from which *tanna*’ is derived

<sup>376</sup> It is “the title of the head of the Jewish community in the land of Israel. He is known as “Rabbi.”

<sup>377</sup> It was codified by, Rabbi Judah “the Prince” (*ha Nasi*), who, according to tradition, was born the year Rabbi Akiba died at the hands of the Romans in 135 CE. Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 51

<sup>378</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846

<sup>379</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 51

<sup>380</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 127; They are called “tractates. See Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846

<sup>381</sup> The orders are: *Zera'im*, “Seeds” (rules about agriculture) See Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846

<sup>382</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846; Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 128

<sup>383</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 127

<sup>384</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846; Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 128

<sup>385</sup> Idem

## (b) Tosefta

The Tosefta closely resembles the Mishnah in its organization and contents. The Tosefta, Aramai, means “addition” and has traditionally been regarded as a supplement to the Mishnah.<sup>386</sup> The structure of the Tosefta parallels that of the Mishnah, though it is composed of extra-Mishnaic material.<sup>387</sup> Its authorship is ascribed to Rabbi Hiyya, a pupil of Judah the Prince, though various features in its manner of treatment have left the question of provenance unresolved in many minds.<sup>388</sup> It consists of a collection of baraitot, statements external to the Mishnah which come from the Tannaim, and the earliest generation of the Amoraim.<sup>389</sup> The Tosefta contains many rabbinic opinions that Rabbi Judah did not record in the Mishnah. It never achieved the same sacred status as the Mishnah. Whenever the two books disagree on a point of law, Judaism follows the Mishnah.<sup>390</sup>

## (c) Talmud

The term Talmud, which means “study” or “learning”, is used to refer, to opinions received from predecessors, to a whole body of learning within the Oral law, or to teaching derived from exegesis of a Scripture text. It refers to the redacted collections from the Amoraim in Eretz Israel and the Amoraim and Geonim in Babylonia. “Talmud” is used in a number of ways. Usually it designates the Mishnah and the Babylonian Gemaras together, as distinct from the Midrashim and the other writings. Narrowly, however, it refers to the Gemaras, Palestinian and Babylonian ---- though it can also be used broadly to mean “talmudic” or “rabbinic” literature generally.<sup>391</sup>

Talmudic literature is an extensive and varied body of traditional Pharisaic material that was codified during the period from the end of the second century through the sixth century C.E.<sup>392</sup> It is divided by subject matter into either *halakah*, having to do with behavior and the regulation of conduct, or

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<sup>386</sup> Yaakov Elman, *Classical Rabbinic Interpretation*, 1846; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 51

<sup>387</sup> Idem, 1846

<sup>388</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 51

<sup>389</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 128

<sup>390</sup> Stephen M. Wylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah*, 33-34

<sup>391</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 11

<sup>392</sup> Idem, 10; The Talmuds were compiled during the 3<sup>rd</sup> through the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, first in Israel (until 370), and later in Babylonia (6<sup>th</sup> century)

*haggadah*, which concerns discussions about theological and ethical matters because halakic pronouncements colored the expressions of haggadah and haggadic exegesis often embodies considerations pertinent for halakah. The literature exists in a few main collections, with a number of peripheral codifications in addition.<sup>393</sup> The Talmud, the major work of Jewish rabbinical interpretation, exists in two forms: “Talmud Yerushalmi,” the Jerusalem Talmud and “Talmud Bavli,” the Babylonian Talmud. In references these are abbreviated as y. and b. respectively. The Talmud consists of pericopes of the Mishnah, accompanied by a commentary called the Gemara (“leaning”).

### (i) Jerusalem Talmud

The literary production, which represents the most extensive development of Mishnah commentary in Eretz Israel is the Jerusalem Talmud (also called the “Talmud of the Land of Israel,” and the “Palestinian Talmud”). The JT is composed of the Mishnah and the Gemara by the Amoraim in Eretz Israel.<sup>394</sup>

In the early fifth century CE, the great rabbinic academies of the land of Israel in Tiberias and Caesarea were closed. The scholars of the age wrote down a compilation of their oral Torah teachings. They organized these teachings around the Mishnah. The collection of continued teachings of the oral Torah that the Sages of the academies wrote down is called the Gemara, which, like the word *mishnah*, is another word for “teaching.” The Mishnah and the Gemara together are called the Talmud, also “teaching”.<sup>395</sup>

Each discussion in the Gemara begins with the topic of the relevant Mishnah, but it may then drift to any other topic. Following the oral nature of the material, like a conversation between the groups of friends, the Gemara leaps unpredictably from topic to topic. Because of the hurried nature of the writing process, the Jerusalem Talmud is rather disordered and difficult to follow. Also, following the original oral nature of the material, the Gemara is not written down in complete sentences. Its style is elliptical ---- that is, with clipped and enigmatic phrases, like reminder notes that contain just enough information to jog the memory of a person who has all the rest of the necessary information in his head.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Idem

<sup>394</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 128

<sup>395</sup> Stephen M. Wylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah*, 34

<sup>396</sup> Idem

## (ii) Babylonian Talmud

With the academies of the land of Israel closed, the two Babylonian academies founded by Rabbi Judah the Prince took over the lead in the ever-unfolding Jewish interpretation of Scripture. In Sura and Nehardea, later in Sura and Pumbeditha, the Rabbis of Babylon continued to study and interpret the written and oral Torahs that were handed down to them by previous generations of Rabbis. Eventually the Rabbis of Babylon composed their own Gemara and published their own Talmud.<sup>397</sup>

The Rabbis of Babylon had time to polish and edit their Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud is much longer than the Jerusalem Talmud. In print, the Babylonian Talmud fills three thousand two-sided folio sheets. The Mishnah is about the same size as the Hebrew Bible, but the Talmud is many times larger, large enough to fill a three-foot shelf with its many volumes. Like the Talmud of the land of Israel, the Babylonian Talmud disorganizes what the Mishnah organizes. Any subject may arise on any page. The Gemara is a literary creation, but it is written in the form of minutes to a conversation between friends. Possibly this style recreates the pattern of discussion between the scholars that took place in the classes at the Babylonian academies.<sup>398</sup>

The Babylonian Talmud was published between the fifth and seventh centuries CE. The Gaonim, the heads of the Babylonian academies, promoted their Talmud to other Jewish communities. By the ninth century, Jews throughout the world recognized the Babylonian Talmud as the ultimate authority on questions of Torah. If one wants to know what the Torah teaches on any given subject, one discovers this by reading not the Hebrew Bible but the Talmud. The Talmud, in rabbinic Judaism, is the ultimate word of the Torah. This remained true for nearly all Jews for a millennium, from the ninth to the nineteenth century. For Orthodox Jews today, the Talmud remains the final word on Jewish law, belief, and practice.

The Babylonian Talmud, containing the Mishnah and expanding on it, holds a place in Judaism parallel to that which the New Testament holds in Christianity. Just as Christians read the Hebrew Bible through the lens of the New

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<sup>397</sup> Idem

<sup>398</sup> Idem, 35

Testament, so Jews read the Torah through the lens of the Talmud.

#### **(d) Targum**

The Targumim are Aramaic translations of Hebrew scripture, which were read alongside the sacred text and used to interpret it to the people. The dating of these Targumim is extremely controversial but most scholars agree that they contain very early material, so it is not impossible to regard them as typical of exegesis in the Tannaitic period.<sup>399</sup>

The synagogue liturgy during the first century CE included public reading from Scripture. The Scripture was read aloud while translation into Aramaic was given verse by verse. Being interpretative paraphrases or explanatory translations, they frequently incorporated later theological concepts and their own *haggadoth* for purposes of clarification and edification. The Synagogue was the home of the Targums, for a reader read from the Hebrew Scriptures and an interpreter paraphrased the text into Aramaic to bring out its meaning and explicate its significance for the congregation. The exegetical work of the Targum seems to have placed greater emphasis on the paraphrase of texts in the Hebrew Bible. Some of the Targumim followed the biblical text with an attempt at literal translation, while others provided elaborations in order to explain “gaps” in the biblical text. The latter Targumim share a common characteristic with that body of rabbinic literature called midrash.<sup>400</sup>

The Targums are important in the determination of early Jewish exegetical practice, for their purpose in rendering the Hebrew into Aramaic was not just to give a vernacular translation of the Bible, but “to give the sense and make the people understand the meaning” ---- as did the Levites in Neh. 8:8.<sup>401</sup> In giving “the sense,” the Targumists attempted to remain as faithful as possible to the original text and yet to bring out the meaning of what the text had to say for their hearers. The Targums, therefore, “lie halfway between straightforward translation and free retelling of the biblical narrative: they were clearly attached to the Hebrew text, and at times translated it in a reasonably straightforward way, but they were also prepared to introduce into the translation as much interpretation as seemed necessary to clarify the sense”.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 50

<sup>400</sup> Cf. Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 129

<sup>401</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 8

<sup>402</sup> J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 13

Evidently Targums originally existed among the Jews for all the biblical books, except those that already contained sizable Aramaic portions (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel). They are extant today in five collections (*Neofiti*, *Targum Jonathan Fragments*, *the Cairo Geniza Targum Fragments*, *Onkelos*, and *Pseudo-Jonathan*). None of them can be dated in their existing forms specifically to pre-Christian or Christian times. All of them evidence varying textual traditions. Nonetheless, informed opinion believes that the targumic traditions that have been codified into our existing Targums represent both Palestinian and Babylonian (i.e., *Onkelos*) Jewish hermeneutics of a very early time, possibly originally coming from various pre-Christian synagogues. As such, they are of great significance to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis.<sup>403</sup> Perhaps, in fact, as Bloch suggested, it was the synagogue targumim that provided the basis for the later rabbinic haggadah<sup>404</sup>

The literal exposition is mainly represented by the so-called Chaldee paraphrases or Targumim, which came into use after the captivity, because few of the returning exiles understood the reading of the Sacred Books in their original Hebrew. The first place among these paraphrases must be given to the Targum Onkelos, which appears to have been in use as early as the first century after Christ, though it attained its present form only about 300-400 CE.<sup>405</sup> It explains the Pentateuch, adhering in its historical and legal parts to a Hebrew text, which is, at times, nearer to the original of the Septuagint than to the eventual Massoretic form, but straying in the prophetic and poetical portions so far from the original as to leave it hardly recognizable.

Another paraphrase of the Pentateuch is the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, or the Jerusalem Targum. Written after the seventh century of our era, it is valueless both from a critical and an exegetical point of view, since its explanations are wholly arbitrary. —The Targum Jonathan, or the paraphrase of the Prophets, was probably written down in the first century, at Jerusalem; but it owes its present form to the Jerusalem rabbis of the fourth century. The historical books are fairly faithful translations; in the poetical portions and the later Prophets, the paraphrase often presents fiction rather than truth.

The paraphrase of the Hagiographa deals with the Book of Job, the Psalms, Canticle of Canticles, Proverbs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and

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<sup>403</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 9

<sup>404</sup> Cf. G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 9

<sup>405</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 129



Paralipomena. It was not written before the seventh century, and is so replete with rabbinic fiction that it hardly deserves the notice of the serious interpreter. The notes on Cant., Ruth, Lam., Eccles., and Esth. rest on public tradition; those on the other Hagiographa express the opinions of one or more private teachers; the paraphrase of Par. is the most recent and the least reliable.

## 2.8.2 Biblical Text: 2<sup>nd</sup> type categories

### (a) Midrash

The group of texts, which reflect biblical interpretation dating from the Amoraic period (ca 500 CE) in Eretz Israel is called midrash. The term darash, “to seek,” “inquire”, “investigate” refers to a method of expounding the text and to a collection of such texts. These texts are commentaries and elaborations on the Written Torah. The various collections, which fall under the head of midrash, however, can focus on deriving rabbinic halakah based on Scripture, or provide elaborations on narrative passages in the Bible. They may be organized according to the order of the biblical text, or arranged as homilies corresponding to the lection on Sabbaths and Holy Days.<sup>406</sup>

The Midrashim are writings dealing principally with the exegesis of Scripture, as distinct from the Mishnah, where the material is recorded independently of Scripture for the most part. The Tannaitic Midrashim are largely halakic in nature, though not entirely; the Homiletic Midrashim are made up of a number of synagogue sermons; and the Midrash Rabbah, meaning the “Great Midrash”, is a complete commentary on the Pentateuch and the five Megilloth (Songs of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther). In addition to these larger collections of traditional halakic and haggadic materials, rabbinic literature includes a number of more individual and somewhat peripheral writings. Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, a narrative midrashic treatment, and Aboth de Rabbi Nathan, a haggadic tractate similar to the famous Pirke Aboth (“Sayings of the Fathers”), are two of the most illustrious.<sup>407</sup>

### (i) Tannaitic Midrashim

The Tannaitic midrashim may be said to form a continuous commentary on the

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<sup>406</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 130

<sup>407</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 11

Pentateuch from Exodus to Deuteronomy. In these midrashim there is extensive use of rabbinic hermeneutics to demonstrate how various expansions of the Oral Law are grounded in Scripture. Despite the use of the name “halakic midrashim”, these collections all contain commentary on narrative passages in their respective biblical books.<sup>408</sup>

## (ii) Exegetical Midrashim

A second set of midrashim consists of those referred to as “exegetical” and “homiletic.” The “exegetical” midrashim are later than the *midreshei halakah*, but a number were compiled during the fifth century CE. It is important to remember that the *midreshei halakah* are exegetical, but modern scholars refer to them as “exegetical” because these collections are organized according to the biblical verse order. The term “exegetical midrashim” distinguishes them from the next group called “homiletic midrashim.”<sup>409</sup>

*Genesis Rabbah* explicates the book of Genesis. Scholars postulate that it was redacted in the fifth century CE. It is considered by some to be the best example of the exegetical midrashim, because the rabbis reveal deep layers of meaning within the text. The meanings the rabbis sought in the Scriptures included truths, which pertained to their own age. *Genesis Rabbah* provides many examples of rabbinic apologetics against pagan and Christian arguments. In the narratives about the patriarchs and matriarchs, it is possible to discern their veiled arguments against Christian claims that these biblical figures reached their true fulfillment only in Christ.<sup>410</sup>

In this period exegetical midrashim were also written on the five books in the Hebrew Bible called the Five Megillot, or “Five Scrolls.” These biblical books were read as part of the synagogue liturgy for the three pilgrimage festivals: Passover (Canticles), Pentecost (Ruth), and Tabernacles (Ecclesiastes); and on Purim (the Feast of Esther) and the Ninth of Ab commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (Lamentations). The earliest description of the liturgical role for these books is in the Mishnah, tractate Megillah. These midrashim would include Canticles Rabbah; Midrash Ruth (also called Ruth Rabbah<sup>411</sup>; Lamentations Rabbah; Midrash Qoheleth (also

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<sup>408</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 131

<sup>409</sup> Idem

<sup>410</sup> Idem

<sup>411</sup> See Chapter four

called Ecclesiastes Rabbah); and the first half (1-6) of Esther Rabbah.<sup>412</sup>

### (iii) Homiletic Midrashim

These collections do not follow the order of the biblical text. Rather, they are developed thematically. As we have them now, these homilies have been subjected to abbreviation or other editorial reformulation one time or another.

Modern scholarship has concentrated considerable effort on the structure of these homilies, especially the formal conventions used for their beginning and conclusion. The *petiah*, which is generally understood to be a kind of proem or introduction to the homilies, is the most common rhetorical form in midrashic literature. The *atimah*, or peroration is a homily with a message of hope in the messianic deliverance of the Jewish people from the harshness of its exile. These *atimot* may offer students of patristic literature some understanding of the development of early Christian typological exegesis.

## 2.8.3 Rabbinic Literature relating to the Book of Ruth

Amoraic midrashic literature includes *Midrash Rabbah* (“The Long Midrash”). It consists of commentary on the five books of Moses and commentary on the five Megillot, or “Scrolls” (*Song of Songs Rabbah*, *Ruth Rabbah*, *Lamentations Rabbah*, *Qohelet Rabbah*, and *Esther Rabbah*) The work as a whole ranges between ca. 450-1100 C.E. with Genesis being the oldest (ca. 425-450), followed closely by Lamentations (ca. 450) and Leviticus (550). The Middle Age Midrashim include Song of Songs (ca. 600-650), Qohelet (ca. 650), and Ruth (ca. 750).<sup>413</sup> Although much of the material is tannaic and amoraic, there is material from later authorities and there are numerous glosses (and later interpolations). Moreover, much of this material has been taken from other Midrashim and talmudic writings. Study of these Midrashim should bear this in mind.<sup>414</sup>

Concerning the Targums to the Writings, there is no official version of the targums to the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Qohelet, Esther, and 1-2 Chronicles). There are no traditions of authors or relationship, as in the case of the Pentateuch or the Prophets, and

<sup>412</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 131

<sup>413</sup> Craig, A. Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 133

<sup>414</sup> Idem, 134

so it is probably best to treat them as relatively independent works. Furthermore, these targums played no official role in the synagogue, though the Five Megillot (Ruth, Qohelet, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Esther) functioned in the holiday liturgy.<sup>415</sup>

#### **2.8.4 Conclusion**

Since about 400 CE writings start to appear for which it can be assumed that an authoritative body of Scriptures already exists. These writings are not intended to be extensions to that sacred literature, but are rather commentaries on it as Gerald Bray have said.<sup>416</sup> They are the exegetical products of Jewish socio-political circumstance starting from the Second Temple Period. We also witness some continuity of the trends and directions of previous exegetical methods, which definitely imposed their effect on the interpreters in their exegesis of existing literature.

### **2.9 The Historical and Socio-cultural Background for the Formation of Jewish Commentary**

The Jewish co-edition of the commenting views started with rabbinic sages. Their interpretation formed the foundation of Jewish exegesis, which reflected their tradition, culture and society at that era. Behind the Jewish interpretations, we may identify some principles or patterns, indicating the pre-concepts and pre-traditions of the commentators when their hermeneutics is carried out. The early Jewish commentary was not something new, but was influenced and evolved from a specific historical and socio-cultural context.

#### **2.9.1 The rise of library scrolls**

James Kugel agrees that the growth and the importance of Israel's sacred library was an importance event for the rise of the interpretation of the Scripture.<sup>417</sup> The available scripture is analyzed as to its true meaning and applicability in changed circumstances. This process of interpretation as it was, fostered by different forces will be examined below. This exegetical technique grew more and more elaborate towards the end of the biblical period. It clearly laid indicated the purpose of interpretation of the Jewish community. The

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<sup>415</sup> Idem, 105

<sup>416</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 47

<sup>417</sup> James Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 51

Jewish people pored over their sacred texts with a single-minded intensity, seeking in them not only a history of their ancestors and the glories of days gone by but also a corpus of divine instructions, a guide to proper conduct and some clues to God's future plans for his people.<sup>418</sup>

Before the final formation of the Hebrew Bible, Eugene Ulrich stated that “the first and most obvious learning that the biblical scrolls taught us was that there were variant forms of the text for many books of the Bible in the last two centuries BCE and the first century CE.”<sup>419</sup> At the outset it should be stated explicitly that a large number of manuscripts display impressive agreement with particular books of what emerged in the Middle Ages to be called the Masoretic Text. So we can be assured that our present biblical text is a copy, preserved with amazingly accurate fidelity, of nearly stabilized ancient collection of ‘biblical texts’ from the period when the Temple still stood.

Ulrich further elaborated the characteristics of variant literary editions of the biblical text. While the scrolls do demonstrate the accuracy of one line of transmission, they also demonstrate at the same time the creative pluriformity, which characterized the process of the development and transmission of the Bible as well as the fact that only one of the multiplicity of various forms of the text has come down to us in the Masoretic Text. Thus, the accumulated variants and literary editions teach us that the text of what we now call our Bible was certainly still in a period of pluriformity and probably still in a period of organic growth during of the Qumran community.<sup>420</sup>

Literary critics have been demonstrating for centuries now that virtually all the books of the Bible are products of a long series of contributors whom we can call --- depending on the activity of each --- authors, tradents, editors, and scribes. When did that period of composition end? The period of evolutionary growth ---- the production of revised literary editions --- was still in progress at the time of the First Jewish Revolt (66-74 CE). The view has been proposed that the multiplicity of text-types at Qumran reflects the confusion caused by the introduction of the several text-types from different localities, especially Babylon.<sup>421</sup> Ulrich even supposed —pluriformity in the text of the Scriptures

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<sup>418</sup> Idem, 13

<sup>419</sup> Eugene Ulrich, *The Scrolls and the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, 31

<sup>420</sup> Idem, 33

<sup>421</sup> See F. M. Cross's article in *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Dead Sea Scrolls Jubilee Symposium Held at Princeton University, November 1997*, vol. 1 (ed. J. Charlesworth; North Richland, TX: Bibal Press, 1998).

for most of Judaism right up to the end of the first century CE, and possibly up to the Second Revolt (132-135 CE).<sup>422</sup>

Ulrich listed three factors putting a halt to the developing, organic stage of the composition of the books of the Scriptures.<sup>423</sup> One factor was that there were serious threats to the very life of the nation and the religion by the Roman victories in 70 and 135 CE. Another factor was the serious challenge to some fundamental beliefs by the claims of those Jews who followed Jesus. A final one was the emerging need for a fixed text, as the religion changed from being centered around—the Temple to being centered around the Torah and the Prophets as the halakhic debates between quarreling parties became more text-based.

The Hebrew Bible's first interpreters established the basic patterns by which the Bible was to be read and understood for centuries to come and they turned interpretation into a central and fundamental religious activity. The story of this great movement begins logically in the biblical period itself. From earliest times, Israel had conceived of what might be called an ongoing "discourse" between itself and its God, a discourse that was embodied in various forms. The most prominent of these was the institution of the sacrificial cult. At various sacred spots ("sanctuaries") and notably in the great Temple of Jerusalem, the people of Israel made offerings to their God. Kugel regards this as part of the divine side of divine-human discourse.<sup>424</sup> On the other hand, God's words and deeds were transmitted and interpreted by a variety of human beings. There had also developed in Israel a particular office, or amalgam of offices, specially associated with such acts of interpretation: that of the prophet.

A divine-human discourse was perceived and carried out daily between Israel and her God, a discourse in which some figures, particularly the prophets, sought to announce God's judgments and desires and to explain the course of present and future events in terms of them.<sup>425</sup> God's part in the divine-human discourse was not alone mediated by live human beings; it was also carried by texts. Long before the Babylonian exile, the word of God and his messengers had been committed to memory and to writing, and Israel had cherished these

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<sup>422</sup> Eugene Ulrich, *The Scrolls and the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, 34

<sup>423</sup> Idem

<sup>424</sup> James Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 13-14

<sup>425</sup> Idem, 15, 17

words. The word was then transformed into the text.<sup>426</sup>

The divine word was, eventually passed on by scrolls. At this stage of development, Kugel compares it to oral tradition and names it as “a greater literalization of the word of God in action.”<sup>427</sup> There was a text, a written document, by which people were to guide their own lives. Indeed, in key speeches inserted throughout the Deuteronomic history, as well as in numerous passages in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, there emerges clearly the notion that the contents of “Torah” constituted a written code of behavior. Some of this mentality may be discerned in the description of a public reading of the Torah contained in the Book of Nehemiah.<sup>428</sup>

Kugel pointed out that it is most significant that there is a desire to have the entire populace actively instructed.<sup>429</sup> The Torah was to be internalized to become a generative force at the level of each individual community member written as in Jeremiah’s “new covenant.”<sup>430</sup> The message is unmistakable: “The Torah, if it is to function as the central text for the community, must truly be their common property, and be properly understood by everyone.”<sup>431</sup>

## 2.9.2 Political change and influence

### (a) The return after the Exile (538-516 BCE)

The period following the Babylonian exile created a number of specific conditions favorable to the activity of interpretation. The Jews began to return from Babylon to their homeland. Kugel calls it a “mode of return”<sup>432</sup> in which the Jews found themselves after the exile. One of the reasons for the Jews to return may be a straightforward desire to return to the place and way of life of their ancestors. These desires depended on the restored community’s collective memory, a memory embodied in its library of ancient texts.<sup>433</sup> Thus, the very “mode of return” --- the desire to go back to something that once

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<sup>426</sup> Idem, 51

<sup>427</sup> Idem, 19

<sup>428</sup> Idem, 19, 21

<sup>429</sup> cf. Deut. 31:11-13

<sup>430</sup> Jer. 31:33

<sup>431</sup> James Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 22

<sup>432</sup> James L. Kugel, “Ancient Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Sage”, in *Studies in Ancient Midrash* James L. Kugel ed., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001) 4

<sup>433</sup> Idem

existed ---- probably made this community book orientated to an abnormal degree. This was a dramatic and important phenomenon. Memory or oral tradition indeed affects written tradition.

Moreover, the stories, prophecies, songs, and prayers saved from before the Babylonian exile were used by the returning Jews for political purposes to support their own views on various issues. For example, the book of Chronicles has been shown to contain a detailed program for the restored Jewish community after the Babylonian exile: its author was a firm supporter of the Davidic monarchy. He was in favor of uniting the northern and southern parts of the country into a single polity, a state whose very existence was predicated on what he saw as the people's eternal as Kugel explained.<sup>434</sup>

In line with this “mode of return”, the author of the literature is to present his ideas not as innovations but as a return to the glorious past. By omitting some things and adding others, the author reshaped the past and made it into a more perfect model of what he himself wished to prescribe for the future.

Texts from the ancient past not only served as a general guide to how life had been lived before the exile but also to how it was to be lived after the return from the exile. These texts and in particular the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, contained numerous laws and commandments from an earlier day. An important result of this “mode of return” in which the returning Jews found themselves was the heightened importance these laws now acquired. It was crucially important that all members of the restored community do their utmost to conform to these divinely given statutes of old.

### **(b) Late Second Temple Period (64 BCE- 70 CE)**

The Roman Empire putting down two Jewish efforts at rebellion in 70 CE and 135 CE marked a new age for the development of biblical interpretation. These political events were not the sole cause of the increasing emphasis on study in Judaism, but the first put an end to Temple worship and the second crushed any hope of its restoration. Thereafter, as Yaakov Elman concluded the effect of this political change on Jewish community was that Jewish religious practice was marked to an even greater extent by study of the Bible and comment on it

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<sup>434</sup> Idem



as major religious activity.<sup>435</sup>

In Palestine the defeat of 70 CE decisively ended the last vestige of political independence and of the Temple as the religious center and the basis of priestly power. Strack and Gunter Stemberger recognized that a reorganization of Jewish self-government had developed only gradually from Yabneh, the new center of religious learning.<sup>436</sup> Soon after 70 CE Yohanan ben Zakkai began to gather around himself Jewish scholars primarily from Pharisaic and scribal circles, but also from other important groups of contemporary Judaism. From these early beginnings there slowly developed a new Jewish leadership of Palestine, able to guide Judaism through a period without a Temple and state of their own. Strack and Stemberger put emphasis on this leadership, who found its institutional expression in the patriarchate with its academy and its court. The latter became the successor to the Sanhedrin of the Second Temple period.<sup>437</sup>

### **(c) After the Second Jewish Revolt (135 CE)**

The Jews of Palestine apparently did not participate in the great diaspora revolt against Roman rule in 115-17 CE. But under the leadership of Bar Kokhba they then allowed themselves to be driven into the tragic second great revolt against Rome in 132-35. Reconciliation with Rome came only after the death of Hadrian in 138. Peaceful reconstruction began under the dynasties of Antoninus and Severus, culminating in the powerful patriarchate of Yehudah ha-Nasi (known as 'Rabbi').<sup>438</sup> After 135 the bulk of the Jewish population of Palestine was no longer in Judaea but in Galilee. Following the Bar Kokhba revolt, the center of Jewish self-government had to change from Yabneh to Usha.<sup>439</sup>

The third century witnessed a consolidation process of previous trends. It brought structural consolidation for Palestinian Judaism in the form of

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<sup>435</sup> Yaakov Elman, "Classical Rabbinic Interpretation" in *The Jewish Study Bible*, Tanakh Translation Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1844

<sup>436</sup> H. L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 2

<sup>437</sup> Idem

<sup>438</sup> Idem

<sup>439</sup> The center of influence was mobile in accordance with the political and social situation. It moved to Beth Shearim then to Sepphoris, and finally to Tiberias by the middle of the third century. See idem.

leadership by the now hereditary patriarchate, and in the rise of the rabbinate. At the same time, Strack and Gunter Stemberger witnessed that Palestine shared in the political confusion and economic decline of the Roman Empire.

Two facts in particular stand out:<sup>440</sup> First Constantine's Christianization of the Roman Empire was the great turning point: the 'edict' of Milan in 313 made Christianity *religio licita*; with Constantine's sole rule from 324 that became significant for Palestine as well. The subsequent period experienced a drastic change of the religious sphere of influence. Strack and Gunter Stemberger described it as a "continual advance of Christianity so that Judaism even in Palestine found itself increasingly on the defensive."<sup>441</sup> A brief respite was afforded by the rule of Julian (361-63), who even permitted the rebuilding of the Temple. Then Christianity finally triumphed. The primary external documentation of this is a law of 380 CE making the Nicene Creed binding on all subjects of the Empire, thereby *de facto* establishing Christianity as the state religion. Between 415-429 the institution of the Jewish patriarchate was abolished.

A long period of stable prosperity ended abruptly in the second half of the fifth century with a number of persecutions of Jews (and Christian), culminating in 468: Jewish self-government was abolished, the Exilarch executed, synagogues were closed and many rabbis were killed. Although the situation normalized in the first half of the sixth century, the exilarchate was not restored. Strack and Gunter Stemberger concluded emphatically stating that Jews in Babylonia and in Palestine were thus without any strong leadership in that time.<sup>442</sup> This provides the political context for the writing and commenting on the Book of Ruth.

#### **(d) Conclusion**

The loss of political independence and of the Temple was the main reason for the rise of rabbinic Judaism. It took quite a long time for the rabbinate to prevail as a new establishment, and to reduce the diversity of pre-70 Judaism to a certain degree of uniformity. Rabbinic Judaism probably never represented the only manifestation of Jewish life and it was only through power play and centuries of development that it became the normative Judaism, which it was

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<sup>440</sup> Idem

<sup>441</sup> Idem

<sup>442</sup> Idem

unfortunately often assumed to have been for the entire period.

The destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the sacrificial service there brought about its substitution by the synagogue and its devotional prayer service, together with the introduction of readings from Scripture. Lections from the Torah and the Prophets (Haftaroth) became part of the synagogal service on Sabbaths, and on two weekdays (Mondays and Thursdays). Books of the Hagiographa were read on festival days, foremost the Five Megilloth, which for this reason are conjoined in the canon: Song of Songs on Passover, Ruth on Pentecost, Ecclesiastes on Tabernacles, Lamentations on the Ninth of Ab,<sup>443</sup> and on Purim the Book of Esther. Shemaryahu Talmon illustrated that these practical necessities furthered the crystallization of a clearly circumscribed and fixed canon of Scripture.<sup>444</sup>

### 2.9.3 Hellenism

Kugel emphasized the importance of Hellenism for the development of the Jewish exegesis on the Bible. He links Hellenistic influence with Alexander's growing of power since 333 BCE. He stated that, "the period from Alexander's conquest and the rise of Hellenism in Judea to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. was a period of crucial importance in the history of Jewish biblical interpretation because the contact with Hellenism had proven decisive in both its positive and its negative aspects."<sup>445</sup> He further elaborated that Hellenism provided a wealth of new ideas and techniques that helped to shape Jewish attitudes toward their own ancient writings and influenced the interpretation of those writings.<sup>446</sup>

The development of Judaism is not a single island in the world. Francis Young followed Kugel's direction that ancient religion was indistinguishable from culture.<sup>447</sup> We may witness the process of Hellenization as the involvement of assimilation of a mass of local pious practices to the dominant perspective of the Greek classics, while retaining local variety.<sup>448</sup> In fact, Jews adopted a

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<sup>443</sup> It is for the commemoration of the destruction of the First and later also of the Second Temple.

<sup>444</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *The Crystallization of the Canon of Hebrew Scriptures*, 14

<sup>445</sup> James Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 50

<sup>446</sup> Idem

<sup>447</sup> Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Hendrickson Publishers' edition, 2002), 50

<sup>448</sup> Cf. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2 vols. (ET London: SCM Press, 1974)

more passive and repelling approach toward the Hellenism. Moreover, as Frances Young proclaimed, there is a conflicting and mutual-expelling dimension between Hellenism and Judaism under Greek dominance over Palestine.<sup>449</sup> The Jews still maintained a literary culture of their own, rather than developing a kind of Hellenised classical tradition. Despite their resisting attitude, the Hellenistic challenge to the literary culture shaped the ancient Jewish world.

We may see the influence of Hellenism on the Jewish community and its literature. Froehlich's famous work is *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, discussing David Daube's parallels and connections between Jewish law and Hellenistic techniques. According to Froehlich,<sup>450</sup> David Daube "has convincingly argued that Jewish rules reflect the logic and methods of Hellenistic grammar and forensic rhetoric." In fact, the bulk of Daube's article is concerned with legal judgments.<sup>451</sup> He parallels the taking over of Greek norms in Latin jurisprudence with the systematization of legal deductions in rabbinic interpretation, suggesting that the borrowing took place when the Rabbis were masters, not slaves, of the new Hellenistic influences. Lieberman also echoed Daube's contribution in his work *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*. Both Lieberman and Daube in different ways were reaching the same nuanced position that Jewish interpretation had ancient traditional roots but responded to the Hellenistic environment by systematizing these traditions in a rationalistic way.<sup>452</sup>

Lieberman's work showed a series of remarkable parallels between the development of the activity of the *Soferim* in Jewish tradition and the practices of the Hellenistic grammarians. He first explored texts and book productions because for scripture there were no publishing houses. The official texts were deposited in the Temple. Lieberman parallels the tension between official and popular texts of the Bible with the circulation of Homeric texts.<sup>453</sup> The textual corrections undertaken by the *Soferim* began too early to have been directed

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<sup>449</sup> Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 51

<sup>450</sup> Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 4

<sup>451</sup> David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric", *Hebrew Union College Annual XXII* (Cincinnati, 1949), 239-64

<sup>452</sup> Discussing how far interpretation was rightly traced back through Jewish tradition to Sinai and how far it emerged under the influence of Alexandrian scholarship, Michael Fishbane (in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) suggest that "neither answer seems particularly wrong nor particularly right for that matter." Rabbinic interpretation was certainly deductive and rationalistic. See the article by Geza Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis", in Ackroyd and Evans (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*.

<sup>453</sup> Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 92

by Hellenistic influence but the parallels in method were striking. Both scribes and Alexandrian scholars developed systems of critical marks.

The Greeks systematized, defined and gave form to interpretations and the Jews “would certainly not hesitate to borrow from them methods and systems which they could convert into a mechanism for the clarification and definition of their own teachings.”<sup>454</sup> Lieberman adduces a series of parallels, which take him beyond the Rules. Literary problems he concludes were solved in a similar way in the schools of Alexandria and Palestine. Again Lieberman concludes that what Jews learned from Greek scholars was application and systematization of their own ancient traditions.

One of the Jewish scholars, Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE), can be regarded as a significant figure to explain the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism. He stands as the most important example of Jewish allegorical interpretation of the scriptures. Philo can also be regarded as a genuinely representative of a hellenized Judaism in the *diaspora*. Samuel Sandmel regards him as in many ways unique in the context of a broadly Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>455</sup> Philo was primarily an apologist who is firm in his Jewish faith, but is “poised between the Greek and Jewish thought-worlds.”<sup>456</sup> In particular, Anthony C. Thistleton rightly comments that he chooses the role of a philosophical and theological exegete of scripture but works on the basis of a Greek text with Greek conceptual tools.<sup>457</sup> Moreover, Klaus Otte argues that Philo’s theory of language is also bound up with this amalgam of Jewish and Greek ideas, including the Therapeutae, the Essenes, and the translators of the Septuagint.<sup>458</sup>

Thistleton illustrated very well the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism through the exegetical example of Philo. Philo went as far as he could towards adopting the ideas and thought-forms of the educated Greek intellectual, while remaining in principle loyal to the teaching of the Jewish Scriptures.<sup>459</sup> In

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<sup>454</sup> Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 64

<sup>455</sup> Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and *Philo’s Place in Judaism* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Ktav, 1971)

<sup>456</sup> David Winston, *Philo of Alexandria: the Contemplative Life, the Giants, and Selections* (London: S. P. C. K. 1981) xi (comment from John Dillon’s Preface).

<sup>457</sup> Anthony C. Thistleton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: Alpha Graphics, 2006), 160

<sup>458</sup> Klaus Otte, *Das Sprachverständnis bei Philo von Alexandria: Sprache als Mittel der Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968) 1-44; cf 105-118.

<sup>459</sup> Anthony C. Thistleton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 160

Michael Young's words, it is "Christian enculturation." This means that Greek culture is subordinated to the scriptures.<sup>460</sup>

These two poles, the Greek and the Jewish, provide the frame of reference, which determines all his thinking and his use of allegorical interpretation. On the one hand, Scripture is the inspired word of God. On the other hand, Philo frequently quotes Homer, Pindar, Euripides, or Sophocles, and is saturated in the thoughts of Zeno, Cleanthes, and the Pythagorians, and quotes and speaks of the great Plato. Thistleton again pointed out that Philo's criteria for the use of allegorical interpretation raised not from the style or genre of biblical texts, but from questions about their theological implications especially for a doctrine of God. He would seem to be entirely culture-relative to Judaism from a wider Hellenistic perspective.<sup>461</sup> Philo thus uses allegorical interpretation to broaden meaning in accordance with a less narrowly religious frame whereas the Fathers used allegorical interpretation to focus meaning more narrowly on Christological doctrine. This issue of patristic exegesis in the early church under the influence of Hellenism, will be dealt with later in a chapter on patristic exegesis.

#### 2.9.4 The Greek Old Testament

The work of interpreting the Bible within Judaism was proceeded on many fronts and in various ways in respect to its historical developmental background. During the two centuries or so before Christ, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (Septuagint, LXX) was an enterprise in interpretation, for every translation inevitably involves interpretation and reflects the particular translator's understanding of the text.<sup>462</sup>

However, the role of Septuagint is limited. The LXX should be looked upon as a theological commentary, as has sometimes been suggested. To use it as a primary source for knowledge of the hermeneutical procedures of the day, is an overstatement of the facts. As Jellicoe points out in speaking of the various translation units in the LXX and their respective philosophies of translation: "Style and method vary considerably, but this is no more than would be expected in a production which extended over some decades and which was the work of different hands. Liberties are taken at times, more so with the later

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<sup>460</sup> Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 68

<sup>461</sup> Idem

<sup>462</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 7

Books, but here literary rather than theological interests seem to be the governing principle".<sup>463</sup> For our purpose, therefore, the LXX will not be considered to be of major significance in determining the exegetical practices of first-century Judaism.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968),316

<sup>464</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*,7

## Chapter Three

### Midrash

#### 3.1 Introduction

Common consensus exists between scholars that the most important event in recent history of the study of the Old Testament text is the successive discoveries of manuscripts at Qumran near the Dead Sea since 1947. They regard these discoveries as precious because the manuscript materials found there were several centuries older than any Hebrew texts known at that stage. Discoveries of the Dead Sea scrolls may contribute to various studies of the Old Testament and Judaism. This was discussed already in Chapter Two in finer detail.

Steven D. Fraade indicated shared interpretative traditions between Qumranic Bible exegesis and Jewish exegesis. His research leads to the creation of a scholarly approach called “comparative midrash”. In this approach, “midrash” denotes scriptural interpretation in general, whether explicit or inferred, going all the way back, to inner-biblically interpretation in the later books of the Bible before the canon was finalized in their reworking of existing earlier scriptural books or passages.<sup>1</sup> One of the emphases of such studies was to claim that most of the interpretive methods and products of rabbinic midrash could be found centuries earlier in the period preceding the gradual closing of the biblical canon discussed in chapter two.

Such studies sought to show not only that a wide variety of types of Jewish texts from a broad range of times and settings share many scriptural interpretations, but also that those shared interpretations revealed a shared/mutual “midrashic” approach to Scripture. From this perspective, some viewed rabbinic midrash as simply a late repository for interpretive traditions that were in circulation for a long time already. This proved that notwithstanding apparent differences in textual forms, religious beliefs and practices, there were great exegetical affinities among the varieties of ancient Judaism.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven D. Fraade, *Rabbinic Midrash and Ancient Jewish Biblical Interpretation*, 102



## 3.2 The meaning and definition of Midrash

### 3.2.1 Meaning

Regarding the meaning of Midrash, Lieve Teugel states that, “midrash” refers to the literary genre, the process or the result of rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Bible. According to the dissertation of Lieve M. Teugels,<sup>2</sup> one could say that “midrash” is the same as “rabbinic exegesis”, if exegesis is taken in the broad sense of “commentary on”, or “interpretation of” Scripture. Jewish commentary or midrash does not only contain clarifications of difficulties on a linguistic or textual level, but also narrative expansions and elaborations of the scriptural text which would not be called exegesis in our day. Therefore, the term “exegesis” for rabbinic scriptural commentary will not be used but rather the term “midrash” is used, which refers to the specific rabbinic way of interpreting the Hebrew Scripture.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however that even the narrative expansions in the midrash always contain some interpretation of the biblical text at hand.<sup>4</sup>

Rabbinic midrash is regarded as a degenerated continuation of biblical midrash:

*“The midrashic genre was destined to experience an extensive development in Rabbinic literature. In the juridical sphere, but above all in the historical and moral, it will give birth to strange forms in which the religious sense will too*

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<sup>2</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of “The Wooing of Rebekah (Gen. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. van der Heide, *Midrash and Exegesis*, 50. His view that midrash differs from modern exegesis is given credit but I cannot agree with Van der Heide’s presentation of midrash. Although he states at the outset that “the functions of midrash range from pure explication... to blatant “reading in” (46), the examples of midrash he gives only stress the “mere homiletic or rhetorical function” of midrash (51). One example is described as “pure midrashic embellishments of haggada”, whereas another is regarded as “rhetorically dressed up with text quotations” (52). So he is to play down the hermeneutic function of midrash which is present even in the passages he quotes. Such one-sided presentation of midrash has in the past and present given rise to misunderstandings and even contempt for midrash and is rendered out of date by recent developments in midrash studies (such as Boyarin, *Intertextuality*)

<sup>4</sup> The link to the biblical passage in midrash is usually obvious by the presence of an explicit quotation of the scriptural verse that is the subject of the commentary. For some scholars such as Arnold Goldberg and Philip Alexander, this quotation from Scripture is even a necessary condition to speak about midrash. See Ph. S. Alexander, “Midrash,” 456. However, midrash is more than a mere juxtaposition of quotation and comment. The comment contains a “meta-linguistic proposition” about the quotation: it says something about its meaning. Cf. A. Goldberg, “Form-Analysis of Midrashic Literature as a Method of Description,” in *Gesammelte Studien*, 80-95. Therefore, the quotations from scripture in midrash are never mere “embellishments.”

*often give way to a thousand subtleties and to all the aberrations of an unbridled imagination. The Biblical passages which by anticipation, as it were, may be called midrashic do not fall into these excesses.*<sup>5</sup>

Renee Bloch defines midrash as literary genre that began and was first developed in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> Bloch pleads for the treatment of rabbinic midrash with the historical-critical methods used for biblical exegesis. Assuming that the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic corpus form a continuum with respect to literary genres, themes and motifs, she proposes a method for the comparative historical study of rabbinic material, based on internal and external comparison.<sup>7</sup> For the external comparison, biblical, early Jewish, rabbinic and early Christian texts should be examined. The purposes of such comparative research would be the dating of rabbinic texts and the diachronic tracing of themes and motifs. Bloch's approach is characteristic in two ways. She treats midrash as a literary genre. Second, she wants to trace the development of traditions.

According to Lieve Teugels, midrash is not the kind of free, imaginative, open-ended story telling, which modern scholarship sometimes wants it to be. Midrash refers to a specific category of rabbinic literature.<sup>8</sup> In Jewish Studies, the term "rabbinic literature" refers to those works that were produced by the rabbinic authorities, also called "Sages".<sup>9</sup> Rabbinic literature includes the Mishnah, the Tosephta, the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmudim, the Targumim and several Midrashim.<sup>10</sup> These are all authoritative scriptures of Judaism until the present day. Within rabbinic literature, the word "midrash" can refer to different realities.

Among the different scholarly opinions towards the definition of midrash, Gary Porton has an innovative, illuminating and comprehensive one. Gary Porton

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter, *Guide to the Bible*, 505

<sup>6</sup> R. Bloch, "Midrash," in W. S Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism I*, 29-50

<sup>7</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 143

<sup>8</sup> L. Teugels, *Midrash in the Bible or Midrash on the Bible?*, 43-63

<sup>9</sup> Cf. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*; Sh. Safrai (ed.), *The Literature of the Sages*. About the institution of the rabbi, see Ph. S. Alexander, "Rabbi, Rabbinism," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 573-578.

<sup>10</sup> See Stemmerger, *Introduction*, 1-14; 56-100; Safrai, *The Literature of the Sages*. See too: B. L. Visotzky, "The Literature of the Rabbis," in his *From Mesopotamia to Modernity* 71-102; R. E. Brown, in his Appendix on "Midrash as a Literary Genre" in his *The Birth of the Messiah*, 557-563; Judah Goldin, "Midrash and Aggadah" in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* Vol 9, 509-515, and the update by Burton Visotzky in the new edition of *the Encyclopedia* (forthcoming)

concludes and states that Midrash carries three different technical meanings: (1) It signifies biblical interpretation; (2) it designates the process of that interpretation; and (3) it describes the collections of those interpretations.<sup>11</sup> This part's arrangement is closely linked with Porton's definition of midrash. The following will illustrate the meaning, characteristics, and exegetical principles of midrash.

We may know that Jacob Neusner shares the same view. He classified the word Midrash as commonly used bearing three meanings.<sup>12</sup> He states that "first is the sense of Midrash as the explanation, by Judaic interpreters, of the meaning of individual verses of Scripture."<sup>13</sup> The result of the interpretation of a verse of Scripture is called a Midrash-exegesis. Second, the result of the interpretation of Scripture is collected in Midrash-compilations or a Midrash-document. The various Midrash-compilations exhibit distinctive traits. They are connected and intersect at a few places but not over the greater part of their scope. These Midrash-compilations as a whole are compilations of midrash, but they are not individual compilations, but rather each is a freestanding composition. These documents emerge as sharply differentiated from one another and clearly defined, each through its distinctive viewpoint, particular polemic, and formal and aesthetic qualities. Third, the process of interpretation, for instance, the principles, which guide the interpreter, is called Midrash-method." There are three types of interpretation of Scripture characteristic of rabbinic Midrash-compilations.

### 3.2.2 Defining Midrash

The purpose and function of midrash is understood to be some kind of exegesis: the explanation of the scriptural quotation is involved.<sup>14</sup> It is very clear that rabbinic literature in general possesses an emphatic interpretative drive. The constant reference to the Scriptures is one of its most conspicuous features. Many scholars still keep on searching the meaning of Scriptures.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gary G. Porton, "Rabbinic Midrash" in *Judaism in Late Antiquity* Vol. 1 Edited by Jacob Neusner, 217

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 41

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Van der Heide, "Midrash and Exegesis", in Judith Frishman & L. Van Rompay (eds.) *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 45

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Halivni's approach to the origin of midrash in Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara and, in a different perspective, Peshat and Darash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis

The Scriptures and their meanings are almost omnipresent, even where the midrashic form is lacking.

However, there are some difficulties in defining midrash. Scholars of rabbinic literature are fully aware of the fact that a designation of midrash as exegesis is a very problematic one.<sup>16</sup> The endeavors to define midrash and to describe what it wants to convey have almost become a separate topic of research, and some scholars even seem to consider the issue to be beyond definition.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the term midrash has been introduced into the realm of general literary criticism.

Among the different scholarly opinions towards the definition of midrash, Gary Porton with his new definition of rabbinic midrash lists the following defining traits of rabbinic midrash<sup>18</sup>:

- (1) The rabbinic texts are collections of independent units. The sequential arrangement of the rabbis' midrashic statements, which correspond to the biblical sequence are the work of the editors.
- (2) The rabbinic collections frequently offer more than one interpretation of a verse, word, or passage.
- (3) A large number of rabbinic exegetical comments are assigned to named sages.
- (4) The rabbinic commentary may be directly connected to the biblical unit or it may be part of a dialogue, a story, or an extended soliloquy.
- (5) Rabbinic midrash atomizes the biblical text to a larger degree than the other forms of biblical interpretation, with the exception of the translations.

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(New York and Oxford, 1991). Samely, "Between Scripture and its Rewording", 62 is convinced that "Rabbinic exegesis", in all its complexity, leads to the heart of rabbinic Judaism; he opens his article with the observation: "Midrash is saying again of what Scripture says." Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, xi, hopes that midrash will be generally recognized as one of the legitimate forms of interpretation.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Van der Heide, "Midrash and Exegesis", in Judith Frishman & L. Van Rompay (eds.) *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 43

<sup>17</sup> See A. G. Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash* (New York 1967); Gary G. Porton, "Defining Midrash", in J. Neusner (ed.), *The Study of Ancient Judaism I* (New York 1981), 55-92; idem, *Understanding Rabbinic Midrash : Texts and Commentary* (New York, 1985); idem, "One Definition of Midrash", in J. Neusner (ed.) *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Documentary Discourse* (Lanham, New York and London, 1987), Appendix, 225-226; Ph. S. Alexander, "The Rabbinic Hermeneutical Rules and the Problem of the Definition of Midrash", *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 8 (1984); J. L. Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash" in G. H. Hartman, S. Budick (eds.), *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven and London, 1986), 77-103.

<sup>18</sup> Gary G. Porton, "Defining Midrash", in J. Neusner (ed.), *The Study of Ancient Judaism I* (New York 1981), 58

- (6) The method, which forms the basis of the rabbinic comment, is often explicitly mentioned. Porton also argues that the setting in which midrash was created was the rabbinic academy and not the synagogues, suggesting that some midrash may simply be an example of holy men engaging the holy text for their own edification and pleasure; midrash needs not be a didactic exercise.

### **(a) In the Hebrew Bible**

Around the middle of the previous century, historical criticism of the Bible started to take interest in midrash. Scholars with historical agendas traced the origins of midrash back to inner-biblical interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

In his *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, Vermes treats different aggadic motives that are derived from the Hebrew Bible, such as the traditions about Abraham and Balaam, and traces the way in which these have taken shape in Jewish and Christian traditions.

Geza Vermes is a pioneer<sup>20</sup> to link the study of midrash with historical biblical criticism. In order to understand the nature and purpose of midrash, he stresses that it is necessary to glance briefly at those biblical passages, which foreshadow and prompt the discipline of exegesis.<sup>21</sup> He takes the view that the re-writing and interpreting of older material in the exilic and postexilic parts of the Old Testament is “no doubt a midrashic process.” The continuity between Bible and midrash is so evident that, according to Vermes, “post-biblical midrash is to be distinguished from the biblical only by an external factor, canonization.”<sup>22</sup> He uses “midrash” and “exegesis” synonymously.

He also pointed out that the public recitation of Scripture, which was part of the

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<sup>19</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 141

<sup>20</sup> Other pioneer advocates of the importance of midrash for the historical criticism of the Bible were the French scholars Andre Robert and Renee Bloch. See Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 142

<sup>21</sup> The earliest relevant material appears in the Deuteronomistic corpus. See Geza Vermes, “Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis (= G. Vermes (red.), *Post Biblical Jewish Studies*)” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 199. Other notable examples of alleged midrash in the Hebrew Bible are the books of Chronicles and some titles of Psalms. See G. Porton, “Midrash: Palestine Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period,” 103-138, 119-188. See Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, esp. 1-10: “Introduction: Towards a New Synthesis”; “Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis (= G. Vermes (red.), *Post Biblical Jewish Studies*, 59-91)

<sup>22</sup> Lieve Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 199

Temple worship, became the essential feature of synagogal liturgy already in pre-Christian times and appears in the New Testament as a well-established custom.<sup>23</sup>

Renee Bloch followed suit and also stressed the necessary relationship of midrash to the Hebrew Bible, writing, “Midrash cannot occur outside of Israel because it presupposes faith in the revelation which is recorded in the holy books.”<sup>24</sup> Midrash, in Bloch’s phrase, was an “actualization” of Scripture. She is given credit for the study of midrash in a biblical context. Her focus on placing rabbinic midrash in a long line of developments beginning with Bible and her emphasis on the midrashists’ assumptions concerning the divine nature of the Bible and the need for it to be comprehend in its entirety were important for subsequent scholars of midrash.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of biblical passages, midrash is a Hebrew term and its only usage outside rabbinic literature is in the Hebrew Bible itself and in Qumran.<sup>26</sup> One should realize that, like most technical terms, the verb *darash*, from which the noun *midrash* is derived, also has a very common meaning, i.e. “to seek”, “to investigate.”<sup>27</sup> The verb *drs* occurs very frequently. Renee Bloch concludes that the verb *Drs* indicates focus of the study of the mighty interventions of God in the history of Israel.<sup>28</sup>

More generally, midrash can be taken to mean “account,” in the sense of giving an account of what is written. “Giving an account” could mean simply “telling” but also “accounting for,” in which case the task is to address whatever becomes an issue when the Torah is studied or recited or when the understanding of Torah is called for. In Jewish tradition, Gerald Bruns points out another point of view that midrash can be said to have a great range of application.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Idem, 201

<sup>24</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 28

<sup>25</sup> The credit is given by, Gary Porton. However, he also criticized that “Bloch’s definition relies too much on the supposed function of midrash and she most likely over-stressed the role that the lectionary cycle of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue had in the formation of midrash.” See Gary Porton, *Rabbinic Midrash*, 221

<sup>26</sup> Stemberger, *Introduction*, 234; G. Porton, “Midrash”: Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period”, esp. 106-108. Porton tends to hold a quite broad view of midrash, which includes also non-rabbinic genres. See also his “Midrash” in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, 818-822; see also J. Neusner, “Midrash in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in his *What is Midrash*.

<sup>27</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 104

<sup>28</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 105

In the Hebrew Bible, the noun “midrash” occurs twice only in the book of Chronicles.<sup>30</sup> However, Lieve M. Teugels pointed out that, the meaning in Chronicles is unclear and disputed among scholars.<sup>31</sup> Midrash there seems to refer to a “Book,” possibly even “a Book of Interpretation.” If so, this usage of the term could well have been a precursor of, and even an inspiration for, the technical use of “midrash” by the rabbis. The Chronicler used the term *mdrs* for the historical works, which glossed Scripture for the purpose of instruction and edification. It is however a very large leap from this to the conclusion that there is midrash everywhere in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>32</sup>

Most often, however, the term is used in a religious sense. It means to frequent a cultic place, to seek God, to seek the response of God in worship and in personal prayer (Amos 5:5; II Chron. 1:5; Deut. 12:5; Ps 34:5; 69:33 and 105:4). This meaning is common in the post-exilic age.

### **(b) In the Rabbinic Literature**

Rabbinic Hebrew adds nothing to the meaning of the verb *darash*. It always means careful study of a biblical passage. In rabbinic literature midrash has the general sense of “search”, with the double nuance of study. The term midrash by Renee Bloch involves a sense of non-literal meaning and designates an exegesis which moves beyond the simple and literal sense in order to penetrate into the spirit of Scripture; to scrutinize the text more deeply and draw from it interpretation that is not always immediately obvious.<sup>33</sup>

As for the “house of my midrash” of which Ben Sira speaks it was probably already a place where Scripture was studied and interpreted. The book of Sirach itself is a typical product of this activity.<sup>34</sup> It evokes the idea of a directed search, such as determining the identity of a person (II Sam. 11:3), searching for that which is lost (Deut. 22:2) or examining the guilt of a man (Job 10:6).

Derash is a “doctrinal statement or a sermon”: its purpose is not only to explicate Scripture but also to make its meaning known in public, “to preach.”

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Chr 13:22 and 24:27

<sup>31</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 153

<sup>32</sup> Idem, 162

<sup>33</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 31

<sup>34</sup> Idem, 29

In a more special sense midrash designates something written for the purpose of interpreting the Bible, usually homiletical, like the Midrash Rabbah, which is a commentary on the Pentateuch and the five Megillot.<sup>35</sup>

### (c) In Qumran

The noun “midrash” and the verb *darash* are found several times in the literature from Qumran, where they take the general meaning of “interpretation.”<sup>36</sup> This is, shown by the Qumran materials: “This is the study [midras] of the Law” (1QS 8:15); “The interpretation [midras] of “Blessed is the man...” [cf. Ps 1:1]” (4Qflor 1:14). Indeed, Qumran’s leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, is called the “searcher of the Law” (CD 6:7).<sup>37</sup>

Only in the rabbinic literature, and in only later works the term “midrash” received its technical meaning known today, viz. “interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.” In this technical sense it is used for two related, but distinct phenomena: the process of biblical interpretation and its result.<sup>38</sup>

As to the relatively limited use of the terms *midrash* and *darash* in Qumran: even though most scholars agree that the community that lived in Qumran was not rabbinic, there are more similarities between the literature found in Qumran and that of the rabbis than just the use of the term midrash. Qumran literature is in many ways closely related geographically and even religiously to the (proto-) rabbinic world but it is also clearly distinct. It is quite plausible that the ancient inhabitants of Qumran, who ever they were, used midrash in a similar way as the later rabbis.<sup>39</sup>

### (d) Other literature

Craig Evans found that the word *midrash*, as well as its Greek equivalent *ereunan*<sup>40</sup>, was associated with biblical interpretation in the first century BCE. Philo, the Greek-speaking Jew of Alexandria, urges his readers to join him in

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<sup>35</sup> Idem, 31

<sup>36</sup> Idem, 153

<sup>37</sup> Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992) 116

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Wright, o.c. 42. Within the result, one can distinguish further between a small unit of interpretation, which “a midrash” is named and a collection of such interpretations, a work called “a Midrash.”

<sup>39</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 162

<sup>40</sup> It means “to search”



searching (*ereunan*) Scripture.<sup>41</sup> In the New Testament, John 5:39 reads: “You search the scriptures”. Moreover, John 7:52 also uses the Greek equivalent *ereunan*.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, the term midrash has taken on a technical meaning. It is always in rapport with Scripture, in the sense of searching, trying to understand the meaning and content of the biblical text in order to reveal and explain publicly the meaning of Scripture.

### 3.3 Midrash and exegesis

It is a genuinely hermeneutical practice in the sense that its purpose is to elucidate and understand the scriptural text as such.<sup>43</sup> As a matter of fact Craig A Evans rightly pointed out the exegetical range of midrash. The functions of midrash range from pure explication and elucidation of the biblical

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<sup>41</sup> Refer to *The Worse Attacks the Better* 17:57; 39:141; On the Cherubim 5:14; See Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 116

<sup>42</sup> Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 116

<sup>43</sup> Until recently commentators on midrash have set it aside as an essentially aesthetic discourse that can be admired for its literariness but not for any light that it sheds on the scriptural texts. As interpretation it is a free wheeling and unconstrained eisegesis. A long-standing scholarly tradition does try to defend midrash against the charge of irrationality by arguing that it is, despite its chaotic or nonlinear surface structure, basically a rule-governed activity, and therefore rational after all. This view sometimes emphasizes the importance of the middot of Hillel, Ishmael and Eleazer b. Jose Ha-gelili. See Herman L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1931, rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1983), pp. 93-98. However, it is not clear that middot are rules in our sense, nor are we really clear about the context in which the middot that come down to us are to be understood (They don't seem to have been formulated systematically or intended to hang together as a manual for exegesis.) For many scholars, many of the middot themselves are offensive to reason. See Saul Lieberman, “Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture,” in *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950), pp. 47-82. J. Weingreen, in *From Bible to Mishna: The Continuity of Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, and New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976), esp. pp. 1-33, remarks on the strange incongruity between the analytical rigor of the rabbis as textual critics and their bizarre extravagance as exegetes. Jacob Neusner tries to penetrate this extravagance to lay bare the deep structure or “syllogism” of a midrashic compilation in *Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). But this is not to defend midrash as interpretation. Neusner's view is that midrash is a perfect example of “the ubiquitous datum of Western Biblical interpretation: it is that people make of Scripture anything they wish.” So there is nothing for it but to take midrash as a form of literature, not as hermeneutics. See Neusner, *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Documentary Discourse* (Lanham, N. Y.: University Press of America, 1987), 20. Indeed, on any hermeneutically informed study of the evidence, midrash is not just eisegesis but a hermeneutical practice that tells us a good deal about what it is to understand a text. A valuable study in this regard is Daniel Boyarin's *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also an excellent study by David Stern, “Midrash and Indeterminacy” *Critical Inquiry* 15. no. 3 (Autumn 1988), 132-61

text involved (exegesis), to blatant “reading-in” of extraneous ideas.<sup>44</sup> Philip Alexander confirmed this range of exegesis in the study of midrash. The task of midrashic commentators may be seen as two-fold, as both exegetical and eisegetical: it involves both drawing out the meaning implicit in Scripture, and reading meaning into Scripture.<sup>45</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the early Jewish commentators were not unaware of this distinction, but in general they give the impression that they are merely drawing out what is objectively present in Scripture. In practice it is difficult to separate exegesis and eisegesis, since both processes are often going on simultaneously in the same act of interpretation. The *darshanim* are adept at exploiting real problems in the text as a way of reading their own ideas into Scripture. In any given instance it will probably be impossible to say whether the interpretation was suggested simply by meditation on Scripture, or devised deliberately as a way of attaching certain ideas to Scripture.<sup>46</sup>

Geza Vermes elaborated these two exegetical trends in different terms.<sup>47</sup> He distinguishes two types of midrash: “pure exegesis”, which takes the biblical text as its starting point and “applied exegesis”, which starts from contemporary needs and seeks to apply the text to these.<sup>48</sup> “Pure” exegesis is organically bound to the Bible. Its spirit and method, and in more than one case the very tradition it transmits, are of biblical origin or may be traced back to a period preceding the final compilation of the Pentateuch. So scripture as it were engendered midrash, and midrash in its turn ensured that scripture remained an active and living force in Israel.<sup>49</sup> The first and foremost of all exegetical imperatives was harmonization and reconciliation. A religion, which recognized the totality of its Scripture as word of God and rule of life could not accept that some legal and historical biblical passages disagree, and even flatly contradict one another.<sup>50</sup>

Exegesis was required to adapt and complete scripture so that it might on the

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<sup>44</sup> It may be stated here for clarity’s sake that “rabbinic (and pre-rabbinic, inner-biblical) exegesis” which lacks the midrashic form share(s) this characteristics.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Alexander, *Midrash and the Gospels*, in C. M. Tuckett ed. “Synoptic Studies” *The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983* (JSNT Suppl. 7), (Sheffield, 1984), 7

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*, 7-8

<sup>47</sup> Geza Vermes, “Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 203-31

<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, one may want to call these two aspects of midrash “exegetical” and “eisegetical.”

<sup>49</sup> Geza Vermes, *Bible and Midrash*, 220

<sup>50</sup> *Idem*, 209

one hand apply to the present time, and on the other, satisfy the requirements of polemics. The resulting form of interpretation, which is not primarily concerned with the immediate meaning of the text but with the discovery of principles providing a non-scriptural problem with a scriptural solution, may be called “applied” exegesis. Vermes further clarified the features of applied exegesis that the point of departure for exegesis was no longer the Torah itself, but contemporary customs and beliefs which the interpreter attempted to connect with scripture and wanted to justify.<sup>51</sup> The result was an evolving closely reasoned corpus of systematic exegesis, which eventually determined the whole orientation of individual and social life.

This new form of Bible interpretation seems to have accompanied the rise of the religious parties, and in particular of the Pharisaic movement. As has been noted in the early centuries of the post-exilic age in Chapter Two, it was the priestly and Levitical scribes who, as the professional and authoritative teachers of the people, were responsible for the transmission and exposition of scripture. Pharisaic groups were obliged to defend the accepted norm with arguments solidly backed by scripture. Out of this necessity Geza Vermes concludes that a technique of exegesis<sup>52</sup> soon arose which conformed to well-defined rules, the middot.

Scholars have made a widespread discussion about the features of middot. First, Gerald Bray introduced the formation of the middot and declared that the main aim behind Midrash was the desire to produce new religious laws (halakot) and broaden the application of those already in existence. To this end, there grew up a number of principles of interpretation, known as middot (“canons”).<sup>53</sup> These went through their own process of evolution, from the seven rules of Hillel (which were almost certainly not originally derived from him) to the thirteen rules of Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha (fl. c. AD 110-130) and finally to the thirty-two rules of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Galili (fl. c. AD 130-160). The Seven basic rules of Hillel are enough to give us the flavour of rabbinical exegesis in general.<sup>54</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera introduced and

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<sup>51</sup> Idem, 221

<sup>52</sup> Idem

<sup>53</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 58

<sup>54</sup> See Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 59; Roger Syren, “Text and Community: The case of the Targums” in Paul V. M. Flesher ed. *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translation and interpretation in memory of Ernest G. Clarke* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 58; Geza Vermes, “Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of “The*

classified the schools of middot as follows.<sup>55</sup>

(a) The School of Hillel

Hillel came to Jerusalem from Babylon. His teachers were the Alexandrians Semayah and Abtalion. He did not let himself be lured by messianic speculations or by the messianic provocations unleashed later among the zealots. Hillel promulgated rules and taught a doctrine based more on logic and rational deduction than on tradition and the authorities.

Hillel established seven rules, which governed every legal and exegetical interpretation of the biblical texts. For this he followed models and technical terms from Greek rhetoric. This use of Greek-style logic and hermeneutic methods introduced the principle of Socratic and Stoic realism into Hebrew law and thought, as well as the intellectual approach of questioning the most obvious. The play of question and answer became the road to knowledge and to know how to act in any situation, in a difficult blend of true gnosis and correct behavior.

Hillel made it possible for the Torah to be tested by reason. The radicals opposed Hillel for he was neglecting the need for an effectual fulfillment of the law. The school of Hillel accepted received tradition but equally admitted and granted juridical validity to practice, without wondering whether the origin of an accepted custom could be foreign to the tradition of Israel.

(b) The School of Sammai

The School of Sammai accused Hillel of being modern since he accepted new rules, which he derived from Scripture. Sammai was known as a willing conservative, patriotic, opposed to foreign influences and against proselytism, amongst the pagans. However, in spite of the strict tendencies of his school, in one of every six cases where the Talmud reports on the differences between the two schools, opinion of Sammai's followers is more open.

According to Ginzberg, Sammai addressed the better off whereas Hillel was more concerned with the lower classes. In the theological field, Sammai's

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*Wooring of Rebekah (Gen. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 165

<sup>55</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 469-470

viewpoint was more theocentric, Hillel's more anthropocentric. In the area of relations with the gentiles, Sammai was more reactionary towards admitting proselytes. Contrary to Hillel's school, Sammai acknowledges the rights of women more, defends their personal status and economic independence and gives credibility to their testimony in court.

(c) The School of R. Ishmael and R. Aqiba

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Jewish hermeneutics flourished greatly. The schools of R. Ishmael and R. Aqiba represent two opposed movements.

R. Ishmael based his hermeneutics on Hillel's fifth rule on "the general and the particular". R. Aqiba, instead, involved the method of "inclusion and exclusion", which enabled him to give supreme importance to the most trivial details of the text, including accents, letters and particles. R. Ishmael's hermeneutics started from the principle that all doctrines or laws are expressed in human language so that their interpretation has to be ruled by the logic of reasons. Aqiba, however, gave preeminence to the derivation of laws from the sacred texts, hardly leaving from the pure halaka and the process of establishing new taqqanot. Aqiba mixes the methods of halaka and haggada which Hillel carefully keeps distinct.

Aqiba gave his approval to a messianic interpretation of the Maccabean revolt. All the texts refer to the fact that Aqiba was executed in connection with the revolt, although the details given cannot be historical.

The schools of R. Ishmael and R. Aqiba developed two tendencies in Jewish hermeneutics which stem from Hillel: on the one hand, search for freedom and reason in exegetical analysis, and on the other, obedience to the demands of the practical and legal order, as an antidote against a possible dissolving of Jewish being through assimilation to forms of pagan or Christian being.

Christianity, especially in its Pauline and Johannine forms, comes close in some degree to Essene movements, distancing itself from Hillelite pharisaism. The hermeneutics of Philo and Essene theology were more accepted by Christianity and rejected more in Judaism. From a very early stage, Christianity tended to set exact limits in doctrinal matters against the possible rise of heretical deviations.

Hillel, so rabbinic tradition informs us, compiled a list of seven rules, these being subdivided into thirteen rules by Rabbi Ishmael and increased later to thirty-two by Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose.<sup>56</sup> The *middot* of Hillel and Ishmael are rules of logic and literary criticism demanding an analogical inference, confrontation of the general statute with the particular, comparison of parallel passages and study of the context.

### 3.4 Midrash and Aggadah

The book of Ruth in Jewish tradition is mainly aggadah, narrative in nature. Both Ruth Rabbah and Targum to Ruth, which deals with the exegetical traditions, are mainly midrashic aggadah. Therefore, we need to trace out and elaborate more the relationship and connection of midrash and aggadah. There is common agreement that midrash and aggadah are closely related. Lieve Teugels confirmed the close relationship and advocated that the interchanging of the terms “aggadah” and “midrash” was all but the rule in scholarship until the last decades of the past century.<sup>57</sup> Most medieval Jewish scholars such as Nachmanides (Ramban) used “midrash” and “aggadah” interchangeably.<sup>58</sup>

However, Teugels admitted that, rabbinic scholars usually distinguish between “aggadah” and “midrash”.<sup>59</sup> Aggadah is defined as those parts of rabbinic literature that are not “halakah” and denotes the narrative parts of traditional Jewish literature, whether or not explicitly referring to the Hebrew Scriptures. Midrash means rabbinic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, irrespective of its legal or narrative contents.<sup>60</sup> Hence, aggadah is a term with a much broader connotation than midrash: it refers to Jewish narrative material in general without taking into consideration the literary form in which it appears.

#### 3.4.1 Oral Torah and Written Torah

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud ad Midrash* (Philadelphia, 1945), 93-8

<sup>57</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 151

<sup>58</sup> E.g., by Nachmanides: “We also have a third book which is called the Midrash, which means “Sermons.” This is just as if the bishop were to stand up and make a sermon and one of his hearers liked it so much that he wrote it down. And as for this book, the midrash, if anyone wants to believe in it, well and good, but if someone does not believe it, there is no harm... Moreover we call Midrash a book of “Aggadah”, which means *razionamento*, that is to say, merely things that a man relates to his fellow.” Cf. H. Maccoby, “The Vikuah of Nahmanides” in his *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>59</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 152

<sup>60</sup> See G. Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh, 1996), 238-9

We now discuss the origins of aggadah and its relation to dual Torah, the most authoritative sources of exegetical tradition in Jewish community. Rabbis believed that revelation consists of a “dual Torah.”<sup>61</sup> One part is the Written Torah, or “written law,” (*Miqra*) more generally called simply *Torah*.<sup>62</sup> The “written Torah” refers to the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel: meaning the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy; the Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets; and the Writings, Proverbs, Psalms, Job, Chronicles, the Five Scrolls, and so on.

Another part is the oral or memorized Torah. It was transmitted from master to disciple, from God to Moses, Moses to Aaron, Aaron to Joshua, and so on down, until it was ultimately recorded in the documents produced by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries CE. Jacob Neusner said that these compilations claim to preserve the originally oral tradition.<sup>63</sup> Rabbinic tradition holds that the Oral Torah contained a revelation of all possible interpretations of the written Torah to Moses.<sup>64</sup>

What Moses received on Mount Sinai was not simply a written text that needed to be understood in a straight-forward manner, but rather the Torah, the complete and forever authoritative revelation of God’s will for his people Israel and for the world. This revelation was given in both oral and written form, the oral form containing both methods of interpreting the Torah and teachings not found in written Torah<sup>65</sup>. It was the responsibility of the rabbis to study the entire revelation continually in order to comprehend it ever more fully. Since all of God’s will was contained there, it was necessary that each generation deepen its understanding of the wisdom the revelation contained, applying it to its own age.<sup>66</sup>

Howard Schwartz believed that the ancient rabbis drew on the oral tradition

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<sup>61</sup> Charles Kannengiesser is concerned with the difficulty of the classification. He said, “In practice, halakah and haggadah can be difficult to distinguish, since individual passages and even entire works (e.g. the Mishnah) often include examples of both categories. Both halakah and haggadah are concerned with resolving questions raised by the Written Torah, and by the reality of observing its commandments.” Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 125

<sup>62</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

<sup>63</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism*, 6

<sup>64</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

<sup>65</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 497

<sup>66</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 26 ; Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 34

they had received. They cultivated it, giving birth, in the process, to a rich and vital legendary tradition. Yet it must never be forgotten that the original impulse out of which these legends were created was exegetical. Great importance was put on resolving contradictions and filling gaps in the narrative.<sup>67</sup>

God said to Moses: “Write these things, for it is by means of these things that I have made a covenant with Israel”<sup>68</sup>. When God was about to give the Torah, He recited it to Moses in proper order, Scriptures, Mishnah, Aggadah, and Talmud, for God spoke all these words (Exod 20:1), even the answers to questions which advanced disciples in the future are destined to ask their teachers did God reveal to Moses! (*Tanuma, Ki Tissa* 58b)<sup>69</sup>

The theology of that part of the Torah becomes accessible when we know how to understand that language for what it is: the this-worldly record of the meeting of the Eternal in time with Israel. This specific type of language indicates some philosophies and beliefs of the rabbis. It will be discussed and examined later.

### 3.4.2 The content and foundation of Torah: Halakhah and Haggadah

The torah stands on a dual foundation: on Halakhah and Aggadah. Halakhah refers to those parts of Torah that are legal in nature. It is found in the Pentateuch, or the body of (originally) oral teaching contained in Talmud and Midrash.<sup>70</sup> The word in rabbinic writing for “law” is halakah, from the Hebrew verbal root *halak*, “to go.” Thus, Halakah was “the way”: the norm for how things are to be done<sup>71</sup>. Halakhah can mean the entire corpus of legal material or one particular religious law, seeking therein to define the laws and to discover in them the fundamental principles by which new laws for resolving new problems might be derived, as well as arguments for justifying certain customs, which already were traditional.<sup>72</sup> It lists 39 types of work and other types of activity forbidden on the Sabbath day (Mishnah). It tries to control

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<sup>67</sup> Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xi

<sup>68</sup> Exod 34:27

<sup>69</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

<sup>70</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33; Abraham Joshua Heschel, “*Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*”, Edited and Translated by Gordon Tucker (New York: Continuum, 2005) 1; Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 126; Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41

<sup>71</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 49

<sup>72</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33



every aspect of life, from dawn to dusk, from birth to death, even reaching beyond the Jewish people to all humankind by means of the so-called rules of Noah.<sup>73</sup> It is easy to see the development of halakah as essentially confined to rabbinic disputations in the study-houses. Halakic literature develops in a clearly stratified manner. Each generation of rabbis understands itself as the successor and explainer of the preceding generation.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, Aggadah consists of those parts of Torah including written or oral that are narrative in nature. “Narrative”, the best linguistic equivalent of Aggadah, is meant to include also purported biography, theology, exhortation and folklore.”<sup>75</sup> Haggadic teachings are not concerned to prescribe behavior or to show what is a right or correct opinion. In a given aggadah, contradictory sources can be presented together; there is no need to arrive at a decision or practice, so the differing traditions are preserved. Howard Schwartz echoed this contradictory nature of Jewish legends. He pointed out that the principles of the midrashic method outlines the development of the legendary tradition and discusses the tools developed for interpretation of these sacred texts, that permitted multiple interpretations, often of a contradictory nature, which were all regarded as legitimate.<sup>76</sup>

Aggada is contained in Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, and the other Rabbah Midrash-compilations (Sections 15-17). In addition, both Talmuds contain ample selections of Midrash Aggadah.<sup>77</sup> Haggadic midrash enjoyed less prestige than Halaka. Haggada lacked the slightest systematic arrangement and often fell into anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in referring to the divinity, always suspect to Orthodox Judaism.<sup>78</sup>

The distinction between homiletical midrash and legal interpretation also requires explanation. Legal midrash is halakic, how one should walk or conduct himself or herself in life. Homiletical interpretation is haggadic, it is how one narrates a story or explains a problem in the text. Haggadic midrash was much more imaginative than halakah in its attempts to fill in the gaps in Scripture and to explain away apparent discrepancies, difficulties and

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<sup>73</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 468

<sup>74</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 126

<sup>75</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*, 1; Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33; Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41

<sup>76</sup> Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis*, xi

<sup>77</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41

<sup>78</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 468

unanswered questions. Legal rulings were not to be derived from aggadic interpretation.<sup>79</sup>

How are Aggadah and halakah used? Liturgical reading of the Scriptures held the place of honor in the synagogues. It provided the material for the sermon, which followed it immediately and was generally a commentary on the Scripture lesson in the form of aggadah. In the schools, this same biblical text was used for instruction; it was studied and commented on and a rule of life or halakah was drawn from it. Hence the Law became the subject matter for daily instruction and tradition.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.4.3 Exegetical relationship of Dual Torah

The character of midrash is determined by the fact that it is an activity related to Torah, and so to understand midrash it is essential to consider the nature and function of Torah in the Rabbinic scheme of things. Moses received the Torah on Sinai in two forms, as Written Torah and as Oral Torah. The former is embodied in Scripture and the latter in Tradition. Philip Alexander confirmed this exegetical relationship that the effect of this doctrine is to enrich and complicate the concept of Torah by absorbing tradition into it.<sup>81</sup> By classifying their traditions as Oral Torah, and by tracing them back to the same revelatory event, which gave birth to the Written Torah, the Rabbis were giving divine sanction to the extensive body of laws, customs and teachings, which they had received from their predecessors.

Philip Alexander further elaborated the development of Jewish exegetical method. The Rabbis achieved the Jewish exegetical trend by presenting tradition in the form of midrash on Scripture.<sup>82</sup> Tradition was reduced to the condition of commentary on Scripture. In Judaism the Written Torah is not merely a source of law or doctrine: it functions as a symbolic centre, it is the “still point” at the heart of the Judaic universe. New ideas and developments within Judaism have to be legitimated by being brought into relationship with Scripture: it must be shown that they are somewhere present in Scripture.

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<sup>79</sup> Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 118

<sup>80</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33

<sup>81</sup> Philip Alexander, *Midrash and the Gospels*, in C. M. Tuckett ed. “Synoptic Studies” *The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983* (JSNT Suppl. 7), (Sheffield, 1984), 5

<sup>82</sup> *Idem*, 6

The major aim of the *darshan* was to find ways of convincingly validating tradition in terms of Scripture. He had other aims as well, related specifically to his view of the nature of the Written Torah. Scripture contained God's supremely authoritative revelation to Israel: above all other texts, therefore, it was worthy of study and meditation. Its teachings had to be searched out, explained, and applied to the heart and conscience of the Jew. Most important of all, the Rabbis were working within a very definite, on-going tradition of scholarship. They seemed to regard themselves primarily as the transmitters of the tradition. In passing on the traditions, which they received, they modified and "improved" them, but such modifications are often external and intended, with the minimum of change, to adapt the tradition to its new context.<sup>83</sup>

Julio Trebolle Barrera further explained and elaborated the role of and relationship with Dual Torah. Tradition is elevated to the category of revelation, which then even seems to be inferior to it. Tradition is transmitted by creating a new meaning and renewing the old meaning. He confirmed that this renewal does not threaten the integrity of the text or assume the intrusion of something alien to the text, which is enriched thanks to its continual renewal.<sup>84</sup> Oral law tries to speak about what written law says. But oral law says something more; it goes beyond the obvious meaning of the passage studied, without forsaking the spirit of the overall meaning of Scripture.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.5 Assumptions behind the method

Philip Alexander introduced some guidelines of Jewish thinking.<sup>86</sup> The *darshan* made three important deductions. First, the text of Scripture is presumed to be totally coherent and self-consistent. This meant that any one part of Scripture may be interpreted in the light of any other part and harmonized with it. Contradictions in Scripture can only be apparent, not real. The *darshanim* spend much time weaving together diverse Scriptures, and reconciling Scripture with Scripture. Second, the text of Scripture is polyvalent. It contains different levels and layers of meaning. It is not a question of finding the one, true, original meaning of Scripture: Scripture can mean several – sometimes seemingly contradictory – things at once. The *darshan* attempts to draw out its various meanings. In a very real sense he considers that all truth is

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<sup>83</sup> Idem, 11

<sup>84</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 496

<sup>85</sup> Idem

<sup>86</sup> Philip Alexander, *Midrash and the Gospels*, 7

present in it: it is simply a matter of finding out where it lies hidden. Third, Scripture is inerrant. It is the *darshanim*'s business to explain away any apparent errors of fact.

Gereld Bruns supplemented some more assumptions behind the midrashic method. The rabbis treated the Scriptures as a self-interpreting text on the ordinary philosophical principle that what is plain in one place can be used to clarify what is obscure or in question in another.<sup>87</sup> But the rabbis also read the Scriptures as being already hermeneutical, that is, as works of interpretation as well as Scripture: the prophetic books and wisdom writings, for examples, are characterized as texts composed specifically for the elucidation of the five books of Moses.

What this comes down to is the rabbinical version of the principle of the hermeneutical circle: "linking up the words of the Pentateuch with those of the prophets and the prophets with the Writings" simply means making sense of the whole by construing relations among the parts, if not exactly vice versa.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.6 The purpose of midrashic exegesis

#### 3.6.1 Gap-filling in Bible and Midrash

Biblical stories like all stories are narrated with "gaps". They do not give all the details of what happens between one event and another. Lieve M. Teugels attributed the role of reader and demonstrated that the readers are keen to fill in all kinds of details when the process of interpretation takes places.<sup>89</sup> Lieve Teugels confirmed that the rabbinic sages recognized gaps and fissures in the biblical text and needed an explanation for them. They could not possibly think of a layered history of composition. They also did not smooth away the gaps by harmonizing or negating them. They recognized rather the tensions and used them as the basis for their interpretations.<sup>90</sup> In other words, they gratefully used the gaps in the biblical text to fill them in with different interpretations, additions and expansions. Midrash takes the position of a reader who is confronted with a story in which many details are only implicitly present and which may have an open ending. Any reader in this situation unconsciously fills

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<sup>87</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 109

<sup>88</sup> Idem, 110

<sup>89</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 42

<sup>90</sup> Idem, 184

in the details or the gaps. Midrash actually served, and serves, as the intermediary between the biblical text and the reader.<sup>91</sup>

Meir Sternberg also introduced the concept of “gap filling” with regard to the active, interpretative, stance a reader takes when confronted with a biblical story.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the procedure of “gap filling” in midrash is discussed extensively by Daniel Boyarin, in his book *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Boyarin defines a “gap” as “any element in the textual system of the Bible, which demands interpretation for a coherent construction of the story; that is, both gaps in the narrow sense, as well as contradictions and repetitions, which indicate to the reader that she (*sic*) must fill in something that is not given in the text in order to read it.”<sup>93</sup>

Whereas interpretation can be seen as an inevitable phenomenon of any reading process, the main purpose of midrash is explicit interpretation. In rabbinic midrash, gaps in the biblical text such as the ones just mentioned are noticed, questioned and deliberately filled in. The gap in the biblical text is often exploited by, the rabbinic interpreter to bring in new ideas in the explanation process. Sometimes the rabbis, who were good close-readers, noticed gaps in the biblical text that we might overlook. Their midrashic interpretations draw our attention to these gaps, as stated by Robert Alter:

*“With their assumption of interconnectedness, the makers of the Midrash were often as exquisitely attuned to small verbal signals of continuity and to significant lexical nuances as any “close reader” of our own age.”*<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186, describes this reading process as follows: “From the viewpoint of what is directly given in the language, the literary work consists of bits and fragments to be linked and pieced together in the process of reading: it establishes a system of gaps that must be filled in.” Boyarin, *Intertextuality* (n.10), 40, calls the Bible a “self-glossing” text, a text which reads itself; and midrash is the rabbinic way of explaining these glosses: “As with all literature, so with the Torah, it is precisely the fault lines in the text, the gaps that its author has left, which enable reading. (...) midrash enters into these interstices by exploring the ways in which the Bible can read itself” (40-41). Sternberg, however, calls midrash --- or in any case the example which he treats, a midrash on the story of David and Batsheba --- “illegitimate gap-filling” (189), which has “no anchorage in the textual details, and even clashes with some givens” (189). The term “illegitimate” is according to our opinion out of place, because it does not give midrash the credit it deserves as an ancient form of Bible commentary operated from a perspective that is very different from our modern view. As could be expected, Boyarin does not entirely agree with this treatment of midrash as well (p. 139, n.9)

<sup>92</sup> M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186-229.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, 41. Henceforth, the word “gap” refers to all these kinds of textual inequalities.

<sup>94</sup> R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 11

However, it should not be forgotten that the rabbinic sages operated from a different ideological framework than most present day readers. This means that there are some guidelines or assumptions behind the sages when the process of interpretation is carried on. They do affect the interpretation of texts. It needs further elaboration and explanation in the Jewish exegesis on the book of Ruth. In fact rabbinic Judaism sets forth a rich corpus of theological formulations of religious truth. That corpus begins with monotheism. It continues with the dogma that God revealed the Torah at Sinai, both written and oral. It culminates in the conviction that all Israel has a portion in the world to come with the exception for those who deny the Torah and the world to come. Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner concluded that these propositions surely comprise not only religious propositions but also a cogent theological structure and system.<sup>95</sup>

As an example, a gap in time framework is, witnessed at the beginning of the Book of Ruth by Scherma Zlotowitz. The time is not specific and defined, though in the book of Ruth, verse 1 in chapter one (“in the days when the Judges judged”) implies a time slot. This undefined time may be explained by a rabbis’ attitude. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz believed that, the precise year of the event is unimportant in the view of rabbis. They further make a point that the Scripture is not a history book. The narratives are often incomplete and the chronology indefinite.<sup>96</sup>

The author of Megillas Ruth, A. J. Rosenberg also echoed the same view and has told us very little about this. The period of Judges began with the death of Joshua and extended until King Saul who introduced monarchy to Eretz Yisrael ---- a period of roughly 350 years.<sup>97</sup> The time gap is very wide and obvious. No sage is telling us when the story of Ruth took place.<sup>98</sup> However the interpreters of midrash fill this time gap with their concern. The Jewish rabbis led us to a network of stories in which the narratives were described in the period of Judges. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz pointed out that it is similar in many ways to two of the sorriest tales in Scripture both at the

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<sup>95</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

<sup>96</sup> Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxi

<sup>97</sup> The rabbis estimated this period from about 1400 BCE to about 1100 BCE. It was the resultant chaos that brought famine to the land and exile to Elimelech. See Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 114

<sup>98</sup> Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources* (Brooklyn: New York, 2004), xx

conclusion of the Book of Judges.<sup>99</sup> These are the narrative of the Concubine in Giv'ah (Judges 19), the story of an atrocity that led to a civil war resulting in over 80,000 dead and the virtual decimation of the tribe of Benjamin and the narrative of the Idol of Michah that led astray a sizeable portion of the tribe of Dan (Judges 18). Those episodes too are placed in an indefinite time frame and the commentators disagree concerning when it occurred.<sup>100</sup>

These two chaotic events during the Judges' period are used to illustrate the social instability and political unrest in this period, which the characters of this book have to face. On 1:1 "and it came to pass", the Midrash<sup>101</sup> cites a tradition that every passage in the Bible beginning with this word, *wayehi*, tells of misfortune, the word consisting of two parts denoting sorrow: *way* "woe" and *hi* "lamentation". The misfortune here was, *there was a famine in the land*. The word, however, occurs twice in this verse, suggesting two misfortunes.<sup>102</sup> "No redundancy" is the principle that Scripture would not include any superfluous words. Therefore, if there appears to be a word or phrase that is redundant in context, it must mean something that has not already been expressed.<sup>103</sup> The sages presume that every word is meaningful in the scripture.

### 3.6.2 Application of the interpretation

We ought to think of midrash as a form of life rather than simply as a form of exegesis. Midrash is concerned with practice and action as well as with the form and meaning of texts.<sup>104</sup> Midrash is concerned to tell about the force of the text as well as to address its problems of form and meaning. The sense of Torah is the sense in which it applies to the life and conduct of those who live under its power, and this principle of application applies to homiletic aggadah as well as to the explicitly legal constructions of halakhah. Indeed, this was the upshot of Joseph Heinemann's study of aggadah.

*"While the rabbinic creators of the Aggadah looked back into Scripture to uncover the full latent meaning of the Bible and its wording, at the same time they looked forward into the present and the future. They sought to give direction to their own generation, and to guide them out of their spiritual complexities... The aggadists do not mean so much to clarify difficult passages in*

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<sup>99</sup> Idem

<sup>100</sup> Idem, xxi

<sup>101</sup> The edition of Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*

<sup>102</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 114

<sup>103</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 296

<sup>104</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 105

*the biblical texts as to take a stand on the burning questions of the day, to guide the people and to strengthen their faith.*<sup>105</sup>

This emphasis on application entails the political meaning of midrash as well as its spiritual purpose which indicates the contextual nature of midrash. Gerald Bruns pointed out that the context is social rather than logical. It is therefore alterable and variable,<sup>106</sup> as in the case of a conversation, where no statement is likely to make much sense when taken in isolation from the whole, even though the whole is not an internally coherent system superior to its parts but a chaotic system in perpetual transition back-and-forth between order and turbulence. The rabbis seem not to have any recognized sense of wholeness. We see they imagined themselves as part of the whole, participating in Torah rather than operating on it at an analytic distance.<sup>107</sup>

Openness is a most distinguished feature of midrash. Openness has to be constructed as the openness of what is written, that is, its applicability to the time of its interpretation, its need for actualization. What is important is that interpretation not be fixed<sup>108</sup> --- an idea that is reflected in the controversy (extending from at least the quarrel between the Pharisees and Sadducees to the beginnings of the midrashic collections) over whether the words of the Sages should be written down.

Leila Leah Bronner advocated that both the Midrash and Talmud place great importance on the story of Ruth's conversion.<sup>109</sup> It is true to see the story that occupies us an ideal picture of the Israelite mission as seen by an author of the Second Temple period. The exiled Judeans are considered as a net bringing back with them the "Moabite" convert. This is the example of the application of the interpretation for upholding the Israeli tradition of kingship from a foreign origin, Moabite and the authority of Torah.

The ancient rabbis in part based their rules for conversion to Judaism on the book of Ruth, pointing out that three times Naomi resists Ruth's desire to follow

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<sup>105</sup> Joseph Heinemann, "The Nature of Aggadah," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, trans. Marc Bergman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 48-49

<sup>106</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 114

<sup>107</sup> *Idem*, 115

<sup>108</sup> *Idem*, 116

<sup>109</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, 63



her to Judah.<sup>110</sup> Once again, the power and norm of Torah is to make the conversion possible. Ruth committed to Torah through her oath to Naomi in verse 16-18, as stated by Andre LaCocque.<sup>111</sup> She declared that “your people are my people and your God be my God” in 1:16. This shows that Ruth had already adopted the ethical code given to her by God, as well as the rites practiced by the people. The Rabbis indicated that Ruth regards herself as one of the Hebrews (Malbim).<sup>112</sup> “Your people will be my people” is taken in the Midrash to indicate her acceptance of all the penalties and admonitions of the Torah. “Your God be my God” showed her acceptance of all the remaining commandments according to the rabbis’ interpretation.<sup>113</sup> As the afterlife matter is concerned, Ruth will be buried according to where Naomi is buried (1:17). It is only a proselyte of this type, whose genuineness stands out beyond doubt, who will be permitted to abide beneath the wings of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, and become full members of the Israelite community.<sup>114</sup>

On Deut. 23:4-7, the rabbis interpreted this pentateuchal prohibition to mean that male Moabites were forbidden to come into the congregation of the Lord, basing this interpretation on the use of the male singular form in the biblical text. The exegetical principle of “A Moabite but not a Moabitess” allowed Ruth to be accepted.<sup>115</sup> In the Talmudic version of the story, Naomi begins the conversion ritual by teaching the importance of Sabbath observance. She tells Ruth that Jews are prohibited from traveling beyond the set Sabbath boundaries on the day of rest. Ruth replies, “Where you go I will go.” Naomi then turns to sexual matters between men and women. Private meeting between men and women are forbidden. Ruth replies, “Where you lodge, I will lodge.” Naomi tells her that the Jews have been command to observe 613 (606+7) commandments. Ruth replies, “Your people shall be my people” (Ruth 1:16). 606 commandments are incumbent only upon Jews. An additional seven, called by the sages the “Noahide Laws” are incumbent upon all the descendants of Noah, that is--- all humanity. Ruth’s name indicates her acceptance of all the 613 commandments of the Torah.<sup>116</sup> As a whole, Ruth’s conversion is applied for the interpretation in Jewish interest of the community.

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<sup>110</sup> Andre LaCocque, *“Ruth: A Continental Commentary”* K. C. Hanson trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3

<sup>111</sup> Idem

<sup>112</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 119

<sup>113</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, 65

<sup>114</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 119

<sup>115</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, 64

<sup>116</sup> Idem, 65

### 3.6.3 It is homiletic

Renee Bloch states that, Midrash is not a genre of the academy but it is rather a popular genre, and above all it is homiletic. Its origin is certainly to be sought for the most part in the liturgical reading of the Torah for Sabbaths and Feasts.<sup>117</sup> The Palestinian Targum, which is functionally midrash, must not be thought of independently of the lectionary reading of Scripture. It very probably reflects the homilies, which followed the Scriptural reading in the synagogues.<sup>118</sup>

For the Qumran community, Philip Davies made a significant point that scriptural explanation may be regarded as a historical lesson to the people of God.<sup>119</sup> It is undeniable that the trend of the Qumran community imposed this effect on Jewish society. He believes that a large number of texts present figures from the past, which issue warnings about the behavior of Israel, exhorting Israel to observe the will of God and avoid catastrophe. While such compositions at times contain predictive elements and anticipating future events, their main function is usually exhortation. In other words, eschatological judgment and salvation are not the subjects of detailed prediction but rather are prompts to ethical behavior.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, from the perspective of the communal context with the exegesis and interpretation of the scriptural text, ethical behavior according to the will of God is the task of commentators in Jewish values and norms, and even Christian exegesis, discussed later in the chapter. Through the application of the approach of Jewish exegesis, modeling is the main aim of interpretation. Moral teaching is a very important issue because Judaism may be regarded as a moral religion. Homiletic function of midrash became a useful mean to achieve and continue the moral example from generation to generation in the history of Israel.

The historical phenomenon of midrash in ancient Israel has brought influence on the modern way of Jewish reading. Renee Bloch witnessed the continuity of the function of midrash and further confirmed the role of homiletic function of midrash. Its goal is primarily practical: to define the lessons for faith and the

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<sup>117</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 31

<sup>118</sup> *Idem*, 31

<sup>119</sup> Philip R. Davies, *Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 157

<sup>120</sup> *Idem*

religious way of life contained in the biblical text.<sup>121</sup> The practical aspect was probably not in the foreground in the biblical midrash because this older midrash related to an age in which the need for adaptation was not felt to the same extent as toward the end of the Biblical age. This practical concern led midrash to interpret Scripture and to “actualize” it. She made a conclusion that this characteristic along with the close relation and constant reference to Scripture and its homiletic function is the essence of midrash.<sup>122</sup>

Jewish commentaries may be used as fulfilling interpreter’s purposes. Kirsten Nielsen pointed out that the most interesting aspect of the *Midrash to Ruth*, namely, *Ruth Rabbah*, is its characterization of Ruth.<sup>123</sup> The character is described morally or negatively for the purpose of edification and upholding tradition. Elimelech’s, one of the characters of the book of Ruth, departure, his leaving of his country without a compelling reason, was regarded as a grave sin. Moreover, his lack of solidarity with the poor is the reason for his premature death and his family’s unfortunate situation.<sup>124</sup> This shows the principle of moral law of sin and punishment in Jewish law. Ruth on the other hand is beautifully drawn. Great emphasis is placed on her conversion, which fits in well with the use of the book at the Feast of Weeks. One of the rabbinical interpretations has been concerned with (and that plays a decisive role in the understanding of the genesis and function of Ruth) King David’s Moabite origins.<sup>125</sup> Ruth’s morality and *hesed* accounted for the origin of the Davidic line and dynasty. The book was written to show how great is the reward for those who perform deeds of loving-kindness (Ruth R. II, 14).<sup>126</sup> Boaz is portrayed as a worthy representative of the righteous who resists all temptation, and as with the Targum to Ruth the concept of righteousness plays a major role.<sup>127</sup>

This period is condemned due to human sinfulness. Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died in 1:3, not due to old age or infirmity, but as the result of Divine punishment for remaining away from the Holy Land.<sup>128</sup> His two sons also sinned still more grievously in that they took Moabite wives in 1:4. Only after

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<sup>121</sup> Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 32

<sup>122</sup> Idem

<sup>123</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18

<sup>124</sup> Idem

<sup>125</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* translated by Jacob Neusner, (Atlanta, 1989), 197

<sup>126</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), preface

<sup>127</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18

<sup>128</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWRF The Book of Ruth*, 115

their father's death, it should be noted, did the sons marry women who were not of their people (*Lekach Tob*).<sup>129</sup> As a result, Mahlon and Chilion (1:2) were given these names as foretelling their early deaths and childlessness. In the words of the Midrash<sup>130</sup> they were given these names, "Mahlon, in that they were blotted out from the world, and Chilion, in that they perished from the world."<sup>131</sup> Mahlon and Chilion died as a punishment for this sin. Mahlon died first because being the elder he should have exercised a restraining influence over his younger brother (Malbim).<sup>132</sup>

The rabbis can interpret Elimelech in a negative way since he had sinned against God and did nothing in accordance with the torah. Elimelech literally in Hebrew is meant as "my God is King" (*Daath Mikra*). The name is expounded as revealing the man's character. It can also signify "unto me (*eli*) shall the kingdom come" (Midrash), giving evidence of his arrogance, a negative description of his character. This is extremely the opposition direction of meaning of "my God is King".<sup>133</sup>

Ruth is beautifully drawn. She may not be free of unchaste thoughts, but compared to the other gleaning women she is a paragon. In this respect great emphasis is placed on her conversion, a fact, which fits in well with the use of the book at the Feast of Weeks.<sup>134</sup> The name of Ruth (1:4) has, been interpreted differently by the rabbis of the Talmud and the Midrash. However, one common point among the Jewish interpretations is the positive example of her morality and being related to the Davidic line of dynasty. The former is derived from the root, *ravoh*, to "satisfy", foretelling that she would be the great grandmother of David, who would satisfy the Holy One, blessed be He, with songs and praises. One midrashic view is that the name is derived from the root, *raoh*, "to see."<sup>135</sup> In contradistinction to Orpah, Ruth saw, or accepted, the words of her mother-in-law. Alternatively, it is derived from *rathoth*, to quake, for she quaked in dread of committing a sin. These derivations may be interpreted as foretelling the future. Zohar Chadash, however, states that she was named Ruth on her conversion. Her original name was Gillith.<sup>136</sup> This

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<sup>129</sup> Idem

<sup>130</sup> The edition of Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*

<sup>131</sup> Idem

<sup>132</sup> Idem, 116

<sup>133</sup> Idem, 115

<sup>134</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18

<sup>135</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 116

<sup>136</sup> Idem

interpretation focused on her commitment to Judaism and her piety is emphasized as well. Each generation of the Jewish community should follow this exemplary character through the homiletic function of midrash by the rabbis' teaching and their sermon preached on every occasion of the feast.

### 3.6.4 Adaptation to the present

Rabbinic methods of legal interpretation (halaka) and moral theological interpretation (haggada) correspond to mechanisms controlling every procedure of interpretation. It has been possible to consider legal and theological hermeneutic as a model of what happens in every principle of interpretation. Every interpretation is an application. The application of a legal rule to a particular case in halaka and the application of a moral message, written or oral, refer to a new situation in haggada.<sup>137</sup>

Changes in circumstances and legal practice forced a method of exegesis to be developed which made possible hermeneutics to be applied to new laws and new conditions. Among these the discussion opens with a question being set and concludes with a decision, which ultimately has to be taken by the Teacher of Righteousness or by Rabbi Jesus. In Mishnaic literature instead, the discussion is resolved by a decision taken by the majority.

Howard Schwartz confirmed that in each generation it has been the practice of the Jewish people to return to the Bible for guidance in both ethical and spiritual matters.<sup>138</sup> The radical changes in culture and environment that they experienced over the ages made it necessary to interpret the biblical laws so that they would be applicable to their contemporary situation. Thus the Bible, and specifically the Torah, is not only the covenant between the people of Isaac and God,<sup>139</sup> but it is also the source of the primary myths of the culture and the bedrock for all commentary, both in the halakhic or legal realm and in the aggadic or legendary realm. Indeed, it is not difficult to understand why all subsequent sacred texts exist in the shadow of the Holy Scriptures.

Lieve Teugels states that, rabbinic exegesis is always theological. It actualizes

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<sup>137</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 497

<sup>138</sup> Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis*, 5

<sup>139</sup> On Shavuot, many Sephardic communities read a *ketubah* (Jewish wedding contract) for the marriage of God and Israel, which was written by Israel Najara in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Safed. See Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis*, 87 for a partial translation of the text.

biblical texts and develops biblical notions<sup>140</sup> which, by definition in the rabbinic view, are divinely inspired or about the divine. Moreover, the fact that interpretation of the Bible was considered Oral Torah involved a religious duty to engage in it. This combination of exegesis and theology, which surpasses the formal characteristics of the midrash (but which is embodied in them) is called a “process of world-making” by Michael Fishbane. That is, midrash is not just part of rabbinic culture; it makes this culture:<sup>141</sup>

*“Consequently, the world of the text serves as the basis for the textualization of the world --- and its meaning. Through exegesis new forms arise, and the content varies from one teacher to another. What remains constant is the attempt to textualize existence by having the ideals of (interpreted) Scripture embodied in every day life. This process of world-making is the ultimate poesis of the exegetical imagination even as the conversion of the biblical text into life is the culmination of the principle of similarity.”<sup>142</sup>*

The Aramaic Targum of the story of Ruth was written in the Aramaic dialect of the West. In many ways, this Targum is an expansion and adaptation of the early Targum of Johnathan. At certain times in Jewish history, the people could not read or understand biblical texts. To transmit the legacy, translators would stand up in public places and tell the story. Neh. 8:8 states that, “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.” These storytellers combined old stories with contemporary consciousness to create prophecy. The language of these prophets was Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of exiled Jews. Their stories are more than translations, for they present interpretations of laws, creeds, and beliefs. Gradually, the Aramaic versions were written down. The translation of the Torah is a final product of the first century CE, the final translation of the Prophets is a product of the fourth of the ninth century CE. Mishael Maswari Caspi and Rachel S. Havrelock appropriately commented that the Aramaic storyteller like the midrashic one was extremely interested in filling in the biblical story’s gaps. The story was expanded to fit the times.<sup>143</sup> We may conclude that the adaptation to the present situation is one of midrashic purposes.

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<sup>140</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 167

<sup>141</sup> So also Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 126-127 about the ideology and even the experiences, of martyrdom as formed by reading of the Song of Songs.

<sup>142</sup> Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination on Jewish Thought and Theology* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4

<sup>143</sup> Mishael Maswari Caspi & Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road*, 79

The position of Ruth in the royal Davidic dynasty is always questioned because of her foreignness, having been a Moabitess. This criticism has led to quarrels and conflicts among the Jewish groups through the ages. Therefore, we may witness the comprehensive details of the conversion between Naomi as Jewess and Ruth the proselyte reflecting that pre-rabbinic and rabbinic Judaism was primarily concerned with the acceptance of *twcm*. Though the practices were related to theological concepts, it did not substitute for them. Etan Levine insisted that conversion consisted of acceptance of these laws, rather than doctrinal confession.<sup>144</sup> This de-emphasis of doctrine precludes the formulation of a coherent theology of ancient Judaism; the rabbis were invariably more in agreement in their classification of the 613 religious imperatives than in their presentations of Jewish dogma.

Scholars are serious about the position of Ruth. They proclaimed that what the proselyte therefore accomplishes is to take shelter under the wings of God's presence, and the proselyte who does so stands in the royal line of David, Solomon, and the Messiah. Over and over again, we see, the point is made that Ruth the Moabitess, perceived by the ignorant as an outsider, enjoyed complete equality with all other Israelites because she had accepted the yoke of the Torah, married a great sage and through her descendants produced the Messiah-sage, David.<sup>145</sup>

Faced with the exemplary character of this foreign woman, who will also become the ancestress of the Davidic line, the rabbis of the Talmud feel that they have to halakhically legitimize Ruth's conversion. Having accomplished her acceptance into the fold, they wish to underscore her merit and extraordinary kindness and valor. Leila Leah Bronner believed that this made her a suitable figure to stand at the beginning of the Davidic or (later messianic) line.<sup>146</sup>

Leila Bronner continued her praise for Ruth's legitimate position in the Israeli community. She claimed that it is in marriage and motherhood that Ruth fulfills her role. By her dedication to Torah, to the feminine functions and values

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<sup>144</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 57

<sup>145</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and the interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, LLC, 2004), 131-132; Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 107

<sup>146</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *A Thematic Approach To Ruth in Rabbinic Literature* in "A Feminist Companion To Ruth" Athalya Brenner edi. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 146

respected and venerated by the sages, she wins their approval and esteem.<sup>147</sup> They compare her to the matriarchs who built the house of Israel, whose merit also derives almost entirely from their fulfillment of the maternal role. The sages accord great respect to the exemplary women of the Bible more than they ever show toward any actual women of their own way.

(v) Rabbinic Hermeneutics as Dialogic

“Dialogic” is a term of particularly Jewish stamp. Dialogic is the opposite of monologic. The former accepts and nourishes variety and the second excludes any method of understanding other than its own, in an attempt to reduce everything to one.<sup>148</sup> So, Jewish theology is never crystallized into dogmas.<sup>149</sup> Being never a dogma but always dialogic, is well attested by Gerald Bruns’ descriptions of midrash as rather reflective than demonstrative and divergent rather than convergent, and moving rather than fixed.<sup>150</sup> He continued to point out that midrash is not linear exposition, not a species of monological reasoning but exegesis that presupposes or starts out from alternative readings and anticipates and encourages or provokes them in turn.<sup>151</sup> Midrash is not the work of the isolated reader but an endless give-and-take between the text and its exegetes and above all among the rabbis who gather together to expound and dispute.

Julio Trebolle Barrera elaborated the diversified feature and dialogic nature of midrash reflected in the Mishnah. It is a concern for collecting and keeping minority opinions that could not hope to have any regulatory force. This respect for the opinion of the minority expressed the conviction that in the application of law everything is questionable and nothing can become dogmatic.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal*, 80

<sup>148</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 496

<sup>149</sup> It should be clarified that at most some basic statements about monotheism and the goodness of creation were formulated as a defense against heresies such as Gnosticism.

<sup>150</sup> The complete concept is that “openness to the pun allows words of the text to be taken now one way, now another, as the working out of a hermeneutical question. Midrash is more reflective than demonstrating, divergent rather than convergent (110-111). The text is treated as something moving rather than fixed, something that is always a step ahead of the interpreter, always opening onto new ground and always calling for interpretation to be begun anew (111). See Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 110-111

<sup>151</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 111

<sup>152</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 496



Moreover, Gerald Bruns confirmed the fact that midrash is keen to keep the minor opinion with continuous dialogue of interpretations. He pointed out that midrash is not a method for resolving hermeneutical disputes. It is the place where disputes are meant to go on, where there is always room for another interpretation or for more dialogue, where interpretation is more a condition of being than an act of consciousness. We need to shake the idea that midrash is a mental process.<sup>153</sup> The point is not to try to hold its multiple interpretations simultaneously in mind as if they constituted a logical system, a canon of internally consistent teachings to be held true for all time or tested against a rule or deposit of faith. On the contrary, to say that midrash is dialogical rather than systematic is to say that it is closer to the rhetorical inventory than to logical organon. It is to say that it is structured discursively according to the principle of “now one, now another,” as within the open indeterminacy of the question rather than in the closure of the proposition. Midrash must always seek to nourish the conflict of interpretation, not to shut it down.<sup>154</sup>

The logic of Hillel’s hermeneutics, the most important Jewish exegetical principles, is matched by a dialogic style, fostering and encouraging differences of opinion and viewpoints.<sup>155</sup> Julio Barrera demonstrated that it has a circular structure of question-and-answer. Dialogic between interpreters, who in principle disagree on the application of a legal text or the meaning of a religious text, leads to a juridical decision being made or the meaning of a religious text to be determined.<sup>156</sup> However, the essence of the dialogic is rooted not just in the relationship established in discussion between interpreters but in the relationship, which is also a dialogic, which they try to establish with the text and what the text attempts to reveal: the eternal Torah and the divine will.

Next we look at examples from the book of Ruth to illustrate the dialogic nature of midrash. As discussed before, Ruth’s conversion is the most important belief among the Rabbis as a tradition of legitimate origin of Davidic dynasty. However, different voices had risen out. Targum to Ruth had another point of view about the wives of Elimelech’s sons. The Targum to Ruth 1:10 stated that,

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<sup>153</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 114

<sup>154</sup> *Idem*, 114-5

<sup>155</sup> Philip Alexander described midrash as “argumentative.” It frequently sets out a number of different opinions and debates their merits. In midrash the bones of the exegetical reasoning show through. See Philip Alexander, *Midrash and the Gospels*, in C. M. Tuckett (ed.), *Synoptic Studies. The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983* (JSNT Suppl. 7), Sheffield 1984) 10

<sup>156</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 497

“they had not been converted.” Etan Levine explained that they did not convert to Judaism. In the Hellenistic era, when the most characteristic distinction between Gentile and Jew was idolatry and polytheism, the rejection of these could itself be regarded as conversion to Judaism. As early Palestinian sources attest, “The rejection of idolatry is the acknowledgment of the entire Torah.”<sup>157</sup> The Syriac paraphrase is limited to “to your country,” suggesting a counter-polemic to the effect that they were going to the land of Israel, but not necessarily to convert to Judaism as she concluded.<sup>158</sup> This was the opposite side of main Jewish thought but reflected the dialogic nature of Jewish hermeneutics.

Etan Levine explained and added that the addition “to become proselytized”, in juxtaposition to their (Ruth and Orpha) leaving their homes and families, reflects the concept of proselytes as those who have been naturalized into a new and godly polity. Whereas *rg* is used throughout the Old Testament as a generic term for a resident alien in Israelite territory without the usual civil rights, the targum consistently uses the term *rg* to signify proselytes only.<sup>159</sup>

Another illustrative example is the explanation of *hesed*. The main Jewish thought about *hesed* is that Ruth’s morality and piety to Naomi is emphasized as a model. Ruth is praised by her willingness to treat Naomi as good as possible. So, God will reward her due to her *hesed*. It is rabbinical and midrashic. On the contrary, Targum to Ruth has another angle of the interpretation of *hesed* on the book of Ruth. Referring to 1:8, it is important to teach how great is the reward for those who perform deeds of loving-kindness (*hesed*.)” As a result, numerous elaborations upon their deeds are contained in aggadic literature. However, the targum understands it in its juridical, biblical sense, involving the discharging of responsibility. The force of the targum is not in its final addition “for you fed and supported me,” but in the previous clause, “for you refused to take men following their deaths.” The targum’s halakic position is that the widows were obligated and entitled to levirate marriage in Judah. Thus their not remarrying in Moab was an act of *hesed* to their deceased husbands, whose names would be “built up upon their estate” if their widows were levirate married to kinsman in Judah. Etan Levine concluded that the targum’s understanding of *hesed* reflected the biblical, rather than the

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<sup>157</sup> As in Christianity where the criterion was whether the person may participate in the Eucharist, in Judaism it was whether he may participate in the Passover.

<sup>158</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 52

<sup>159</sup> Idem, 53

rabbinic understanding of the term.<sup>160</sup>

### 3.7 Conclusion

Midrash is the approach of early Jewish exegesis. Jewish exegetes used this method to interpret their Scripture for teaching and preaching. It is a specific type of exegetical method in antiquity. Next chapter we may witness the application of midrash to the interpretation on the book of Ruth. The sages urge for the upholding their tradition, norms and values in the face of their surrounding political, historical and cultural challenge and background.

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<sup>160</sup> Idem, 51

## Chapter four

### The book of Ruth in Jewish commentaries

#### 4.1 Introduction

##### 4.1.1 What is a commentary?

We begin with a scholarly definition of commentary as “a systematic series of explanations or interpretations of the writing.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, this definition is not comprehensive as it tells us nothing of the methods or forms employed by such series of interpretations and in what manner they adhere to the text being interpreted or to one another, or the attitude of their authors toward that base-text or their intended audience. Those missing facts behind the commentary are very important for this research. In fact, my research is to point out the missing methodology and pre-set values of Jewish commentators, who are severely influenced by their historical and cultural environment in the specific period of time.

Steven Fraade also studied this subject. He stated that his “work is to understand in both literary and socio-historical terms the early rabbinic choice of scriptural commentary as a communicative medium as it was shaped by its rabbinic authors so as to engage its ancient readers.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the mere interpretation or bare explanation of author’s commenting a text is insufficient as it doesn’t present the true picture of what cultural and historical beliefs were activating them. We need to go deeper into the examination of the role of the historical context that shaped the commentator.

The ancient commentators of the Jewish community are sages. They are groups and individuals, who constitute themselves in society not only through their speech and behavior but also through the production of materials works such as commentarial works. William Scott Green even pointed out that “The production of a text, like that of any cultural artifact, is a social activity.”<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 264. Compare Roland Barthes’s characterization of commentary as “the gradual analysis of a single text.” *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 12

<sup>2</sup> Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 1, 15

<sup>3</sup> William Scott Green, *History Fabricated: The Social Uses of Narratives in Early Rabbinic*

texts produced by literate groups are intricate cultural constructions, and the elements and syntactical frameworks of textual constructions lend whatever significance to their substance as controlled analysis can discern.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we need to investigate the nature of Jewish exegetical activity in cultural and social terms.

Green further commented that the technical knowledge presupposed by most of the rabbinic literature shows that rabbis produced their texts not for the world at large, nor for strangers and outsiders, but for themselves.<sup>5</sup> They were produced for an internal audience. His concluding remark is that “they are of rabbis, by rabbis, and for rabbis.”<sup>6</sup> They constitute a rabbinic conception of rabbinic culture, composed for itself and addressed to itself. Therefore, the rabbinic documents call attention to the fact that rabbis are portrayed as heirs for maintaining the contours and values of rabbinic culture and religion. He concluded that the rabbis are creating something new in their culture, which they are responsible to maintain.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4.1.2 Commentary in a political and social context**

This chapter is to examine the relationship between Jewish exegesis and its historical and social context with reference to the book of Ruth. Modern scholars are also interested in this socio-historical approach. Though Kirsten Nielsen in his commentary of the book of Ruth is mainly dealing with modern interpretation, his study also reflects the methodological issues my approach of study of Jewish exegesis on the book of Ruth deals with.<sup>8</sup> He reveals the fact that “the background against which the audience and readers of the time would have understood the book, as well as the social and political situations within which Ruth has functioned, is important as a defense of the claims of David’s family to the kinship”. This quotation reveals the link of relationship between Jewish exegesis and its historical and social context with reference to the book of Ruth.

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Judaism”, in Jacob Neusner ed., *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* (AAR Studies in Religion, 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 144

<sup>4</sup> William Scott Green, *History Fabricated: The Social Uses of Narratives in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 145

<sup>5</sup> Idem

<sup>6</sup> Idem, 153

<sup>7</sup> Idem

<sup>8</sup> See the commentary of Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 1997

We can interpret the Davidic dynastic line through the ages in a historical and social context. From the early Jewish period, around 60 BCE, the literature from Pharisaical circles provide the first evidence in the early Jewish period of hope for a Davidic messiah, the Son of David.<sup>9</sup> This hope was based on an interpretation of the Davidic dynasty tradition that posited an eternally valid dynastic promise on the basis of which God would raise up an ideal Davidic king, who would rule Israel and the world.<sup>10</sup> The catalyst for this interpretation was the rise of the Hasmoneans and their claim to kingship. As opposition to the Hasmoneans increased, this reading of the Davidic dynasty tradition functioned to attack the legitimacy of the Hasmoneans, exploiting the contradiction between an eternally valid Davidic dynasty and a Hasmonean rule. Moreover, the characterization and role of the Son of David served to articulate the author's vision of an ideal social and political order, free from foreign oppression and full of righteousness, holiness, and wisdom. Indeed, the Davidic king, who was ascribed every kind of charismatic endowment would be the mediator of these divine blessings.

Without doubt, the time during which the Book of Ruth was written was chaotic in political situation at 5<sup>th</sup> BCE. It also echoed political situation in the time of the Judges. The Jewish congregation or readers of the book may have been seeking for a long term and stable leadership, which was traditionally promised through God's plan to Israel in the form of a Davidic Dynasty, which is a growing and existing tradition in Scripture. Kirsten Nielsen commented that surprisingly it was through a foreign woman, the Moabite Ruth, whom God chose David and his family to sit on the throne of Israel.<sup>11</sup> This declaration shows clearly the connection of the thematic research between the historical interest and Jewish exegetical method.

#### 4.1.3 Commentary in the readers' community

The exegetical work was not done on its own like a man on an island. With regard to Jewish commentary, not only the authoring or redaction, but also its audience should be studied. I have to argue that the implied audience of that text was first and foremost the collectivity or class of pre-rabbinic sages and their disciples of mid-third century CE Palestine. Steven Fraade advocated the transcended nature of hermeneutics. He commented that the creators of

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<sup>9</sup> *Pss. Sol.* 17

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Pomykaka, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 268

<sup>11</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, preface

commentary hoped that it would have a life extending well beyond its own time and space.<sup>12</sup>

The interpretation of a text is, done by readers, who are linked to a community. The communal situation will also impose influence on the way commentator interpret the text. Gerald Bray emphasized the applicability of the text to a communal situation. The text itself would be ready to speak to the next generation with the same freshness with which it had always spoken in the past.<sup>13</sup> This is also the case for the Jewish community. Moreover, James Kugel agreed with this relevance of the text to the community's readers. He pointed out the assumptions shared by all ancient interpreters. One of them was that "Scripture constitutes one great Book of Instruction, and as such is a fundamentally *relevant* text."<sup>14</sup> This means that it should be applicable and practical to the needs of the community, which receives the text. We may elaborate this point that the biblical figures were held up as models of conduct and their stories were regarded as a guide given to later human beings for the leading of their own lives. In return, the needs and features of the communal context imposed a great influence on the interpreters. This will be discussed later with examples of the exegesis on the book of Ruth.

## 4.2 Commentary development in the Jewish community

### 4.2.1 Introduction

Commentaries by definition have some characteristics in common. Steven Fraade lists some of them. All commentaries can be said to exhibit the following structural traits: They begin with an extended base-text, in which they designate successive subunits for exegetical attention. To each of these they attach a comment or chain of comments, which remain distinct from the base-text. They then take up the next selected subunit in sequence.<sup>15</sup> Referring to Jewish commentary, we might take the commentary form as a way of interpreting the scriptural texts in pre-rabbinic varieties of Judaism. The majority of that interpretation takes the form of what has been called *rewritten Bible*<sup>16</sup>, which paraphrases the biblical text, whether as story or as law. James

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<sup>12</sup> Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 18

<sup>13</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 18

<sup>14</sup> James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 15

<sup>15</sup> Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 1-2

<sup>16</sup> Detailed discussion may be found in chapter two under the discussion of the Dead Sea scrolls and exegetical trends.

Kugel gives more attention to the ancient biblical interpretation found in books that includes expansive retellings of biblical stories, first-person narratives put in the mouths of biblical heroes, pseudonymous apocalypses, the sayings and proverbs of ancient sages and actual biblical commentaries, sermons and the like composed from the third century BCE through the first century CE.<sup>17</sup> These old texts allow us to reconstruct in some detail how the Bible was interpreted and understood during this crucial Second Temple Period, which was fully examined in chapter two.<sup>18</sup>

The method behind this rewritten Bible is also linked with midrashic interpretation as Philip S. Alexander commented that within the corpus of post-biblical Jewish literature are a number of texts devoted to retelling in their own words the story of the Bible.<sup>19</sup> He emphasized the relationship of rewritten bible to Scripture and to the midrashic tradition as a whole. We may find some connection and continuity between them. First, the rewritten Bible texts read the Bible with close attention, noting obscurities, inconsistencies and narrative lacunae. The methods by which they solve the problems of the original are essentially midrashic, i.e. similar to those found in the rabbinic midrashim.<sup>20</sup> Second, rewritten Bible texts make use of non-biblical tradition and draw on non-biblical sources, whether oral or written. By fusing this material with the biblical narrative the rewritten Bible texts appear to be aiming at a synthesis of the whole tradition (both biblical and extra-biblical) within a biblical framework: they seek to unify the tradition on a biblical base. Moreover, the rewritten bible forms a formatting structure for midrashic tradition. The narrative form of the texts means that they can impose only a single interpretation on the original. The original can be treated only as univalent. By way of contrast, the commentary form adopted by the rabbis allows them to offer multiple interpretations of the same passage of Scripture, and to treat the underlying text as polyvalent.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Steven D. Fraade adds another point about the features of re-written Bible. In some cases, the rewritten Bible may follow the order of the

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<sup>17</sup> James L. Kugel, "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Sage" in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, James L. Kugel ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001) 17. Also see the detail illustration of these examples of Fishbane's work in *Biblical interpretation in Israel*.

<sup>18</sup> See note 124 and 125 at Chapter Two

<sup>19</sup> Geza Vermes, *Scripture and the Tradition in Judaism*, 99

<sup>20</sup> Idem, 117

<sup>21</sup> Idem



biblical text filling its gaps and clarifying its ambiguities. But in other cases the “rewritten Bible” may substantially rework the biblical order, blending together biblical texts from different locations even as those relocated biblical citations are exegetically paraphrased, thus concealing both the words of the Scripture and its order within its retelling.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, we should not underestimate the influence of the historical process leading to the interpretation of a text. Each and every text has come into being on the basis of a network of other texts that the author consciously draws on and wishes the reader or listener to keep in mind during the experience of the new text. However, Kirsten Nielsen points out that this new text is also part of other networks that the author is unaware of: for texts have a history, they are re-employed in new situations, and new listeners link them to other texts. The interpretation of texts is therefore never at an end.<sup>23</sup>

In order to understand the form of Jewish commentary, another aspect that has to be kept in mind is that of the homily or sermon. A preacher or teacher would begin with a particular biblical verse, story, or motif and weave round it a web of biblical citations, allusions, and interpretations. The organizing and unifying principle of which would be the thematic message he sought to convey. Although such a homily might depend heavily on biblical language and images for its rhetorical force, it would not direct its audience’s attention to any successive biblical text per se. This may have been the dominant form of oral preaching and teaching in pre-rabbinic (Second Temple) times, say in the synagogues of Palestine.<sup>24</sup> These homilies may subsequently have been collected (or recollected) and edited so as to provide some of the materials out of which literary commentaries were later fashioned, but that is a different matter, and one for which we have little pre-rabbinic evidence, as will soon be discussed<sup>25</sup>

There can be no question that the rabbinic commentary’s practice of providing a multiplicity of meanings for a given scriptural fragment raises a distinctive set of theological-hermeneutical issues relating to the pre-set belief of sages in the following discussion. However, Fraade regards this phenomenon as related to

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<sup>22</sup> Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 2

<sup>23</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 9

<sup>24</sup> See Steven D. Fraade’s notes on p. 172-3

<sup>25</sup> Steven D. Fraade’s notes on p.173

the more general character of the commentary as a collective combining of heterogeneous and at times discordant traditions, some clearly editorially interconnected and others simply juxtaposed.<sup>26</sup> We will try to find out how these traditions or the historical context imposed influence on the exegesis of the book of Ruth.

Another factor guiding the development of commentary in the Jewish community was the exegetical approach of *pesharim*. This method is thoroughly discussed in chapter two. We may refer to the characteristics and comparison of modern commentary with this kind of interpretation.<sup>27</sup> In conclusion, the commentaries are the earliest examples of a literary genre that became popular in rabbinic circles from the second century CE and later on.

#### 4.2.2 The Midrash Ruth and Targum to Ruth as a commentary

Common opinion exists between scholars about the date of Ruth Rabbah. Ruth Rabbah is one of the Midrash-compilations of the later fifth or early sixth centuries CE.<sup>28</sup> Jacob Neusner describes the whole group of later fifth and sixth century compilations of scriptural exegeses as follows: “These Midrashim all consist of a collection of homilies, sayings, and aggadot of the amoraim (and also of the tannaim) in Galilean Aramaic and rabbinical Hebrew, but also include many Greek words.”<sup>29</sup> It seems that all these Midrashim, which are not mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, were edited in Erez Israel in the fifth and sixth centuries CE.

According to the dual nature of Torah, the Midrash on Ruth<sup>30</sup> contains many haggadic components, which are also found in the Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud, *Pesiqta de Rab kahana*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, and *Genesis Rabbah*. This Midrash presents exegesis of the biblical story verse by verse, often departing from the text and navigating a strange course.<sup>31</sup> The basic exegetical principle is that missing information in one text can be deduced from other texts. Mishael Maswari Caspi and Rachel S. Havrelock further commented that

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<sup>26</sup> Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 16

<sup>27</sup> See note 213 and 214 in Chapter Two.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), Xi

<sup>29</sup> Idem

<sup>30</sup> We use the translation work. See Nosson Scherman / Zlotowitz General Editors, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources* (Brooklyn: New York, 2004)

<sup>31</sup> Mishael Maswari Caspi & Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road: Ruth, Naomi, and the Female Journey* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1996), 79

Rabbah / Midrash Ruth follows rabbinical thought in a constant dialogue with earlier texts, and itself provides material for later texts.<sup>32</sup> Trygve Kronholm rightly concluded that Ruth Rabbah is “therefore not a fabrication of fantasizing scribes but the result of learned rabbinical exegesis.”<sup>33</sup>

Jacob Neusner further confirmed the dialogue function of Ruth Rabbah. In Ruth Rabbah, Jacob Neusner pointed out the relationship between Scripture and Jewish documents. The compiler is engaged in dialogue with the Scriptures of ancient Israel. The Scripture provided the language, the vocabulary and the metaphors. On the other hand, the authors supplied “the syntax, the reference point, the experience that formed the subject of the writing.”<sup>34</sup> He further elaborated on the allied relationship. The Scriptures raised questions, set forth rules of thought, premises of fact and argument. However the Midrash “does not bear any literary or rhetorical resemblance to Scripture”. It “has condemned ethnocentrism and favored a religious, and not an ethnic, definition of who is Israel”.<sup>35</sup>

One more point should be added here. In the Hebrew Bible, the “Scroll of Ruth” is placed within the Hagiographa, the third section of the canonical triad. The Septuagint with its historical line does not distinguish between the Prophets and the Hagiographa, and presents Ruth chronologically following Judges. Etan Levine commented that listing of Ruth as an appendage to the Book of Judges, and the Talmud’s dictum that the prophet Samuel was the author of Ruth, reflects this historical arrangement of the LXX.<sup>36</sup>

The Scroll of Ruth was read in the synagogue on the Feast of Weeks for two reasons. Etan Levine provided the reasons: first, because the story transpires during the barley harvest which culminates in the Feast of Weeks; second, because the Feast of weeks commemorates the giving of the Law, and Ruth is regarded as the proselyte *par excellence*, who accepts the law unreservedly (cf. I, 10ff).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Idem, 19

<sup>33</sup> Trygve Kronholm, “The Portrayal of Characters in Midrash Ruth Rabbah. Observations on the formation of the Jewish hermeneutical legend known as “biblical haggadah” *ASTI* 12 (1983):20.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Midrash Compilations of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries, An Introduction to Rhetorical, Logical and Topical Program*, Volume III, (Scholars Press, Atlanta Georgia 1989),135-136

<sup>35</sup> Idem

<sup>36</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 1

<sup>37</sup> Idem

It is necessary to explain more about the second reason. Ruth was seen as a model proselyte. Perhaps this accounts for the custom of reading the book at the festival of Shavuot, first recorded in the post-Talmudic tractate *Sopherim*. John H. Hayes concluded that the development of Ruth as a model proselyte have occurred in parallel with the development of Shavuot from a harvest festival to a commemoration of the giving of the law.<sup>38</sup> The traditional explanation, that Ruth is read at Shavuot because that is when King David died, is hardly realistic, while the fact that the main action in the story takes place at the time of harvest is hardly in itself a sufficient basis for the custom's origin.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, the Aramaic Targum of the story of Ruth was written in the Aramaic dialect of the West. As Hebrew became increasingly unintelligible to the masses, the custom arose of translating the scriptural reading into Aramaic vernacular. During the New Testament period, therefore, most Jews as well as Christians relied upon the Targums for their understanding of the Hebrew Old Testament scripture lesson.<sup>40</sup> The Targum to Ruth both translates and elaborates upon the Hebrew text, containing, in a less developed stage, the essential themes and structure of full midrash.

The targum text has not been edited first so that early elements contradicting the Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition have not been harmonized or excised. It is an eclectic arrangement of diverse sources intended to address doctrinal problems, fill lacunae, illustrate abstractions, inspire faith, eulogize the Torah, and convey that "the book was written to show how great is the reward for those who perform deeds of loving-kindness"<sup>41</sup> Unlike other midrash texts, the Targum incorporated its material directly into the Biblical translation. Thus, the listener could hardly discern the distinction between the translation of, and the commentary upon the scriptural reading. The various didactic, polemical, and inspirational midrashim fused into a continuous narrative here.

In many ways, Mishael Maswari Caspi and Rachel S. Havrelock pointed out that the Targum is an expansion and adaptation of the early Targum of

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<sup>38</sup> John H. Hayes, ed., *Hebrew Bible: History of Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) The Former Prophets: Ruth by D.R.G. Beattie, 427

<sup>39</sup> Idem

<sup>40</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), preface.

<sup>41</sup> Refer to Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:8. See Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 68

Johnathan.<sup>42</sup> At certain times in Jewish history, the people could not read or understand biblical texts. To transmit the legacy, translators would stand up in public places and orally tell the story. “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.”<sup>43</sup> These storytellers combined old stories with contemporary consciousness to create prophecy. The language of these prophets was Aramaic, the lingua franca of exiled Jews. Their stories are more than translations, for they present interpretations of laws, creeds, and beliefs. Gradually, the Aramaic versions were written down: the translation of the Torah is a final product of the first century CE, the final translation of the Prophets is a product of the fourth to the ninth century CE. Mishael Caspi and Rachel Havrelock rightly commented that the Aramaic storyteller, like the midrashic one, was extremely interested in filling in the biblical story’s gaps. The story was expanded to fit the times.<sup>44</sup>

The Targum to Ruth reflects the liturgical use of the Book of Ruth for the feast of Weeks. In keeping with the theme of Torah, which dominates the synagogue observance of the feast, Etan Levine concluded that, “the Targum consistently eulogizes the commandments, their efficacy, rewards for obeying them, punishments for violating them, and the stature of those exemplars who obeyed the Torah under duress, or to an unusual degree.”<sup>45</sup>

My thesis focuses on the study of the Jewish interpretation of the book of Ruth, based upon English translations. There are only two English translations for Midrash Ruth Rabbah. Jacob Neusner mentions them in short.<sup>46</sup> The first translation into English is the excellent one by L. Rabinowitz, *Midrash Rabbah, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of Rabbi H. Freedman and Ph. D. Maurice Simon*, published in London 1939 by Soncino Press, Volume VIII. The CD Disc of Davka Corporation presents this Soncino Classic Collection. The text is based on the Wilna editions. The second is a form-analytical one by Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah, An Analytical Translation*, Scholars Press for Brown Judaic Studies, Atlanta 1989. The Wilna text, which is the only known basis worldwide, offers the best common ground for our enquiry.

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<sup>42</sup> Mishael Maswari Caspi & Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road*, 79

<sup>43</sup> Neh. 8:8

<sup>44</sup> Mishael Maswari Caspi & Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road*, 79

<sup>45</sup> Etan Levine, “The Aramaic Version of Ruth” (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) 2

<sup>46</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Components of the Rabbinic Documents, Part II*, XLII.

Our Bible text is taken mainly from the King James Version and the text in the heading of each Parashah from the Revised Standard Version. We will use the latter as a quotation from Ruth Rabbah.<sup>47</sup>

For the Targum on Ruth we use the translation of Targum to Ruth from the edition of D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994). It is used as supplementary information for the account of the change of exegesis through times and spaces in the socio-political meaning of the term.<sup>48</sup>

## 4.3 Techniques of Rabbinic Exegesis

### 4.3.1 Introduction of the techniques

We need to introduce some techniques of rabbinic exegesis. These are some general remarks not made on specific literature but on Jewish exegesis in general. The hermeneutic rules used to interpret the Bible in aggadic and halakhic texts represent the essence of midrash. The creators of the midrashim make explicit their exegetical reasoning by the application of *middot*.<sup>49</sup> In general, Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck concluded that hermeneutic rules were viewed as necessary for decoding the Bible, seen as containing the revealed word of God, which language is comprehended as different from that in which people normally communicate.<sup>50</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck made the major application of midrashic hermeneutic rules,

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<sup>47</sup> Both of these translations do have their assets and detriments. The language of Rabinowitz is outdated and his cross-references are not at all relevant to the questions of our day or to the special emphasis of the Messianic idea in Midrash Ruth. Jacob Neusner gives a modern dynamic counterpart to the text using a very free hand. If the purpose of Midrash is "to reinterpret or actualize a given text of the past for present circumstances" as Renée Bloch has stated, then Neusner has really succeeded in his work. He has chosen the Wilna text for his translation. The only deficiency in both these works is the choice of the English equivalents for some Hebrew concepts. In the Jewish Prayer Book Siddur for instance the central word of Ruth Rabbah has been always translated as "kingdom" and not "throne" like Neusner mostly prefers, or "royalty" as Rabinowitz does.

<sup>48</sup> Etan Levine, "The Aramaic Version of Ruth" (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973)

<sup>49</sup> The most characteristics feature of rabbinic interpretation is its devotion to Midrash. The main aim behind Midrash was the desire to produce new religious laws (*halakot*) and broaden the application of those already in existence. To this end, there grew up a number of principles of interpretation, known as *middot*. See Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996) 58 and see also the Seven Rules of Hillel.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash: Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism Volume One* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 268

which has two functions. First, the Tannaim mostly applied them in order to derive legal rulings that is, the halakhic texts. Second, the Amoraim often utilized them to prove a situational, historical, sermonic, or narrative fact. It refers to aggadic function. Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck made a feature of halakhic matters.<sup>51</sup>

The so-called Seven Rules of Hillel are based upon Hellenistic models. The Seven Rules of Hillel certainly existed before Hillel the Elder (2<sup>nd</sup> half of first century BCE) who applied them (T. San. 7:11). The gradual compilation of lists of rules of interpretation (middot) emphasizes this evolution: the first seven rules, attributed to Hillel, are made into 13 by R. Ishmael and then 32 by R. Eliezer ben Joseph ha-Gelili (Zeitlin) The original seven rules were summarized by Lieberman.<sup>52</sup>

- (i) *Qal wa-homer* (lit. “light and heavy”): what applies in a less important case is valid in another more important one.
- (ii) *Gezara shawa* (lit. “an equivalent regulation”): identical words, used in different cases, apply in both (principle of verbal analogy)
- (iii) *Binyan ’ab mikkatub ’ehad* (lit. “constructing a father [i.e., principal rule]from one[passage]”): if the same phrase occurs in a certain number of passages, what refers to one applies to them all.
- (iv) *Binyan ’ab mishshene ketubim* (lit. “constructing a father [i.e., principal rule] from two writings [or passages]”): formation of a principle by means of the relationship established between two texts.
- (v) *Kelal uperat uperat ukelal* (lit. “General and particular, and particular and general”): law of the general and the particular. A general principle can be restricted if applied to a particular text; likewise, the particular can be generalized and become a general principle.
- (vi) *Kayotze bo mi-maqom ’aher* (lit. “To which something [is] similar in another place [or passage]”): the difficulty of a text can be resolved by comparison with another text which has some similarity (not necessarily verbal) with it.
- (vii) *Dabar halamed me’inyano* (lit. “word of instruction from the context”): determining meaning from context.

<sup>51</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 268

<sup>52</sup> Based on a version of the Tosefta, see Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 53. Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 272; Also see Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993) 497 and Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 117

Hillel's rules led to the development of an atomized type of exegesis, which interpreted sentences, clauses, phrases and single words as completely independent of the literary context and historical circumstances mentioned in the text. In halakhic matters the reigning tradition prevented all too arbitrary an application of the rules of interpretation. In matters of haggadah, however, Julio Trebolle Barrera commented that excesses were very common since they did not entail danger to the practice of law.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Purpose of These Methods

The search for hidden meanings in Scripture did not flourish in Rabbinic Judaism until after 70 CE, after which this endeavor produced wonderfully intricate interpretations in the next few centuries. The process is illuminated by the medieval acronym *pardes*, which stands for four types of hermeneutical meanings advocated and summarized by Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck: *peshat*, literal meaning; *remez*, hint, as supplied by *gematria* or *notarikon*; *derash*, homiletic meaning; *sod*, mystery. Apart from *peshat*, these types of hermeneutic might be said to be looking for hidden or secondary meanings within the text. They look beyond the obvious to find what the author has hidden.<sup>54</sup>

### 4.4 Some general patterns arising from the study of Jewish exegesis on the Book of Ruth

The following is the development of the argument about the correlation of Jewish exegesis and the socio-historical context of the commentator or reader community on the book of Ruth. We can draw some hermeneutical principles from them and show how the pre-concept of rabbis affect the interpretation on the book of Ruth through the application of some general techniques of rabbinic exegesis as discussed above.

#### 4.4.1 Torah

Scholars declared that the sages emphasized the priority of the Torah. This meant that Torah played the primary role when the sages imposed a specific message on texts. We may now discuss the legal background to the book of

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<sup>53</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 497

<sup>54</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 301



Ruth. The legalistic importance is relatively unimportant on the book of Ruth because the nature of literature of the book of Ruth is aggadic. Surely, the practice of gleaning behind the harvesters (Ruth 2:2-3) is mentioned in Old Testament legislation<sup>55</sup>, where the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widow are allowed such a right.<sup>56</sup> Care for the weaker members of the community is a general feature of legislation in the Near East. Kirsten Nielsen points out the purpose of the Torah that the introduction to the law of Hammurabi is “to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil that the strong might not oppress the weak.”<sup>57</sup> This is one of the legal backgrounds, which becomes the foundation that Torah governs the interpretation of narrative on the book of Ruth.

Now, we refer to the importance of the Torah for the Israelite community of the book of Ruth Rabbah. Jacob Neusner rightly described that it was an act of righteousness that Israel performed in accepting the Torah.<sup>58</sup> Ruth Rabbah: Petihta One proved this importance.

*“By your life, I shall speak in righteousness and save my children.”*

*And in virtue of what righteousness?*

*R. Eleazar and R. Yohanan:*

*One said, “In virtue of the righteousness that you did for my world by accepting my Torah. For had you not accepted my Torah, I should have turned the world back to formlessness and void.”*

*For R. Huna in the name of R. Aha said, “...It is in virtue of the righteousness that you did in your own behalf by accepting my Torah.”<sup>59</sup>*

We may say that Torah was the foundation of Judaism. It determined the Israelite behavior and standard. With regard to the conversation between Ruth and Naomi, the Torah imposes heavy religious responsibilities on Ruth and tends to separate Israel from Gentiles if one wants to commit to Judaism. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:16 states that,

*When Naomi heard her say this, she began laying out for her the laws that govern proselytes.*

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<sup>55</sup> See Deut. 24:19

<sup>56</sup> Also see Lev. 19:9; 23:22

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ANET, 164 and see also Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 54

<sup>58</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Ruth Rabbah and Esther Rabbah* vol. six Studies in Ancient Judaism (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 3

<sup>59</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989) 24

*She said to her, "My daughter, it is not the way of Israelite women to go to theaters and circuses put on by idolators."*

*She said to her, "Where you lodge I will lodge."*

*"...your people shall be my people":*

*This refers to the penalties and admonitions against sinning.<sup>60</sup>*

Religious responsibilities lead to consequences. One who follows the rules of Torah will face consequences if violating them. Ruth Rabbah 1:16 stated that all violators must bear "the penalties and admonitions against sinning." Therefore, Torah requires commitment and a constant play of conscience of Israel community. As a whole, the foundation of interpretation on the book of Ruth is the upholding of Torah's tradition.<sup>61</sup>

However, the main function of Torah is not only for punishment but also aims at the sanctification of life. We may get some indication of it by Naomi's demand on Ruth. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:16 declared that,

*She said to her, "Where you go I will go."*

*She said to her, "My daughter, it is not the way of Israelite women to live in a house that lacks a mezuzah."<sup>62</sup>*

The above shows the demand of sanctification for Ruth. It aims to separate Ruth from alien influence, and she is supposed to convert to Judaism. Torah is the standard of Israel's behavior. Scholars such as Jacob Neusner agreed with the priority of Torah for Ruth Rabbah. He is an outstanding scholar in studying Jewish thought in different books of Hebrew Bible. He emphasized the role of Torah in the exegetical work on the book of Ruth in antiquity. He pointed out that the extraordinary power of the Torah is to join the opposites through Ruth's commitment to the Torah. Basically, the Torah tends to have the same purpose to show how through the Torah "all things become one."<sup>63</sup> The Torah is exemplified by the sage to make the outsider, Moabite Ruth, into an insider, as part of Israel, in the book of Ruth.

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<sup>60</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 80

<sup>61</sup> See chapter two for the discussion of that "the rabbis make him (Ezra) a restorer of the Torah".

<sup>62</sup> A doorpost marker contains verses of Scripture. Cf. Deut. 6:6-9

<sup>63</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Ruth Rabbah and Esther Rabbah* / vol. six Studies in Ancient Judaism (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), xxxii

Chapter two on the Targum to Ruth also laid much emphasis on the importance of Torah. The Targum to Ruth 2:1 declared that:

*Now to Naomi there was known through her husband a powerful man, strong in the Law, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz.*<sup>64</sup>

Boaz is described as knowing the Torah. Etan Levine believed that this not only indicated the respective ideal stereotypes of men and women in antiquity, but also fulfilling the law or studying the law was paramount.<sup>65</sup> Torah was the standard and norm of Israel community. Man especially as a leading figure in family, community and country should have enough knowledge in Torah. Rabbis such as R. Tarfon represented the position that performance of Torah was most important, since it is an end in itself. Moreover, R. Aqiba held that study was most important, since it produced action.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Torah is the standard of Israel behavior.

The importance of Torah was deeply rooted in the historical and social background. It was due to the absence of political centripetal focus. The loss of political independence and of the Temple since 70 CE<sup>67</sup>, provoked a vacuum of any value system. The failure of the Jewish revolt against Rome (66-73 CE) brought about a comprehensive transformation of life in Palestine. The old political system was replaced by direct Roman rule. Seth Schwartz pointed out that some changes necessarily caused further transformations in social, political, cultural and religious life.<sup>68</sup> This situation urged a certain degree of uniformity from the diversity of pre-70 Judaism.<sup>69</sup> This uniformity meant that the Israel community looked for a common norm and regulation, by which the people can be guided and their way of life can be standardized. Therefore, this common value system shared by the Israel community is Torah, both written and oral.

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<sup>64</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 22

<sup>65</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 66-7

<sup>66</sup> *Idem*, 67

<sup>67</sup> The meaning and consequence of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple refers to the article: Robert Goldenberg, "The Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple: Its meaning and its consequences" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* Steven T. Katz ed Vol. Four The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191-205

<sup>68</sup> Seth Schwartz, "Political, Social, and Economic Life in the Land of Israel, 66-c.-235" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* Steven T. Katz ed Vol. Four The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23

<sup>69</sup> The political change and influence from Second Temple Period is discussed in chapter two.

Moreover, the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the sacrificial service brought about the rise of the synagogue and its devotional prayer service. It definitely included the introduction of readings from Scripture.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, this may help the spread of teaching Torah and make it known to the people.

Lastly, the importance of Torah in Israel community was, enhanced by setting up the center at Jamnia. The restructuring of Judaism took place at this small town near the Mediterranean coast called Yavneh (Jamnia). Yohanan ben Zakkai was allowed by the Romans to establish an academy or place of study of some sort here. Representatives from a number of groups seem to have gathered here, and it is likely that some of these had their input into the new synthesis, which became Rabbinic Judaism. One of the main changes in emphasis had to do with Torah study as a religious activity.<sup>71</sup> Study as an act of worship became the center of Judaism after 70 CE. One suggestion is that this aspect of Rabbinic Judaism was the contribution of the scribes for whom the study of the written Word was central. The role of scribes in Jewish interpretation as a social influence will be discussed later on.

#### 4.4.2 Monotheism

Monotheism is the central doctrine of Israelite theology. Scholars<sup>72</sup> are relatively consistent in the use of “monotheism” for a religion that believes in the existence of only one god.<sup>73</sup> Morton Smith portrays an essentially polytheistic Israel until the emergence of a “Yahweh-alone” movement in the ninth century and afterward, which eventually gave rise to an expression of Yahweh as the only God during the postexilic period.<sup>74</sup> Jewish exegesis bore this trend of theology. Ruth Rabbah underlined this monotheistic principle. Ruth Rabbah: Petihta One declared that:

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<sup>70</sup> Different parts of Scripture, such as the Five Megilloth were allocated to different festivals for reading, for example, Ruth on Pentecost. This discussion may be found in Chapter Two.

<sup>71</sup> There is little evidence in the pre-70 rabbinic traditions that the Pharisees emphasized study as a part of their religious practice; rather the traditions focus on eating meals and otherwise maintaining a state of ritual purity. See Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to the First Century of Judaism: Jewish religion and history in the Second Temple Period* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 20

<sup>72</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “Religion in Ancient Israel” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker & Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Apollos & Baker Academic, 2004), 405

<sup>73</sup> An opposite terminology, “polytheism” is for one that believes in and worships a variety of deities.

<sup>74</sup> Morton Smith, *Palestine Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: SCM, 1971), 15-31

*Taught R. Simeon by. Yohanan [concerning the verse, "God your God, I am"], "I am God for everybody in the world, but I have assigned my name in particular only to my people, Israel. "I am called out, "the God of all nations" but "the God of Israel."'<sup>75</sup>*

Jacob Neusner revealed the text that God is God of all the nations, and has sovereignty over all nations. Particularly, God has assigned his name only to his people, Israel.<sup>76</sup> This assignation showed the principle of election, which chose Israel as the target of God's revelation.

Moreover, Ruth Rabbah: Petihta Three stated that:

*"Man":*

*this speaks of Esau: "And Esau was a man, a cunning hunter" (Gen. 25:27).*

*'Strange":*

*for he estranged himself from circumcision and from the obligations of religious duties.*

*"The pure":*

*this refers to the Holy One, blessed be He,*

*who behaves toward him in a fair measure and gives him his reward in this world, like a worker who in good faith carries out work for a householder.*

*Another interpretation of the verse, "The way of the guilty man is crooked and strange, but the conduct of the pure is right" (Pro. 21:8):*

*"The way of the guilty man is crooked": this speaks of the nations of the world, who come crookedly against Israel with harsh decrees.*

*"Man": for they derive from Noah, who is called a man.*

*"Strange":*

*for they worship alien gods.*

*"The pure":*

*this refers to the Holy One, blessed be He,*

*who behaves toward him in a fair measure [supply: and gives him his reward in this world, like a worker who in good faith carries out work for a householder].<sup>77</sup>*

Monotheism was demonstrated through God's connection to other nations and Israel. Regarding with above text, God gave Esau his reward in this world, but

<sup>75</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 24

<sup>76</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 3

<sup>77</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 29-30

will exact punishment in the world to come. So too the nations of the world afflict Israel with harsh decrees. God treats them fairly and gives them their reward in this world, only to exact punishment in the world to come. Jacob Neusner concluded that the parallel relations between God and the nations, on the one side, and Israel and the nations on the other, recapitulate the relations between God and man, God and Israel.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 2:8 states the pattern of monotheism. It declares that:

*“Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field:”*

*This is on the strength of the verse, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3)*

*“...or leave this one.”*

*This is on the strength of the verse, “This is my God and I will glorify him” (Ex. 15:2).*

*“but keep close to my maidens:”*

*This speaks of the righteous, who are called maidens: “Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you bind him for your maidens” (Job 40:29).<sup>79</sup>*

Jacob Neusner agreed with the principle of monotheism as the main doctrine of God. The Israelite has no other Gods but God. This idea resembled with the traditional view in the Bible.<sup>80</sup> He further adds that Israel is commanded not only to be ruled but also to glorify God.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, Targum to Ruth also demonstrated the principle of Monism. The Targum to Ruth 1:10 declared that:

*They said to her, “We will not go back to our people and our god, but rather we will go with you to your people to become proselytes.”<sup>82</sup>*

The Israel upheld this doctrine through the rejection of other gods. In the Hellenistic era, when the characteristic distinction between Gentile and Jew was idolatry and polytheism, the rejection of these could itself be regarded as

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<sup>78</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 46

<sup>79</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 112

<sup>80</sup> Refer to the introduction of this section.

<sup>81</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Ruth Rabbah and Esther Rabbah I* vol. six Studies in Ancient Judaism (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 22

<sup>82</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 20

conversion to Judaism. Etan Levine pointed out that as early Palestinian sources attest, “The rejection of idolatry is the acknowledgment of the entire Torah.”<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, targum to Ruth 2:4 states that:

*Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, “May the Memra of the Lord be your sustenance. They said to him, “The Lord bless you.”*<sup>84</sup>

Targum to Ruth 2:8 also confirmed the doctrine of monotheism. According to Jewish law, a relapsed proselyte was an apostate no less guilty than a born Jew who had crossed over to another religion, and Boaz may well be addressing, or referring to a class of “adherents” in New Testament times, who embraced Monotheism, and who observed some fundamental laws, yet were still unassimilated fully. The targum presents an exhortation which is typical of early Jewish polemics.<sup>85</sup>

Targum showed the concern of manifestation of monotheism. By the paraphrase of “the Memra of the Lord”, the targum indicates non-acceptance of the sole rabbinic exegesis of Ruth found in the Mishnah that the name of God may be used for greeting.<sup>86</sup> The targum’s paraphrase indicates the position that the name of God may not be used for secular greetings. Etan Levine assured that it might be used of course in blessing: the workers bless Boaz, the targum translates verbatim, “May the Lord bless you.”<sup>87</sup>

Targum to Ruth 2:20 show again the appearance of Monotheism. It declared that:

*Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he by the holy mouth of the Lord, who has not failed in his kindness to the living and the dead.” Naomi said to her, “The man is related to us, he is one of our redeemers.”*<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) , 52

<sup>84</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 22

<sup>85</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 71-2

<sup>86</sup> The name of God was not to be used idly even in prayers. See Etan Levine, “The Aramaic Version of Ruth” (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 68

<sup>87</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 69

<sup>88</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield:

The paraphrase “by the holy mouth of the Lord” is characteristic of the targum’s use of honorific adjectival modification when referring to God, God’s attributes, and relationship between God’s activities and the world. This is an intermediate step in the transition process of separating God’s actions and attributes from the mundane, in the on-going development of the sense of God’s “otherness”. Etan Levine concluded that the targum frequently substitutes one anthropomorphism or corporeal reference for another, in apparent preference for sublimity.<sup>89</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Chaotic social background in the period of the Judges

##### (a) The Jewish exegesis of famine

Two of the sorriest tales during the period of the Judges at the conclusion of the Book of Judges, The Concubine in Giv’ah (Judges 19) and the Idol of Michah (Judges 18), are discussed in chapter three.<sup>90</sup> These two chaotic events during the Judges’ period are used to illustrate the social instability and political unrest in this period. The first illustration of social instability by the sages was the occurrence of famine. Ruth 1:1 “and it came to pass”, begins with the word, *wayehi*. It tells of misfortune. The misfortune indicated here is that there was a famine in the land.<sup>91</sup> Rabbi Rosenberg believes that the word occurs twice in this verse, suggesting two misfortunes.<sup>92</sup> This exegetical approach is underlined by early Jewish interpretation. The principle of “No redundancy”, however, means that Scripture would not include any superfluous words. The principle of redundancy in Jewish exegesis takes for granted that Scripture never includes any superfluous words.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery Peck concluded that if there appears to be a word or phrase that is redundant in context, it must mean something that has not already been expressed.<sup>94</sup>

The severity of famine is accentuated again by the sages’ interpretation. The starvation mentioned belongs to those “ten famines” counted in Ruth Rabbah

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JSOT Press, 1994), 25

<sup>89</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 83

<sup>90</sup> See note 98 at chapter three.

<sup>91</sup> This discussion is also included at the footnote 100 of Chapter three to illustrate the concept of “filling gap”.

<sup>92</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWr The Book of Ruth*, 114

<sup>93</sup> See also section (IV) “Assumptions behind the Method” at chapter three.

<sup>94</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 296



1:1.

*"...there was a<sup>95</sup> famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons':*

*(= Genesis Rabbah XXV:III.1:) Ten famines came into the world.*

*One was in the time of Adam: "Cursed is the ground for your sake" (Gen. 3:17)*

*One was in the time of Lamech: "Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed" (Gen. 5:29)*

*One was in the time of Abraham: "And there was famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the time of Abraham (Gen. 26:1)*

*One was in the time of Jacob: "For these two years has the famine been in the land" (Gen. 45:6)*

*One was in the time of the rule of judges: "And it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land" (Ruth 1:1)*

*One was in the time of David: "There was a famine in David's time (2 Sam 21:1)*

*One was in the time of Elijah: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years" (1 Kgs. 17:1)*

*One was in the time of Elisha: "And there was a great famine in Samaria" (2 Kgs. 6:25)*

*There is one famine, which moves about the world.*

*One famine will be in the age to come: "Not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11).<sup>96</sup>*

The Targum to Ruth also echoed the severity of famine and had a list of ten famines. It stated that:

*The first famine was in the days of Adam, the second famine was in the days of Isaac, the fifth famine was in the days of Jacob, the sixth famine was in the days of Boaz, who is called Ibzan the Righteous, who was from Bethlehem, Judah. The seventh famine was in days of David, king of Israel, the eighth famine was in the days of Elijah the prophet, the ninth famine was in the days of Elisha in Samaria. The tenth famine is to be in the future, not a famine of eating bread nor a drought of drinking water, but of hearing the word of prophecy from before the Lord.<sup>97</sup>*

The sages always used number in their exegetical activity. Ten is used here. A similar list of ten famines is also found in Genesis Rabbah. 25:3; 40:3; 64:2,

<sup>95</sup> Targum to Ruth states that there is a severe famine.

<sup>96</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 45-6

<sup>97</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 18

Ruth Rabbah 1:1 and in later Midrashim Targum Cant. 1:1 has a list of ten songs, and Targum Esther II 1:1 a list of ten kings.<sup>98</sup> Thus, Etan Levine commented that in these cases ten was used as “a number of statements by which the world was created, the blessings which will accrue to the Righteous and the punishments for the Wicked in the world-to-come, the generations during which God averts his wrath, the trials of the faithful, the miracles wrought for Israel, the punishment of Israel’s enemies, the disobediences of Israel in the wilderness.”<sup>99</sup> As a whole, famine as a social disorder was commonly used, in their exegesis by Jewish sages.

Besides the physical meaning of famine, the time of Ruth was also a time of famine in symbolic sense. It therefore means both a spiritual and a moral one. The scripture states this with the formula "the word of the Lord was precious in those days".<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the Jewish sages also echoed the view that “God therefore starved them of the Holy Spirit”<sup>101</sup> if the Israel people were worshipping idols. Famine comes about because of some moral reasons. Israel deceives God, who then imposes famine as punishment. Ruth Rabbah: Petihta Two clearly illustrate the consequences of immoral Israel and states that,

*Another interpretation of the verse, “Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep and idle person will suffer hunger”:*

*Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep because the Israelites were slothful about repentance in the time of the Judges,*

*they were “cast into a deep sleep.”*

*“... and an idle person will suffer hunger”:*

*Because they were deceiving the Holy One, blessed be He: some of them were worshipping idols, and some of them were worshipping the Holy One, blessed be He,*

*the Holy One, blessed be He, brought a famine in the days of their judges<sup>102</sup>*

The Talmud also echoes the moral meaning of famine. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz advocated that as the Talmud interprets, it

<sup>98</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) note 2 at page 18.

<sup>99</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 44

<sup>100</sup> I Sam.3:1

<sup>101</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 27

<sup>102</sup> Idem, 28

indicates that the people judged, criticized, and flouted their judges. Under such conditions, authority breaks down.<sup>103</sup> When that happens, there is famine, both physical and spiritual. The moral meaning of famine was emphasized in the case that a great man such as Elimelech, learned, honored and wealthy as he was, could cast off his responsibility to his people and flee to the fields of Moab. This point was also shared with the Jewish interpretation of Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:1.

*So why was Elimelech punished?*

*It is because he broke the Israelites' heart.*

*He may be compared to a councilor who lived in a town, and the people of the town relied on him, saying, "If years of famine should come, he can provide for the whole town with ten years of food."*

*When the years of drought came, his maid went out into the marketplace, with her basket in her hand.*

*So the people of the town said, 'Is this the one on whom we depended, that he can provide for the whole town with ten years of food? Lo, his maid is standing in the marketplace with her basket in her hand!'*

*So Elimelech was one of the great men of the town and one of those who sustained the generation. But when the years of famine came, he said, "Now all the Israelites are going to come knocking on my door, each with his basket."*

*He went and fled from them.<sup>104</sup>*

Ruth Rabbah: Petihta Four again pointed out that Elimelech has betrayed the young by leaving the country, rather than bearing the burdens of the young with him.

*[As to the verse, "Whose leaders are born with. There is no breach and no going forth and no outcry" (Ps. 144;14)], R. Simeon b. Laqish would transpose the elements as follows:*

*"When the elders bear with the youngsters, "there is no breach" into exile: "And you shall go out at the breaches" (Amos 4:3).*

*"...and no going forth": into exile: "Cast them out of my sight and let them go forth" (Jer. 15:1).*

*"...and no outcry": of exile: "Behold, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people" (Jer. 8:19). "And the cry of Jerusalem went up."*

*[As to the verse, "Whose leaders are born with. There is no breach and no going forth and no*

<sup>103</sup> Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxii

<sup>104</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 47

outcry” (Ps. 144:14)], R. Luliani [Julius] said, “When the young listen to the old, but the old do not bear with the young, then ‘The Lord will enter into judgment’ (Is. 3;14).

“The name of the man was Elimelech”: Because trouble has come, do not forsake them?”

“...and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went.”<sup>105</sup>

Elimelech as a leader can't lead the community to face the chaotic situation. He even gave up his responsibility. He was greatly criticized by the sages. Modern scholars also echoed this view. Jacob Neusner pointed out that “the leaders must not be arrogant”<sup>106</sup> from his study of Ruth Rabbah. The irresponsible leader initiating a chaotic situation provided the room for the desire of messiah or kingship in order to bring them peace and stability.

However, the Targum adopted a contrasting view to Ruth Rabbah. It does not regard the left of Elimelech as an escape of his responsibilities to the poor. Etan Levine adopted a Karaite approach. Like the targum, Karaite tradition justifies Elimelech's leaving.<sup>107</sup> Moab was “the nearest place concerning which they had heard that there was no famine.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the famine mentioned in the Hebrew bible does not refer exclusively to Bethlehem, as distinct from the rest of Palestine. The Targum to Ruth 1:6 said that,

“The Lord had remembered his people, the house of Israel, to give them bread.”<sup>109</sup>

This verse refers to the people as a whole, in all of Palestine. Moreover, had there been any place in Palestine not afflicted with famine, Elimelech would have gone there, instead of migrating to the field of Moab.<sup>110</sup>

The emphasis on the interpretation of famine on the book of Ruth reflected the social insecurity at that time. The social background imposed influence on Jewish commentators. In the third century CE, the Roman Empire suffered from famine and plagues not less than 16 times.<sup>111</sup> Though it is not clear how

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<sup>105</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 33-4

<sup>106</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Mother of the Messiah in Judaism: The Book of Ruth* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1993), 12

<sup>107</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 45

<sup>108</sup> Idem, ad I, 1.

<sup>109</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, *JSOTSS* 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 19

<sup>110</sup> Commentary of Japhet Ben Eli ad Ruth 1, 3

<sup>111</sup> D. Weitz, *Famine and Plagues as Factors in the Collapse of the Roman Empire in the Third Century*, Ph.D. Fordham University New York, 1972 (University Microfilms International, Ann

many of these events took place in the Land of Israel, there is no doubt that they affected this area. While talking about the Mediterranean culture, this culture was not of people only, but of germs as well. That is to say that the third century saw too many trauma that it could have skipped the Land of Israel. Geoffrey Wood identified biblical narratives, which described periods of famine in Palestine with the passages in 1 Kings 17-18 and 2 Kings 8.<sup>112</sup>

With the above description of social insecurity, Israel was a country without hope in a disastrous environment. The 6<sup>th</sup> century was a complete disaster. In the years 516-520 CE, famine prevailed in the Land of Israel for five years, and this disaster was combined with locusts in two successive years. In the fifth year, the springs of Jerusalem, Siloam dried up and people were dying of thirst. One can only guess that some 10% of the population, if not more, perished.<sup>113</sup> In the 6<sup>th</sup> century there were three major waves of Black Plague in the Mediterranean basin in 542, 558 and 573.<sup>114</sup> Though the sources do not mention the Land of Israel in particular, chances are that the disaster that prevailed in Syria and the Roman-Byzantine Empire took place in the Land of Israel as well. Under such social disastrous condition, the Jewish commentators emphasized the moral role of famine in their interpretation of divine punishment for the Israel community.

### **(b) The purpose of famine**

In spite of the destruction caused by famine, it is not the final end. In Jewish interpretation, the meaning of famine is rather constructive and positive. God punished Israel by famine in order to lead them to repent. Ruth Rabbah: Petihta Three declaimed that punishment is not the end for Israel even when famine occurred because the people were against God. Ruth Rabbah: Petihta Two states that,

*“At that time said the Holy One, blessed be He, “My children are rebellion. But as to exterminating them, that is not possible, and to bring them back to Egypt is not possible, and to trade them for some other nation is something I cannot do. But this shall I do for them: lo, I*

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Arbor, Michigan, 1984), 86, 108, 122.

<sup>112</sup> Geoffrey E. Wood, “Ruth, Lamentations” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 605

<sup>113</sup> Dionysios Ch. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire: A Systematic Survey of Subsistence Crises and Epidemics* (Aldershot – Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 259-261

<sup>114</sup> Michael W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Plague in the Early Medieval Near East* (PhD Princeton University, University Microfilms International, 1981), 121-135

*shall torment them with suffering and afflict them with famine in the days when the judges judge.*<sup>115</sup>

In spite of destruction caused by famine, Israel repents and gets the reward in the world to come. Ruth Rabbah : Petihta Three again said that

*“... but the conduct of the pure is right”: this speaks of the Holy One, blessed be He, who behaves toward him in a fair measure in this world, but gives them the full reward that is coming to them in the world to come, like a worker who in good faith carries out work for a householder.*<sup>116</sup>

Ruth Rabbah emphasized God's mercy on Israel. Ruth Rabbah: Parashah Two used the case of Job<sup>117</sup> to illustrate God's aim for the sinner's repentance. The sequence of divine destruction is first the property and then lastly human beings.<sup>118</sup> Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:5 reveals that God didn't intend to hurt humans and rather waits for humans to repent. It declares that:

*So when leprous plagues afflict a person, first they afflict his house. If he repents the house requires only the dismantling of the affected stones. If not, the whole house requires demolishing.*

*Lo, when they hit his clothing, if he repents, the clothing has only to be torn. If he did not repent, the clothing has to be burned.*

*Lo, if one's body is affected, if he repents, he may be purified.*

*If the affliction comes back, and if he does not repent, “He shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp.”*

*So too in the case of Mahlon and Chilion:*

*first their horses and asses and camels died, and then: Elimelech, and finally the two sons.*<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:21 also echoed the above view that repentance is the main aim of divine punishment. It stated that,

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<sup>115</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 30

<sup>116</sup> Idem

<sup>117</sup> Some modern researchers examined Naomi's story investigating the correspondence with Job's grief. Both stories have the same parallel theme. See Jacqueline E. Lapsley, “The Word Whispered Bringing it all together in Ruth” in *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 94

<sup>118</sup> Refer to Job 1:14 and 19 and also see Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:5

<sup>119</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 63

*“Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has afflicted me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me”:*

*[“He has brought calamity upon me” ]in accord with the attribute of justice: “If you afflict him in any way” (Ex. 22:22)*

*Another interpretation of the word “afflict” [in the verse, “I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has afflicted me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me” ]:*

*All of this concern is for me,*

*For in the world, “the Lord has afflicted me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me,” but in the world to come: “Yes, I will rejoice over them to do good for them” (Jer. 32:41).<sup>120</sup>*

Once again God inflicts punishment in this world, but rewards the righteous in the world to come.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the scriptural tradition also echoes the above declaration. In case of repentance, human beings may be forgiven in the Psalms of the Hebrew Scripture.<sup>122</sup> Jacob Neusner also confirmed the view of Ruth Rabbah. God’s mercy on Israel is the eventual purpose. The merciful Lord does not do injury to human beings first.<sup>123</sup> Rather, he exacts a penalty from property, aiming at the sinner’s repentance. If the sinner sincerely repents, he is forgiven. Divine justice leads to a pattern of punishment for sin, but also to reconciliation in response to repentance.<sup>124</sup> When Israel worships idols, God deprives them of the Holy Spirit. When they do not repent, they suffer the consequences.<sup>125</sup>

### **(c) Chaotic political situation urges for the coming of a king**

Chapter three had helped the delineation of the period of the book of Ruth within the period of Judges.<sup>126</sup> The delineation can mark a distinctive political period. This means that the exegesis may be influenced by political circumstances. Kirsten Nielsen agreed with this delineation.<sup>127</sup> It was also shared by the sages’ view, though they believed that the precise year of the event is unimportant as the narratives are often incomplete and the chronology

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<sup>120</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 95

<sup>121</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 18

<sup>122</sup> Ruth Rabbah Parashah Two: Ps. 78:48; Ps. 105:33; Ps. 105:36

<sup>123</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Ruth Rabbah and Esther Rabbah I* vol. six Studies in Ancient Judaism (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001) 14

<sup>124</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 14

<sup>125</sup> Idem, 47

<sup>126</sup> See from note 95 to 98 at Chapter Three.

<sup>127</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 39

indefinite. Moreover, the sages also believed that the Torah is neither a history nor a story. However, Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz appreciated the wisdom of God that “His infinite wisdom gave us the *“Book of the Generations of Man”*”<sup>128</sup> and included in it what was necessary for us to know”.<sup>129</sup> The delineation has also the purpose to make the story fit in with a time preceding the time of David as indicated by the genealogies in chapter four on the book of Ruth.

Next we discuss the Jewish interpretation of the book of Ruth from a political perspective. The “Judges” period is a politically chaotic situation. There was an absence of leadership. The main theme of the Jewish interpretation on Ruth Rabbah is to trace back the divine plan, in which the coming of the kingdom will satisfy the needs of the Israel community. First, Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg interpret the phrase “the judges judged” (Ruth 1:1) as indication of a lawless generation in which the judges committed more abominations than the rest of the people, leading to a generation that judged its own judges.<sup>130</sup> Ruth Rabbah: Petihta One agrees with him and deals with the problem of “a generation that judged its judges”. This problem also leads to famine.<sup>131</sup> It is said that:

*[“God, your God, I am”:]*

*Rabbis interpreted the verse to speak of the judges: “Even though I called you gods, “You shall not revile gods” [that is, judges] (Ex. 22;27), “God, your God, I am “over you.”*

*“He further said to the Israelites, “I have given a share of glory to the judges and I have called them gods, and they humiliate them.*

*“Woe to a generation that judges its judges.”*

*[Supply: “And it came to pass in the days when the judges were judged.”]*<sup>132</sup>

Moreover, Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:1 pointed out the problem again. It declared that:

*“And it came to pass in the days when the judges were judged”:*

*Woe to the generation that has judged it judges,*

<sup>128</sup> See Gen. 5:1

<sup>129</sup> Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxi

<sup>130</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 114

<sup>131</sup> See the section of famine in previous discussion at page 16-22

<sup>132</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 25



*and woe to the generation the judges of which need to be judged:  
as it is said, "And yet they did not obey their judges" (Judges 2:17).<sup>133</sup>*

It was a time when people did not respond to their leaders and too many of the leaders did not earn the allegiance of the people. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz pointed out the significance of the absence of the leaders. He declared that, "when there are no leaders and no followers, the soul of Judaism hungers with pangs no less severe or lethal than those of an emaciated body (*OhrYohe!*)."<sup>134</sup> In the absence of a restraining authority, the moral standard and the piety to God were both in a crisis. No one was willing to take up social responsibility. Self-interest was to be maintained without considering the truth. We can experience this trend in the case of Elimelech's leaving. The reasons for this emigration according to Jewish commentators were his mean personality and the insecurity of life and property, which during a famine would be exposed to the violence of the hungry mob. As a result of the lack of leaders, human sinfulness was enhanced.

The beginning of Ruth Rabbah opens up a lawful-less situation within a political vacuum. The phrase "It came to pass in the days that the judges judged" is repeated six times in the Midrash. This helps to understand the moral background to which the homily is related. It was a time of idolatry and corruption. The judges were responsible for bias verdicts and they released the guilty and convicted the innocent. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:1 illustrates this with a picture of their behavior:

*"R. Hiyya taught on Tannaite authority, 'You shall do no unrighteousness in judgement" (Lev. 19:15):*

*" This teach that a judge who perverts justice is called by five names:*

*Unrighteous, hated, repulsive, accursed and an abomination..*

*The Holy One, blessed be He, also calls him five names:. evil, despiser, covenant-violator,provoker, and rebel against God.*

*"And he brings five evils to the world: he pollutes the land, profanes the name of God, makes the Presence of God leave, makes Israel fall by the sword, and send Israel into exile from their land."<sup>135</sup>*

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<sup>133</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 43

<sup>134</sup> Rabbis Nosson Scherman / Meir Zlotowitz General Editors, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources: The Book of Ruth*, xx

<sup>135</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press,

Targum to Ruth and Ruth Rabbah were different in their view of punishment. Targum to Ruth stresses the sinfulness of intermarriage, in distinction to the midrash texts that regard the death of Elimelech's sons as punishment for leaving Palestine. Targum to Ruth 1:5 states that:

*"And because they transgressed against the decree of the Memra of the Lord and intermarried with foreign peoples, their days were cut short and both Mahlon and Chilion also died in the unclean land, and the woman was left bereaved of her two sons and widowed of her husband."*<sup>136</sup>

From the above quotation, Etan Levine commented that the Targumist emphasized that the two sons have married "unclean" women. They were, punished by sleeping in "unclean" soil.<sup>137</sup> The targum here reflects a biblical rather than rabbinic point of view. We may refer to the message of the book of Nehemiah. It prohibited a mixed marriage aimed to protect Judah from corrupting heathen influences.

We now sum up the relationship of moral standards with political instability in the book of Ruth Rabbah and the Targum to Ruth. As mentioned before, Elimelech was punished because of his leaving from Palestine. Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg echoed this view. Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died in 1:3 not due to old age or infirmity but as the result of Divine punishment for staying away from the Holy Land.<sup>138</sup> His two sons sinned still more grievously in that they took Moabite wives in Targum to Ruth 1:5. Only after their father's death, it should be noted, did the sons marry women who were not of their people (*Lekach Tob*).<sup>139</sup> As a result, Mahlon and Chilion were given these names as foretelling their early deaths and childlessness. In the words of the Midrash, Rosenberg commented that, "Mahlon, in that they were blotted out from the world, and Chilion, in that they perished from the world."<sup>140</sup> Mahlon and Chilion died as a punishment for this sin. This again illustrates the point of divine punishment on human sinfulness.

The above descriptions and interpretations were indelibly inscribed in Jewish

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1989), 44

<sup>136</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 19

<sup>137</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 49

<sup>138</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 115; See also Ruth Rabbah III: ii.1

<sup>139</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 115

<sup>140</sup> Idem

thought because they are more than tales. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz commented that they are expressions of what can occur when “*there is no king in Israel, every man does what is right in his own eyes.*”<sup>141</sup> They described them as timeless and eternal truths.<sup>142</sup> Ruth is of a piece with those other illustrations of what can happen when there is no vested authority in Israel.<sup>143</sup> A vacuum of leadership is undeniably a political phenomenon. This provokes an urge for the Israel community for the divine plan of eternal kingship

In a vacuum of political authority, there was an urge for kingship in the Israelite community. The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the dispersal of the Jews from Jerusalem was for the sages a setback of their nationalist beliefs, since the Messiah was ought to have had come during the time of the second Temple.<sup>144</sup> Messianic expectation was also an obvious trend in the tradition of Scripture. The following texts witness this point. Haggai 2:9 promises: "The glory of this last temple is to be greater than that of the first". Moreover, Malachi 3:1 says: "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come." Zechariah 11:13, when it speaks of the 30 pieces of silver, which were cast into "the house of the Lord" presupposes the existence of the Temple. Further, Psalm 118:26, the "royal hymn" which according to the Rabbis will be sung to the Messiah when he comes, says: "From the house of the Lord we bless you". All the verses refer to the divine plan of the coming king to restore the Israel community.

Jewish sages witnessed a chaotic situation without a vested authority in the Israel community. In the period before the Destruction of Temple, the communities became aware of the increase in violence and violations of law such as killing and adultery.<sup>145</sup> The judicial system known as the Sanhedrin had, been abolished around this time too.<sup>146</sup> Once the judicial system in the capital city vanished, the whole system in the Land of Israel collapsed. Without the enforcement of any law, barring the law of the sword of Roman military rule,

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<sup>141</sup> At the end of the book of Judges 21:25

<sup>142</sup> Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxi

<sup>143</sup> Idem, xxii

<sup>144</sup> Refer to the conclusion of messianic expectation during Second Temple Period at chapter two, especially Kenneth Pomykaka's dissertation.

<sup>145</sup> t. Sota 14:1

<sup>146</sup> E. E. Urbach, *Hahalakha: Its Sources and Development* (Givataim: Yad Lataalmud, 1984), 47-57

Jewish society descended into a long chaos.

In third century CE, Strack and Gunter Stemberger witness that Palestine shared in the political confusion and economic decline of the Roman Empire. Constantine's Christianization of the Roman Empire was the great turning point. Strack and Gunter Stemberger describe it as a "continual advance of Christianity so that Judaism even in Palestine found itself increasingly on the defensive."<sup>147</sup> Strack and Gunter Stemberger concluded that Jews in Babylonia and in Palestine were thus without any strong leadership.<sup>148</sup> This provides a political context for rewriting and commenting on the Book of Ruth. Such a political environment leading to the rise of the desire for a new kingship is deeply rooted in the Jewish congregation as well.

#### **4.4.4 Ruth's righteous proselyte (conversion) relates to the Davidic line of dynasty**

##### **(a) Torah**

Leila Leah Bronner confirmed that both the Midrash and the Talmud place great importance on the story of Ruth's conversion.<sup>149</sup> The foundation and legitimacy of the conversion of Ruth is still the implementation of Torah.<sup>150</sup> Torah again played a crucial role in the Jewish exegesis on the conversion of Ruth. Ruth as an outsider becomes the Messiah<sup>151</sup> from Moab in their exegesis. This miracle is accomplished through the mastery of the Torah. The main points of conversion in Ruth Rabbah are linked to these ideas. The proselyte is accepted because the Torah makes it possible to do so. The condition of acceptance is complete and total submission to the Torah. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:16 declared that the principle of proselyte is written down in the Torah. It said that:

*When Naomi heard her say this, she began laying out for her the laws that govern proselytes.*<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Refer to the historical and political section after second Jewish revolt at chapter two.

<sup>148</sup> Idem

<sup>149</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, 63

<sup>150</sup> Torah is also the foundation of Jewish interpretation, discussed in the previous section.

<sup>151</sup> Definitely it is not the Messiah, named Jesus, interpreted by Christian commentators. Rather, it refers to the line of Davidic dynasty according to Hebrew Bible.

<sup>152</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 80

Once again, the power and norm of Torah makes the conversion possible. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:18 also confirmed the position of proselytes in the Torah.

*“And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her,  
Said R. Judah b. R. Simon, “Notice how precious are proselytes before the Omnipresent.  
“Once she had decided to convert, the Scripture treats her as equivalent to Naomi.”<sup>153</sup>*

Jacob Neusner commented that proselytes are precious to God. Once they decide to convert, they are equivalent to Israelites.<sup>154</sup> He furthered commented that those proselytes who are accepted are respected by God and are completely equal to all other Israelites. Those who marry them are masters of the Torah, and their descendants are masters of the Torah, typified by David.<sup>155</sup>

The conversion of Ruth is confirmed by the interpretation of Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:16<sup>156</sup> with the addition of the following quotations.

*This refers to the penalties and admonitions against sinning.  
“... and your God my God.”<sup>157</sup>*

This simply indicates that Ruth is obligated to commit to the divine law. Otherwise, she has to observe the Jewish religious regulations. The interpretative labor is to show what constitutes a proper conversion in the Jewish tradition. In the interpretation of Jewish sages, the convert had to be sincere and determined, willing to accept the intense duties and obligations of Jewish law.<sup>158</sup>

Furthermore, there is another interpretation of “for where you go I will go” In the midrashic interpretation of the story, Naomi begins the conversion ritual by teaching the importance of Sabbath observance. She tells Ruth that Jews are

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<sup>153</sup> Idem, 91

<sup>154</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 17

<sup>155</sup> Idem, xxxi

<sup>156</sup> This verse is also used for the interpretation of the Torah as the foundation of Jewish exegesis in the previous section.

<sup>157</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 80

<sup>158</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *A Thematic Approach To Ruth in Rabbinic Literature*, 152

prohibited from traveling beyond the set Sabbath boundaries on the day of rest. Ruth replies, “Where you go I will go.” Naomi then turns to sexual matters between men and women. Private meetings between men and women are forbidden. Ruth replies, “Where you lodge, I will lodge.” Naomi tells her that the Jews have been commanded to observe 613<sup>159</sup> commandments.

The interpretation of 613 commandments was underlined by the principles of Jewish exegesis. Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck pointed out that the figures are interpreted by the use of wordplay, which includes all kinds of manipulations, some of which were later formalized into methods such as *Gematria* (using calculations based on the letters) and *Notaricon* (using abbreviations or acronyms). In the earlier traditions, the wordplay usually consists of puns based on similar sounds or slightly different spellings.<sup>160</sup> The underlying theology of this method is that the sages believed that Scripture contains hidden insights only available to the clever or inspired interpreter. They treated Scripture as though it was written in a higher language than mere human language. Sometimes the divine author has left a hint that this hidden meaning exists, but Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery Peck pointed out that the Jewish interpreter mostly has to discover this for his own sake.<sup>161</sup> Clearly once again this shows the intention of Jewish sages to uphold the solidity of the Davidic line of dynasty although Ruth was a foreign and female Moabite.

The burial practice is also an evidence for Ruth’s conversion. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:17 declares:

*“... where you die I will die.”*

*This refers to the four modes of inflicting the death penalty that a court uses: stoning, burning, slaying and strangulation*

*“... and there will I be buried:”*

*This refers to the two burial grounds that are provided for the use of the court,*

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<sup>159</sup> Six hundred and six commandments are incumbent only upon Jews. An additional seven, called by the sages the “Noahide Laws” are incumbent upon all the descendants of Noah that is all of humanity. Ruth’s name indicates her acceptance of all these 613 commandments of the Torah. See Leila Leah Bronner, 65. In the midrash, the 613 commandments correspond to natural order. The 365 negative commandments correspond to the number of days in the solar year, and the 248 positive commandments correspond to the number of days during which the moon is seen. See Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 59

<sup>160</sup> Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 297

<sup>161</sup> Idem

*One for those who are stoned and burned, the other for the use of those who are slain or strangled.*

*May the Lord do so to me and more also, if even death parts me from you:”*

*She said to her, “My daughter, whatever you can accomplish in the way of religious duties and acts of righteousness in this world, accomplish.*

*A. This proposition that after death one cannot repent in line with the following verse: “The small and great are there alike, and the servant is free from his master” (Job 3:19)*

*Said R. Simon, “This is one of four scriptural verses that are alike (in presenting the same message):*

*“The small and great are there alike:” In this world one who is small can become great, and one who is great can become small, but in the world to come, one who is small cannot become great, and one who is great cannot become small.*

*“... and the servant is free from his master:” this is one who carries out the will of his creator and angers his evil impulse. When he dies, he goes forth into freedom: “and the servant is free from his master.”<sup>162</sup>*

Jacob Neusner states that to become an Israelite means to accept God’s dominion, encompassing also the penalty for sins and crimes for which Israel is answerable. To be Israel means to be subjected to the four modes of the death penalty for the specified sins, to carry out religious duties and acts of righteousness. These should be done in this world, in the world to come after death one cannot repent.<sup>163</sup>

As far as the matter of burial practices is concerned, Ruth will be buried according to where Naomi is buried (1:17). Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg further singled out Ruth’s unique position in the Israelite community. It is only proselytes of this type, whose genuineness stands out beyond doubt, who are permitted to abide beneath the wings of the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, and become full members of Israelite community.<sup>164</sup>

Chapter three also dealt with the conversion of Ruth. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 3:3 states that:

*“Wash therefore and anoint yourself:”*

*“Wash yourself:” from the filth of idolatry that is yours.*

*“...and anoint yourself:” this refers to the religious deeds and acts of righteousness [that are*

<sup>162</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 82

<sup>163</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 16

<sup>164</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tW The Book of Ruth*, 119

*required of an Israelite].*

*and put on your best clothes”:*

*Was she naked?*

*Rather, this refers to her Sabbath clothing.*

*In this connection did R. Hanina say, “A person has to have two sets of clothing, one for everyday, one for the Sabbath.”*

*And so did R. Simlai expound the matter in public, on account of which the associates wept, saying “As are our garments on every day so are our garments on the Sabbath [for we own only what we are wearing].”<sup>165</sup>*

Jacob Neusner believed that the covert to Israel is washed of the filth of idolatry. The criteria of conversion also refers to the one who is anointed in the religious deeds and acts of righteousness, which are required of an Israelite.<sup>166</sup>

On the other hand, Targum to Ruth also confirmed Ruth as a proselyte. The concept of proselyte is first introduced at the Targum to Ruth 1:10. The Targum to Ruth 1:10 states that the addition “to become proselytes”, in juxtaposition to their leaving their homes and families reflects the concept of proselytes as those who have been naturalized into a new and godly polity.<sup>167</sup>

Furthermore, the Targum to Ruth 2:8 states that:

*Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen to me, my daughter. Do not go to glean ears in another field and do not pass on from here to go to another nation, but stay here with my girls.”<sup>168</sup>*

Etan Levine pointed out that Boaz’s invitation as well as Naomi’s charge reflects the separatist ideal, which was one of the charges Jews were accused of by syncretistic religious of Hellenistic and Roman civilization.<sup>169</sup> In homiletic literature, Ruth is extolled both as representative of the true proselyte and as ancestor of David and the Messiah. Consequently, her life is frequently interpreted in historical or messianic terms, with Boaz symbolizing God his representative.

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<sup>165</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), Jacob Neusner, “Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation” (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 141

<sup>166</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 27

<sup>167</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 53

<sup>168</sup> Idem, 23

<sup>169</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973)



Chapter three on the Targum to Ruth also mentioned the conversion of Ruth. Targum to Ruth 3:3 declared that:

*So wash yourself with water, anoint yourself with perfumes, put on your jewelry<sup>170</sup>, and go down to the threshing-floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until the time that he has finished eating and drinking.<sup>171</sup>*

Again, the conversion means the abolishment of idolatry and commitment to the Torah. Etan Levine believed that the added words: “water” and “perfume” all famillar symbols in the midrash. Ruth’s washing symbolizes the shedding of idolatry. “Perfume” alludes to good deeds and “garments” refers to Sabbath garments.<sup>172</sup>

### **(b) Upholding of the position of Ruth**

The upholding of Ruth in Israel royal dynasty is deeply rooted in Jewish interpretation. This is because the inferiority of female status was a common norm at that period. As part of the royal line of the Davidic dynasty, Ruth as a female needed to be established as a legitimate figure in Israel community. The Jewish commentators also make use of their exegetical methods to uphold the position of Ruth, a Moabite in an Israel community.

Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:4 states that,

*“These took Moabite wives”:*

*It was taught on tannaite authority in the name of R. Meir, “They did not convert them nor baptize them nor had the law been taught: “Amonite male,” but not female, “Moabite male”, but not female.*

*Since such a law had not been taught, permitting marriage to a formerly prohibited ethnic group, they did not escape punishment on that account.<sup>173</sup>*

The above quotation illustrates that females were not forbidden. In Deut. 23:4-7, the rabbis interpreted this pentateuchal prohibition to mean that male Moabites were forbidden to come into the congregation of the Lord, basing this

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<sup>170</sup> In MT tradition of Hebrew bible, it is “your garment” (Kethibh) or “garments” (Qere).

<sup>171</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 26

<sup>172</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 86

<sup>173</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 60

interpretation on the use of the male singular form in the biblical text. Leila Leah Bronner concluded that the exegetical principle of “A Moabite but not a Moabites” allowed Ruth to be accepted.<sup>174</sup> Once again, we can understand the exegetical motive behind the interpreters.

Ruth Rabbah 1:14, which discussed the every act of kissing, illustrated the royal linkage of Ruth.

*“...and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law”:*

*Every act of kissing is frivolous except for three:*

*the kiss of a high position, the kiss of meeting, and the kiss of departing.*

*The kiss of a high position: “Then Samuel took the vial of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him” (1 Sam. 10:1).*

*The kiss of meeting: “And he met him in the mountain of God and kissed him” (Ex. 4:27)*

*And the kiss of departing: “and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law.”*

*R. Tanhuma said, “Also the kiss of kinship: “And Jacob kissed Rachel” (Gen. 29:11)*

*Why so? Because she was related to him.”*

Ruth Rabbah tried to include Ruth into the royal dynasty. Andre LaCocque had the same view and actively described the position in the Jewish royal community. Ruth was not just a passive instrument for the preservation of the ancestral line of David. “She was a beacon of loyalty for Israel, a woman to rank with the matriarchs of the nation.”<sup>175</sup> She is interpreted as a link to David because David is given the highest priority in the Israel community. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 2:1 also described the supremacy of David in the Israel community.

*‘Boaz married Ruth, and whom did they produce? David: “Skillful in playing, and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, prudent in affairs, good-looking, and the Lord is with him (1 Sam. 16:18).”*

*“Skillful in playing”: in Scripture*

*“... a man of war”: who knows the give and take of the war of the Torah.*

*“...prudent in affairs”: in good deeds.*

*“...good-looking”: in Talmud*

*Another interpretation of “Skillful in playing, and a mighty man of war, prudent in affairs, good-looking, and the Lord is with him”:*

<sup>174</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, 64

<sup>175</sup> Andre LaCocque, *The Feminine unconventional: Four subversive figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 89

“prudent in affairs”: able to reason deductively.

“...good-looking”: enlightened in law.

“...and the Lord is with him”: the law accords with his opinions.<sup>176</sup>

Jacob Neusner also confirmed the position of David. He believed that David, the model of the Messiah, was a master of Scripture, Mishnah and Talmud study.<sup>177</sup> Ruth stands in the royal line of David, Solomon, and the Messiah.<sup>178</sup> Jacob Neusner summarized that Ruth married a great sage and through her descendants produced the Messiah-sage, David.<sup>179</sup>

Scholars also echoed the view of Ruth Rabbah. Andre LaCocque declared that the ancient rabbis in part based their rules for conversion to Judaism on the book of Ruth, pointing out that three times Naomi resists Ruth’s desire to follow her to Judah.<sup>180</sup> Leila Leah Bronner also tried to trace back the rabbis’ intention of confirming the legitimacy about Ruth. Faced with the cognitively dissonant exemplary character of this foreign woman, who will also become the ancestress of the Davidic line, she thought that the rabbis of the Talmud have to halakhically legitimize Ruth’s conversion.<sup>181</sup> Then, having accomplished her acceptance into the fold, they wish to underscore her merit and extraordinary kindness and valor, which make her a suitable figure to stand at the beginning of the Davidic (messianic) line. Most importantly, Leila Leah Bronner tried to legitimize Ruth’s conversion in order to bolster the legitimacy of the Davidic line.<sup>182</sup> This is the central theme of Jewish exegetical activity.

On the other hand, the Targum To Ruth has another interpretation of Ruth’s conversion. Targum to Ruth 1:16-17 declared the major verses of Ruth’s conversion. It states that,

Verse 16

<sup>176</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 101

<sup>177</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 20

<sup>178</sup> This concept of Messiah is not developed in Jewish thought, but rather expanded and consolidated in Christian exegesis.

<sup>179</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and the interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, LLC, 2004) 131-132; Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 107

<sup>180</sup> Andre LaCocque, “*Ruth: A Continental Commentary*” K. C. Hanson trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3

<sup>181</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *A Thematic Approach To Ruth in Rabbinic Literature* in “A Feminist Companion To Ruth” Athalya Brenner edi. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 146

<sup>182</sup> Idem, 152

*Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you, to go back from after you for I desire to be a proselyte."*

*Naomi said, "We are commanded to keep Sabbaths and holy days so as not to walk beyond two thousand cubits."*

*Ruth said, "Wherever you go, I will go."*

*Naomi said, "We are commanded not to lodge together with gentiles."*

*Ruth said, "Wherever you lodge I will lodge."*

*Naomi said, "We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen precepts."*

*Ruth said, "What your people keep I will keep as if they were my people from before this."*

*Naomi said, "We are commanded not to engage in idolatry."*

*Ruth said, "Your god is my god."*

Verse 17

*Naomi said, "We have four death penalties for the guilty, stoning with stones, burning with fire, execution by the sword and crucifixion."*

*Ruth said, "By whatever means you die, I will die."*

*Naomi said, "We have a cemetery."*

*Ruth said, "And there will I be buried. And do not say any more. May the Lord do thus to me and more to me, if even death shall separate me and you."<sup>183</sup>*

With reference to the above quotation, Ruth was obliged to keep Sabbaths and holy days and keep six hundred and thirteen precepts (1:16). Moreover, Ruth was not allowed to engage in idolatry (1:16). This emphasized the behavior of Ruth, committed to the norm of the Torah.

Moreover, the verses also placed much emphasis on the obligation in which Ruth would face the punishment if violating the rules (Ru.1:17). This verse reflects the fact that the targum violates the unanimous rabbinic sources, in perfect accord with sectarian tradition. Whereas the Bible only specifies death by burning and by stoning, the general references to the death penalty in the Bible are universally accepted in Pharisaic-Rabbinic literature as death by burning and strangulation. This divergent view was deeply rooted under sectarian development of Israel community.<sup>184</sup> Sectarions who did not accept the authority of the "Halakah to Moses at Sinai" relied upon their reading of the explicit scriptural text. Whereas the Pharisees interpreted the verse as

<sup>183</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 21

<sup>184</sup> Refers to the discussion under the section of "Sectarian Development" on Chapter Two

referring to hanging the body following the execution, specifically by stoning, the Sadduceans understood this as death by hanging. Their literalist interpretation was reinforced by visual observation. The Roman government in distinction to Pharisaic courts did use hanging as a death penalty.

Consequently, the Sadducees were sufficiently convinced of the legitimacy of their exegesis to warrant Sadducean courts sentencing the condemned to death by hanging. Etan Levine concluded that the four death penalties of the Sadduceans were: stoning, burning, the sword and hanging, in perfect accord with the version contained in the targum Ruth, in violation of Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition.<sup>185</sup>

The targum to Ruth 1:22 also witnessed the controversial difference between Pharisee and Sadduces. It states that:

*“So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem on the eve of Passover, and on that day the children of Israel were beginning to harvest the Omer of the heave-offering, which was of barley.”*<sup>186</sup>

According to exegetical tradition, the biblical words “barley harvest” signify the cutting of the ‘omer, hence the specification in the targum that their arrival coincided with the cutting of the ‘omer. But in specifying that it was the day before Passover, the targum again contradicts Pharisaic tradition and presents the Sadducean attitude and practice. This meant that the ‘omer cannot be cut on the festival since it would constitute a violation of the biblical injunction against labor on a festival. Etan Levine concluded that “since the targum attributes its anti-Pharisaic practices, not to local custom, but to all of Israel in biblical antiquity, amending it in conformity with Pharisaic-Rabbinic law is unjustifiable and beclouds the identification of its origins.”<sup>187</sup>

We now go back to the discussion of the conversion. Etan Levine pointed out that the details of the conversation between Naomi the Jewess and Ruth the proselyte reflects that pre-rabbinic and rabbinic Judaism was primarily

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<sup>185</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 60-1

<sup>186</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 22

<sup>187</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 64-5

concerned with the acceptance of *twcm*, the practices, which though related to theological concepts, did not substitute for them. This meant that conversion consisted of acceptance of these laws, rather than a doctrinal confession.<sup>188</sup>

This de-emphasis of doctrine precludes the formulation of a coherent theology of ancient Judaism. Torah again is of main essence for the Jews. The rabbis were invariably more in agreement in their classification of the 613 religious imperatives than in their presentations of any Jewish dogma. Contrary to popular belief, early “non-rabbinic” Judaism<sup>189</sup> shared this attitude to the Law. Thus, Philo Judaeus reflects the concept that the touchstone of Judaism is the practice of the *Torah*, rather than the confession of theological principles.

The chapter two of Ruth Rabbah also echoed the position of Ruth in Israelite dynasty. The Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 2:12 declared that

*“So notice the power of the righteous and the power of righteousness the power of those who do deeds of grace.*

*“For they take shelter not in the shadow of the dawn, nor in the shadow of the wings of the*

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<sup>188</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 57

<sup>189</sup> First and most important of all, in chapter two, we deal with the period covered for the influence of early Jewish exegetical method. This is the Second Temple Period (516 BCE-70 CE), which is an important period imposing tremendous effect on the formation of early Jewish exegesis. Undeniably, developmental process is a continuous one. Early Jewish exegetical method is not a sudden innovation. The scholar, Jacob Weingreen, witnessed this point. He illustrated that there are distinct points of similarity between early expository notes and certain categories of exposition found in the Talmud, later product of Jewish exegesis and points to a continuity of pattern from the earlier to the later. His main theme is certain attitudes, practices, and regulations, which found their mature expression in the Talmud and which on that account have been generally regarded as Rabbinic in character and origin are in fact to be detected in the literature of the Old Testament. Jacob Weingreen, “Exposition in the Old Testament and in Rabbinic Writings” in *Promise and Fulfillment: essays presented to Professor S. H. Hooke in celebration of his ninetieth birthday, 21<sup>st</sup> Janunary, 1964*, Society for Old Testament Society, F. F. Bruce edi. (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1963), 187 After discussing the Second Temple Period as an influential period in the formation of early Jewish exegesis, we should make clear to show how “early” Jewish exegesis is defined and delineated. A historical and developmental perspective is used to be a methodology. We first define the early stage of the Jewish commentaries with the comparison of the time frame of patristic literature in the whole history of the periods of hermeneutics. As far as the whole history of hermeneutics is concerned, Scholars had viewed it as a different historical developmental unit. Fredric Farrar proposed a seven-period or system of biblical interpretation. His classification seems to be basically historical and chronological. There are seven main periods and systems of Biblical interpretation. Roughly speaking, the *Rabbinic* lasted for 1000 years, from the days of Ezra (BCE 180) to those of Rab Abina (CE 498). The *Alexandrian*, which flourished from the epoch of Aristobulus (BCE 180) to the death of Philo, and which was practically continued in the Christian Schools of Alexandria, from Pantaenus (CE 200) down to Pierius. The *Patristic*, which in various channels prevailed from the days of Clement of Rome (CE 95) through the Dark Ages to the *Glossa Interlinearis* of Anselm of Laon (CE 1117). The remaining four periods of interpretation are the Scholastic, Reformation Era, Post-Reformation and Modern Epoch.

*earth, not in the shadow of the wings of the sun, nor in the shadow of the wings of the cherubim or the seraphim.*

*“But under whose wings do they take shelter?”*

*“They take shelter under the shadow of the One at whose word the world was created: “How precious is your loving kindness O God, and the children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings’ (Ps. 36:8).”<sup>190</sup>*

To convert to Judaism is to take shelter under the wings of God's presence as stated above. Jacob Neusner declared that those who do deeds of righteousness and grace take shelter not in the shadow of the dawn, nor in the shadow of the wings of the earth, not in the shadow of the wings of the sun, nor in the shadow of the wings of the hayyot, nor in the shadow of the wings of the cherubim or the seraphim, but only under the shadow of the One at whose word the world was created.<sup>191</sup> Jacob Neusner confirmed that converting to Judaism is to take shelter under the wings of God's presence.<sup>192</sup> Etan Levine illustrated rightly that “this system is not Stoic, wherein theology is related to philosophy. Rather theology is related to ethics and is expressed through the regulation of life according to the divine laws of the *Torah*.”<sup>193</sup> The historian Josephus Flavius also coins the term “theocracy” to define Judaism: “the detailed articulation of God's *theos* and a polity based upon that law. Or, in rabbinic terms, to be a Jew is to accept the divine law, the “yoke of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>194</sup>

Moreover, Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 2:14 emphasized the position of Ruth in royal dynasty. It declared that:

*“And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread, and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her parched grain; and she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over:*

*R. Yohanan interested the phrase “come here” in six ways:*

*“The first speaks of David.*

*“Come here”: means, to the throne: ‘That you have brought me here’ (2 Sam. 7:18).*

*“... and eat some bread”: the bread of the throne.*

*“...and dip your morsel in vinegar”: this speaks of his sufferings: “O Lord, do not rebuke me in*

<sup>190</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 121

<sup>191</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 24

<sup>192</sup> Idem

<sup>193</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 57

<sup>194</sup> Mishnah, Berakot II, 2

*your anger*” (Ps. 6:2)

“So she sat beside the reapers”: for the throne was taken from him for a time.”

As R. Huna said, “The entire six months that David fled from Absalom are not counted in his reign, for he atoned for his sins with a she-goat, like an ordinary person [rather than with a he-goat, as does the king].”

[Resuming from G:] “and he passed to her parched grain”: he was restored to the throne: “Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed” (Ps. 20:7).

‘...and she ate and was satisfied and left some over’: this indicates that he would eat in this world, in the days of the messiah, and in the age to come.

“The second interpretation refers to Solomon: “Come here”: means, to the throne...

“The third interpretation speaks of Hezekiah: “Come here”: means, to the throne...

“The fourth interpretation refers to Manasseh: “Come here”: means, to the throne...

“The fifth interpretation refers to the Messiah: “Come here”: means to the throne...

“The sixth interpretation refers to Boaz: “Come here”: means to the throne...<sup>195</sup>

When Ruth came to Boaz, she came to the throne of David, his sufferings when he lost the throne, but his restoration to the throne, and would prosper in the days of the Messiah and in the age to come. Jacob Neusner believed that the relation of Ruth to another five important Israelite figures, Solomon, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Messiah and Moses are essential indicators for the position of Ruth in the line of royal dynasty.<sup>196</sup>

On the other hand, the Targum to Ruth believed that Ruth’s answer falls naturally into rhythmic sentences with recurrent forms --- poetry that has appealed to generation after generation in 1:16-18. In Jewish tradition these are the very words that are used as an example for the proselyte to follow. That Ruth is seen as the prototype of a proselyte is already clear from the Targum to Ruth 1:16, where Naomi explains to Ruth the demands of the law on the convert. Kirsten Nielsen shows that in the Targum to Ruth 2:6 Ruth is described as a proselyte, while in connection with Ruth 3:11 she is said to be strong enough to bear the yoke of the Lord’s law.<sup>197</sup>

The addition “to become proselytized”, in juxtaposition to their leaving their homes and families, reflects the concept of proselytes as those who have been naturalized into a new and godly polity. Levine stated that, whereas *rg* is used

<sup>195</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 124-7

<sup>196</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 26-7

<sup>197</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 49



throughout the Old Testament as a generic term for a resident alien in Israelite territory without the usual civil rights, the targum consistently uses the term *rg* to signify proselyte.<sup>198</sup>

The upholding of Ruth in the Israel royal dynasty is deeply rooted in a social and cultural environment. This is because the inferior status of female was the common norm at that period. To be of the royal line of the Davidic dynasty, Ruth as a female needed to be established as a legitimate figure in the Israel community. We now discuss the role and value of women in the Israel community. Women in Biblical times fulfilled significant roles in society, in the capacity of queens, prophetesses and judges. Indeed the participation of woman in practically any ritual and social event in Biblical society was sanctioned.<sup>199</sup> However, when one reads the Talmudic sources it is very clear that by this time women were deprived from participating in these social functions. In Talmudic times no woman ever served as a Tanna, a sage of the oral tradition, and certainly not as a social leader in the Land of Israel. Hence we may say that while in the Biblical period a woman played a part in government and society, that was not the case in later Judaism. Th. Friedman even observed that by later times she had become officially exempt from certain commandments in the Torah, and almost cut off by society.<sup>200</sup> An example of this demeaning of status and importance can be seen in the sheer fact that some Rabbis in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century made general allegation against all Jewish women, blaming them of practicing witchcraft (b. Berakhot 53b).<sup>201</sup> As such deprivation is not the only examples of misogyny in the Rabbinic literature, the reality must be that in some manner women lost status in the eyes of their chauvinistic husbands.

We may conclude that the social value of Jewish woman was devalued. The Hellenistic culture that segregated women and combined with the natural chauvinism of the age on account of the equalization of the male-female ratio, contributed to a new perspective towards women. This type of discrimination was still a far cry from that which can be seen even today in Muslim culture. However, women were bereft of social power, and though there was no king, it

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<sup>198</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 53

<sup>199</sup> See Deut. 29:10; 31:12; Ezra 10:1

<sup>200</sup> Th. Friedman, "The Shifting Role of Women, From the Bible to Talmud", *Judaism*, 36 (1986), 479-487. See also: M. Bar-Ilan, "The Attitude towards Women in some of the books in the Pseudepigrapha", *Beit Mikra*, 38/133 (1993), 141-152 (Hebrew)

<sup>201</sup> M. Bar-Ilan, *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity*, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998, pp. 119-122.

was clear that males (and Rabbis) dominated. Therefore, under such cultural and social dominance of males, the Jewish commentators tried to trace back the rabbis' intention of writing about Ruth in a positive point of view. Faced with the cognitively dissonant exemplary character of this foreign woman, who will also become the ancestress of the Davidic line, the rabbis has to legitimize Ruth's position in Israelite community.

#### **4.4.5 Ruth's *hesed*<sup>202</sup> and modesty as fitting an ancestress of David and also as an ideal of feminine behavior**

##### **(a) Characterization**

First we want to elaborate the role of character and characterization in literature. Lieve M. Teugels worked on this.<sup>203</sup> Characters in a narrative are shaped by the author/narrator, whether they represent historical figures or not. The portrayal can represent the author/narrator's own perspective, or it can depict a character through the eyes or the words of other characters. Further, Lieve M. Teugels emphasized the role of the readers. The characters are also partially created by the reader or hearer of the story, who assembles various character-indicators into a character-construct. The character-traits (mental, physical and other) that make up a character may or may not be explicitly mentioned in the text. Often they are not mentioned or only partially. The readers create their own mental picture of a character outlined by the narrator while reading the text.<sup>204</sup> Rimmon-Kenan treats the question as follows:

*"How then is the construct arrived at? By assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, inferring traits from them."*<sup>205</sup>

Characterization is the way characters are presented textually. The reader, however, fills out the characters presented in a narrative. Meir Sternberg calls this a "gap-filling" activity:

*"They (character portraits) are the product of the reader's cumulative and gap-filling activity along the sequence where the portaittee figures, rather than of the narrator's solicitude from the*

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<sup>202</sup> See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Bible and Women's Studies" In *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (Michigan: Yale University, 1994), 247-56

<sup>203</sup> Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of The Wooing of Rebekah (Gn. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004)

<sup>204</sup> Idem, 35

<sup>205</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59

outset.”<sup>206</sup>

The rabbis when interpreting the characters also follow the same procedure.<sup>207</sup> Now we go into details about the description and interpretation of character in the book of Ruth. The story of Ruth represents a climax in the art of literary narrative.<sup>208</sup> Kirsten Nielsen indicates that the most interesting aspect of the Biblical book of Ruth for the *Midrash to Ruth* is its characterization.<sup>209</sup>

On Ruth Rabbah, the rabbis can interpret Elimelech in a negative way since he had sinned against God and did nothing in accordance with the Torah. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:1 illustrated before.<sup>210</sup>

In midrashic interpretation, the narration of Elimelech is interpreted in negative terms. Elimelech’s name literally means “my God is King” (*Daath Mikra*). The name is expounded as revealing the man’s character. Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg commented that, it can also signify “unto me (*eli*) shall the kingdom come”, giving evidence of his arrogance, a negative description of his character. This is extremely the opposition direction of meaning of “my God is King.”<sup>211</sup>

However, a more positive view may result from the Jewish exegesis. Elimelech is shown as a wealthy man. Elimelech is first described as “a certain man” (1:1). Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg interpreted the Hebrew *ish* in Rabbinic exegesis denotes not merely a person but rather a personage, a man of importance either in learning or in social status.<sup>212</sup> Rashi also declared that, “he was a very wealthy man and the leader of the generation.”<sup>213</sup>

Though he is described as a positive figure, it doesn’t contradict from previous negative views since greater responsibilities in community are presumed for him. He could not take it up and consequently receive severe judgment.

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<sup>206</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narratives: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana university Press, 1987), 326

<sup>207</sup> See “Gap-filling in Bible and Midrash” from page 20 at Chapter Three.

<sup>208</sup> For S. D. Goitein, the story of Ruth is a virtually work of literary art, unparalleled in its structural harmony. See Shlomo Dov goitein, *The Scroll of Ruth 2<sup>nd</sup>* ed. (Tel. Aviv: Yavneh Publishing, 1963) 49-58 (in Hebrew)

<sup>209</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18

<sup>210</sup> See the page 18 of this chapter.

<sup>211</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 115

<sup>212</sup> Idem, 114

<sup>213</sup> A. Schwartz and Y. Schwartz, *The Megilloth and Rashi’s commentary with linear translation* (New York: Hebrew linear Classics, 1983), 151

Ruth undeniably was portrayed as a positive and moral figure.<sup>214</sup> First, we discuss the meaning of the name of Ruth. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:4 states that:

*“... the name of the other Ruth”:*

*for she paid attention to the words of her mother-in-law [and the word for see or pay attention and Ruth share the same consonants]<sup>215</sup>*

Her name is described as piety to her mother-in-law, Naomi. The name of Ruth (1:4) has, been interpreted differently by the rabbis of the Talmud and the Midrash. However, one common point among the Jewish interpretations is the positive example of morality related to the Davidic line of dynasty. Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg derived it from the root, *ravoh*, to “satisfy”, foretelling that she would be the great grandmother of David, who would satisfy the Holy One, blessed be He, with songs and praises. He further added one more midrashic view that the name is derived from the root, *raoh*, “to see.”<sup>216</sup> In contradistinction to Orpah, Ruth saw or accepted the words of her mother-in-law. Alternatively, it is derived from *rathoth*, to quake, for she quaked in dread of committing a sin. These derivations may be interpreted as foretelling the future. Zohar Chadash however states that she was named Ruth on her conversion. Her original name was Gillith.<sup>217</sup> This interpretation focused on her commitment to Judaism and her piety is emphasized.

Ruth’s behavior is also given credit in the interpretation of rabbis. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 2:5 declared that:

*“Whose maiden is this”:*

*Didn’t he know her?*

*Since he saw her as such a proper woman, whose deeds were so proper, he began to ask about her.*

*“All the other women bend down to gather gleanings, but this one sits down and gathers.*

*“All the other women hitch up their skirts. She keeps hers down.*

*“All the other women makes jokes with the reapers. She is modest.*

*‘All the other women gather from between the sheaves (and the grain there is not in the category of gleanings) <sup>218</sup>. She gathers only from grain that has already been left behind.”*

<sup>214</sup> See the discussion of “Upholding of the position of Ruth” at page 31

<sup>215</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 60

<sup>216</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to tWR The Book of Ruth*, 116

<sup>217</sup> Idem

<sup>218</sup> With the [ ], the editors made the clarification.

*Along these same lines: “And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said to Abner, whose son is this youth” (1 Sam. 17:55).*

*Didn't he know him?*

*Just the day before he had sent word to Jesse saying, “Let David, I ask, stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight” (1 Sam. 16:22), and now he asks who he is?*

*When Saul saw the head of the Philistine in his hand, he began to ask about him: “Is he a descendant of Perez, a king (Gen. 37:29-30) ? A descendant of Zarah, a judge?*

*Now Doeg, the Edomite, was present then and he said to him,*

*“Even though he may descend from Perez, is he not also of unfit origin? Is the family not unfit? Is he not of Ruth the Moabite?”*

*Said Abner to him, “But has the law not been made: ‘An Ammonite female, ‘a Moabite male,’ not a Moabite female?”*

*He said to him, “If so, why not say also, “An Edomite male,” not an Edomite female, “an Egyptian male,” not an Egyptian female? So why were the men rejected? Is it not on the count of “because they did not meet you with bread and with water” (Dt. 23:5)? But the women should have met the women!”*

*For a moment the law was, forgotten by Abner.*

*Said to him Saul, “As to the law been forgotten by you, so and ask Samuel and his court.”*

*When he came to Samuel and his court, he said to him, “How do you know this? Is it not on the authority of Doeg? He is a sectarian, and he will not leave this world whole. But it is not possible to send you away bare.*

*“All the honor of the king’s daughter is within the palace” (Ps. 45:14): it is incumbent on a man not to go out and provide food, it is incumbent on a man to do so.*

*“And because they hired Balaam against you (Dt. 23:5): a man does the hiring, and a woman does not.”<sup>219</sup>*

Jacob Neusner commented that the Moabite women who could be the ancestress of David, exhibited exceptional modesty and discretion.<sup>220</sup> Ruth is, however, beautifully drawn. She may not be free of unchaste thoughts but compared to the other gleaning women “she is a paragon.”<sup>221</sup> In this respect Kirsten Nielsen believed that great emphasis is placed on her conversion, a fact, which fits in well with the use of the book at the Feast of Weeks.<sup>222</sup> The morality of Ruth is the main discussion of *hesed*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>219</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 108-9

<sup>220</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 21

<sup>221</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18

<sup>222</sup> Idem

Boaz, as an ancestor of David, is positively and beautifully portrayed as a moral man in the eyes of the rabbis. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 2:1 states that:

*["A man of wealth" translates what is literally "a mighty man of valor, so:] said R. Abbahu, "If a giant marries a giantess? What do they produce? Mighty men of valor."<sup>223</sup>*

Targum to Ruth 2:1 also echoed with Ruth Rabbah and gave us a positive image of Boaz. It stated that:

*Now to Naomi there was known through her husband a powerful man, string in the Law, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz.<sup>224</sup>*

However, the great challenge to Boaz occurs at the scene of the threshing floor with Ruth. In midrashic interpretation, the sages made a clear image of Boaz. Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg states that, "where the thought of a living God governs the relationship between the sexes, a man and a woman may meet in the hour of midnight in a lonely threshing-floor and part from each other as pure as when they came in 3:13."<sup>225</sup> This is interpreted as an expression of an oath to illustrate Boaz's piety to God. Boaz swore that he would not send Ruth away with mere words but would indeed keep his promise. According to Rabbinic comment Boaz was addressing himself to God (4:14).

*"All that night Boaz was prostrate in prayer, saying: Sovereign of the Universe! Thou knowest that I have had no physical contact with her. I pray Thee, let it not be known that the woman came into the threshing-floor, so that the name of Heaven be not profaned through me."<sup>226</sup>*

Boaz was "in good heart" (Rt.3:7) not just because he had eaten and drunk, but because he had recited grace after his meal, he had eaten sweet things, he was busy studying the Torah and he was looking for a wife. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 3:7 declared that:

*Another explanation of the phrase, "And when Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was*

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<sup>223</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 101

<sup>224</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 22

<sup>225</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 131

<sup>226</sup> Idem, 132

*merry*”:

*For he had occupied himself with teachings of the Torah: “The Torah of your mouth is good to me” (ps. 119:72)*

*Another explanation of the phrase, “And when Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry”:*

*He was seeking a wife: “Who finds a wife finds a good thing” (Pro. 18:22).<sup>227</sup>*

Targum to Ruth 3:7 also shared the same view. It declared that:

*Boaz ate and drank and his heart was merry. He blessed the name of the Lord who had accepted his prayers and removed the famine from the land of Israel, and he went to lie down beside the heap of grain. Ruth came in quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.<sup>228</sup>*

Etan Levine pointed out that since the targum regards Boaz as the righteous Ibsan by virtue of whose merit and prayer the famine was lifted, it refers to his prayer of thanksgiving as well as his petition.<sup>229</sup>

Boaz is also portrayed as a worthy representative of the righteous who resists all temptation. The Targum to Ruth 3:8 states that:

*“In the middle of the night the man was startled, and he was afraid, and his flesh became soft like turnip from fear. He saw a woman lying at his feet, but he restrained his desire and did not approach her, just as Joseph the Righteous did, who refused to approach the Egyptian woman, the wife of his master, just as Paltiel bar Laish the Pious did, who placed a sword between himself and Michal daughter of Saul, wife of David, whom he refused to approach.”<sup>230</sup>*

As in the above quotation, Boaz is also compared to Joseph and Paltiel ben Laish in the Midrash Zuta on Ruth 3:13. R. Johanan arranged the three heroes in ascending order of merit: Joseph, who had to endure temptation on only one occasion. Boaz resisted temptation for a whole night whereas Paltiel resisted temptation for many nights.<sup>231</sup> This meant that Boaz was really a moral man

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<sup>227</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 147

<sup>228</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 26

<sup>229</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 88

<sup>230</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 27

<sup>231</sup> San. 19b, 20a

because he did not have any sexual contact with Ruth.

Kirsten Nielsen and D. R. G. Beattie agreed that Targum to Ruth's concept of righteousness plays a major role.<sup>232</sup> The Rabbis clearly felt that the scene at the threshing floor, in which Ruth and Boaz spent the night together, needed a careful exegesis lest the reader might conclude that they might actually have engaged in sexual intercourse. It has been suggested above that the treatment of this passage in the ancient versions was motivated by this consideration. The haggadists were determined to leave no room for doubt. This type of Jewish interpretation is well illustrated by D. R. G. Beattie. Beattie introduced the concept of "haggadic additions" to the story when discussing the Jewish exegesis on the book of Ruth. The purpose of this exegetical approach is to bring out the meaning of the original text by presenting it in an amplified form. The kind of additional material, which will be considered here, represents a haggadic expansion, which is frequently without basis in the original.

#### **(b) Theme of *hesed* as indication of the morality of Ruth**

The morality of Ruth is held as a typical model in the upholding of the royal line of the dynasty. Her morality can be well illustrated with the concept of *hesed*. This is the main theme in the depiction of character in the book of Ruth in Jewish interpretation. *Hesed* is indeed one of the key words controlling the text. The word occurs three times in the Biblical text: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the story.<sup>233</sup> The rabbis point out what the *hesed* of Ruth does for Naomi, from gleaning in the fields to bringing food for her and the *hesed* she does in honoring the memory of the dead in Naomi's family becoming her own by marriage. Ruth Rabbah stresses these moral characteristics of the narrative in the book of Ruth. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:8 said that:

*'May the Lord deal kindly with you':*

*R. Hanina b. R. Adda said, "What is written is "he will deal."*

*"He assuredly will deal..."*

*"...as you have dealt with the dead":*

*"for you have occupied yourself with their burial shrouds."*

*"...and with me":*

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<sup>232</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18; D. R. G. Beattie, "Jewish exegesis of the Book of Ruth" (*Journal for the study of the Old Testament*), 178-9

<sup>233</sup> Ruth 1.8, 2:20 and 3:10



*For they had given up on their rights to a marriage-settlement.*

Said R. Zeira, "This scroll contains nothing of cleanliness or un-cleanliness, nothing of prohibition or remission, so why has it been written?"

"It is to tell you great a reward of goodness is coming to those who do deeds of mercy [by burying the dead, which is a kindness that the deceased cannot repay]."<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, Leila Leah Bronner classified the meaning of *hesed* as having two dimensions:

- (i) In the exercise of beneficence toward one who deserves it, but in a greater measure than he deserves it.
- (ii) In most cases the prophetic books use the word *hesed* in the sense of practicing beneficence toward one, who has no right at all to claim this from you.<sup>235</sup>

Regarding Ruth, the second meaning is used. Ruth's narrative actually resembles the older narratives in language, content and style.<sup>236</sup> Leila Leah Bronner indicated the correspondence of Ruth with Abraham. Ruth, like Abraham, the founder of the nation and the first of the proselytes, left the house of her father and mother and went to join a people who would not accept her because of her foreign origins.<sup>237</sup> Yet she will not be dissuaded and joins the Israelite nation, with no thought of reward for this act of affiliation. In this lies her great *hesed*.<sup>238</sup>

All of this interpretive labor has several motives. Firstly the Torah acceptance is a basic requirement for Jewish exegesis. Secondly, Ruth as seen as a descendant of Royal Israel, makes it necessary to show her as a paragon of docile, loyal, compliant female behavior. Thereby the royal image and position may be maintained.

On the other hand the Targum to Ruth has another angle of the interpretation

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<sup>234</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 68

<sup>235</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, "The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal" in *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 63

<sup>236</sup> See Gen. 24:12-14; Ruth 3:3-9

<sup>237</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal*, 63; Leila Leah Bronner, *A Thematic Approach To Ruth in Rabbinic Literature*, 148

<sup>238</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *A Thematic Approach To Ruth in Rabbinic Literature*, 148

of *hesed* in the book of Ruth. The concept of *hesed* in the targum is markedly different from that of the Bible. Etan Levine listed out several differences. The targum manifests an understanding of *hesed* found in early Rabbinic Literature and in the New Testament. *Hesed* is no longer the fulfillment of responsibilities expected of principals in a relationship; nor is it “normative” behavior; nor is it a necessarily reciprocal relationship; nor is it the diligent observance of laws and customs. She confirmed rather, *hesed* is a category of exemplary behavior and the *hesed* is the unusual person who adheres to standards above and beyond the normative and the expected.<sup>239</sup> We concluded that Targum emphasized the meaning of *hesed* as a moral standard and modeling use.

Now, we go the meaning of *hesed* on the targum to Ruth. Targum to Ruth 1:8 states that:

*“Naomi said to her two daughters-in-laws, “Go return, each to her mothers house. May the Lord deal faithfully with you as you have dealt with your husbands who are dead, in that you have refused to take husbands after their death, and with me, in that you have sustained and supported me.”*<sup>240</sup>

Referring to 1:8, it is important to teach how great is the reward for those who perform deeds of loving-kindness (*hesed*.)” As a result, numerous elaborations upon their deeds are contained in aggadic literature. However, Etan Levine illustrated that the targum understands it in its juridical and biblical sense, involving the discharging of responsibility.<sup>241</sup> The force of the targum is not in its final addition “*in that you have sustained and supported me,*” but in the previous clause, “*in that you have refused to take husbands after their death.*” The targum’s halakic position is that the widows were obligated and entitled to levirate marriage in Judah. Thus she further concluded that their not remarrying in Moab was an act of *hesed* to their deceased husbands, whose names would be “built up upon their estate” if their widows were levirate married to kinsman in Judah.<sup>242</sup> The targum’s understanding of *hesed* reflects the biblical, rather than the rabbinic understanding of the term. It is because the Targum, mainly reflects the messages of biblical narratives, is a translation of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>239</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 92

<sup>240</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 19

<sup>241</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 51

<sup>242</sup> Idem

Moreover, the Targum to Ruth 2:11 echoed the concept of *hesed*. It declared that:

*Boaz replied and said to her, "It has surely been told to me about the word of the sages that, when the Lord made the decree about you, he did not make it with reference to females, he made it only with reference to men, and it is said to me by prophecy that hereafter kings and prophets shall proceed from you on account of all the kindness that you have done for your mother-in-law, in that you supported her after your husband died and you forsook your god and your people, your father and your mother, and the land of your birth and went to be a proselyte and to dwell among a people who were not known to you in former times."*<sup>243</sup>

The doubled Hebrew "told" occasioned the double exegesis incorporated by the targum: Boaz was told of the rabbinic legislation permitting Moabite women, and he was told of her future progeny. The targum further doubles the *hesed* that she had performed: supporting Naomi and affiliating with an alien people.

Regarding the above text again, the targum adds 'your god and your people' since the Hebrew "your father" is interpreted as signifying 'your God', and the Hebrew "your mother" symbolizes "your people". Ruth's *hesed* is elaborated upon since the biblical prohibition against accepting Ammonites and Moabites was regarded as punishment for their not having acted with *hesed* during Israel's time of need. Etan Levine showed that by responding both halakically and personally to her question of status, the targum relates to the question of her acceptability, as a Moabite.<sup>244</sup>

Targum to Ruth 2:12 indicated that the morality of *hesed* received rewards. It declared that:

*"May the Lord repay you a good recompense in this world for your good deeds and may your reward be perfect in the next world from before the Lord, God of Israel, under the shadow of whose glorious Shekinah, you have come to become a proselyte and to shelter, and by that merit you will be saved from the judgment of Genenna, so that your portion may be with Sarah, and Rebekah, and Rachel, and Leah."*<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 24

<sup>244</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 74-5

<sup>245</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield:

“Full” recompense is characteristically interpreted by the targum as referring to (Rt. 1:9) reward both in this world and in the world to come. Furthermore, in the Hebrew text there are two references to reward, suggesting two types of recompense. Additionally, in Jewish theology, whereas the reward for conversion to Judaism is bestowed exclusively in the world to come, the reward for deeds of *hesed* is bestowed in both worlds.<sup>246</sup> A frequent biblical description of the confident security of the faithful is having shelter and refuge beneath the wings of God, the shadow of his wings. The targum characteristically paraphrases these terms to avoid corporeality.<sup>247</sup>

Besides the discussion of Ruth’s *hesed*, the targum to Ruth 1:20 related this morality to Boaz. It displayed that Boaz had showed *hesed* to the living and to the dead by his special kindness to Ruth. He was the redeemer. Finally, human *hesed* to the living and to the dead had already been mentioned in the scroll in Naomi’s blessing of her daughters-in-law. It was apparently considered self-evident that Boaz, the male counterpart of Ruth, was the one “who had not failed in his kindness to the living or to the dead.”<sup>248</sup>

Leila Leah Bronner commented that the sages emphasized those qualities (modesty, obedience, devotion to wifely and maternal duties) that will bolster Ruth’s fitness as an ancestress of David and also as an ideal of feminine behavior.<sup>249</sup> Thus, in addition to the loyalty, steadfastness, *Hesed* and obedience that she displays in the biblical text, they add beauty, royal lineage, and a highly exaggerated modesty. Ruth is the paragon of all those virtues the sages believed a woman ought to embody. Ruth’s role is to be a faithful, modest daughter-in-law and by remarrying and bearing a male child, to continue the male line of her deceased husband.

Chapter three on the book of Ruth showed the importance of morality. Jacob Neusner commented that there is a correspondence between one’s virtue and one’s reward. Jacob Neusner shows that it is on the merit of “and he measured

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JSOT Press, 1994), 24

<sup>246</sup> The function of Israel’s exile is the attraction of proselytes, whereby they are saved from Gehinnom. If Israel, which is involuntarily in exile is saved, the proselyte who opts for exile is certainly saved. Since Ruth opted for the hardships of exile, Boaz assured her that she would not experience Gehinnom again. See Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 76-7

<sup>247</sup> Idem, 78

<sup>248</sup> Idem, 84

<sup>249</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, “The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal” in *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 80

out six measures of barley and laid it upon her” that six righteous persons came forth from him, and each one of them had six virtues.<sup>250</sup> These are David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Daniel, and the royal Messiah.

Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 3:15 declared that:

*[Supply: “So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and laid it upon her”:]*

Said R. Judah b. R. Simon, “It is on the merit “and he measured out six measures of barley and laid it upon her’ that six righteous persons came forth from him, and each one of them had six virtues.

“[These are] David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Daniel, and the royal Messiah:

“David: “Skillful in playing and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, prudent in affairs, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him” (1 Sam. 16:18).

“Hezekiah: “That the government may be increased and of peace there be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it, through justice and through righteousness” (Is. 9:6). “And his name is called wonderful, counselor, mighty, strong, everlasting father, prince of peace” (Is. 9:5).”

Some say, “Be increased” is written with a closed M.”

*[Reverting to E:]* “Josiah: “For he shall be as a tree planted by waters, that spreads out its roots by the river” (Jer. 17:8).

“Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: “Youths in whom there was no blemish but fair to look on, and skilful in all wisdom, and skilful in knowledge, and discerning in thought, and such as had ability” (Dan. 1:4)

“Daniel: “A surpassing spirit, and knowledge and understanding, interpreting of dreams and declaring of riddles and loosing of knots were found in the same Daniel” (Dan. 5:12).

“...and the royal Messiah: “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding” (Is. 11:2).”<sup>251</sup>

Jacob Neusner illustrated that the six messianic figures being given verses that endow each with six virtuous traits.<sup>252</sup>

It is in marriage and motherhood that Ruth fulfills her role. By her dedication to these, the feminine functions and values are respected and venerated by the

<sup>250</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 32

<sup>251</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 168-9

<sup>252</sup> Idem, 169

sages. She wins their approval and esteem. They compare her to the matriarchs who built the house of Israel, whose merit also derives almost entirely from their fulfillment of the maternal role. Leila Leah Bronner concluded that the sages accord great respect to the exemplary women of the Bible more than they ever show toward any actual women of their own way.<sup>253</sup> As a whole, Ruth Rabbah and Targum to Ruth emphasized some traditional virtues, which were admired by the Jewish community. They provided a model for Israel to learn from its behavior and morality.

### **(c) Teaching Morality and Modeling as the Role of Scribes**

#### **(i) The role of scribes**

The social situation indeed played a significant role in shaping Jewish exegesis. The origin of the stratification of Jewish society in this period was attributed to the events from the early days of the return from Babylonia in the 5-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Tribal ancestry almost officially disappeared. Without any monarchy, the society re-divided itself into Priests, scribes, Levites, Israelites, and proselytes and other peoples lacking proper genealogy. Among the groups, the scribes were the exegetical commentators for upholding traditional values and norms for the Israel community.

The origin of scribes started from the Second Temple Period.<sup>254</sup> It was the destruction of the Temple that set the stage for the destruction of the social order. After the destruction of the Temple, the priests lost their key role in society and eventually also their position as the leading stratum in society.<sup>255</sup> This descent of the person of the Priest was, facilitated by the sages of the Mishna, whose sanctioning of their innovations with the stamp of oral transmission brought forth new rulings, such as that there does not need to be a Priest to declare a leper pure or impure<sup>256</sup>. The scribes began to gain importance in society.

Moreover the scribes had their own priorities in society, based not on ancestry

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<sup>253</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal*, 80

<sup>254</sup> A thorough discussion is included in chapter two, especially referring to Martin Hengel's and Louis Ginzberg's point of view.

<sup>255</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to First Century of Judaism: Jewish religion and history in the Second Temple Period* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 31

<sup>256</sup> m. Negaim 3:1

but rather on excellence in knowledge of the Torah.<sup>257</sup> During the time that the new stratification was built and sustained, a new phenomenon was also on the rise: sectarianism.<sup>258</sup> The sects were different from one another particularly with regard to religious belief, daily calendar and rules of conduct (especially of purity). With their strict laws in the midst of the Romans, the sects degenerated with time, leaving very few traces in normative Jewish circles. Thus, Rabbinic rule in Antiquity set the trend of Jewish life in many aspects of the Jewish law and thought. Their influence was long lasting afterwards as well.

The duty of scribes is to handle, copy<sup>259</sup>, enrich and uphold the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>260</sup> Bruce Norman believed that Jewish commentary involved a never ending process<sup>261</sup> because this inscribed commentary including the numerous transformations of the *traditum* was the product of various scribes or schools seeking to preserve and contemporize the ancient word for new generations of readers facing new sets of political and religious challenges for whom the old answers had ceased to be compelling.<sup>262</sup>

Indeed, the role of scribes is mainly to teach. Bruce Norman<sup>263</sup> concluded the work of Fishbane<sup>264</sup>. Fishbane distinguishes three ways in which tradents may affect hermeneutical and rhetorical transformations: spiritualization, nationalization and nomicization. The new composition spiritualizes the old content when, for example, it draws spiritual principles from law or when it engages in the “pneumatic revaluation” of old stories and formulae.<sup>265</sup> Nationalization happens by means of synecdoche (for example, a single legal

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<sup>257</sup> m. Horayot 3:8

<sup>258</sup> The sectarian development is discussed at chapter two, including the apocalyptic group, Pharisees, Sadducees and the wise. Josephus called sectarianism as the ‘fourth philosophy’ of Judaism. The movement won widespread popular support.

<sup>259</sup> The term ‘scribe’ (*grammateus* in the Greek sources) has a wide meaning, similar to our word ‘secretary’. It can mean lowly scribe who keeps simple records and needs little more education than to be read and write. See Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to First Century of Judaism: Jewish religion and history in the Second Temple Period* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 37. However, we don’t adopt such a superficial definition at all.

<sup>260</sup> Refer to the views of Michael Fishbane, Elias Bickerman and Shemaryahu Talmon at page 8-9 of chapter two in the discussion of the work of scribes.

<sup>261</sup> Bruce Norman, *Scripture, Story and Exegesis in the rewritten Bible of Pseudo-Philo* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 37) Sheffield Academic Press, 66

<sup>262</sup> Cf. the apt description offered by A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory* (Notre dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> eds, 1984), 112

<sup>263</sup> Bruce Norman, *Scripture, Story and Exegesis in the rewritten Bible of Pseudo-Philo* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 37) Sheffield Academic Press, 66

<sup>264</sup> See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

<sup>265</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 426

offense represents the nations' sins) and personification (for example, the entire people depicted as a single historical figure). The *traditio*<sup>266</sup> nomicizes the content, when a retold story is infused with "Torahistic" values, precepts or regulations", or when developments in the *traditum* are explained by appealing to certain morals, or a troubling tradition is reworked to suppress undesirable elements.<sup>267</sup>

As Fishbane explains, these creative, exegetical transformations of the ancient *traditum* were intended to effect a social or theological transformation of a contemporary audience, often by combing the predictable and familiar with the unexpected:

*By a sometimes subtle and sometimes forceful conjunction between normative interpretations of laws and dicta and their subversion or reinterpretation, the intended audience is led to perceive a significant disjunction in its present reality; and by confrontation with past prototypes or paradigms a given generation is encouraged to look towards the future for their reiteration or transformation. Indeed, such strategic balancing audience expectation and surprise plays a vital role in many...species of aggadic exegesis...In sum, there is in aggadic exegesis an ongoing interchange between a hermeneutics of continuity and a hermeneutics of challenge and innovation.*<sup>268</sup>

Lester L. Grabbe added one more point that those who were scribes by profession had special training in traditional laws as well.<sup>269</sup> Indeed, it has recently been argued that the scribes of the New Testament are actually the Levites, trained in the law. If so, this could explain the apparent official teaching function of the scribes and also why the priests are so often absent from the Gospel tradition (i.e. they are represented by the 'scribes').

## (ii) The importance of morality and modeling

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<sup>266</sup> The *traditum* is the content of tradition, which is the complex result of a long and varied process of transmission, *traditio*. At each stage in the *traditio*, the *traditum* was adapted, transformed or reinterpreted. See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 6

<sup>267</sup> Idem, 426

<sup>268</sup> Idem, 427-8 See also M. Fishbane, "Torah and Tradition", in D. A. Knight (ed.), *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1977), pp. 275-300 (286). J. A. Sanders's work on the nature of Old Testament prophecy runs parallel to this idea. In J. A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy", in G. W. Coats and B. O. Long (eds), *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testaments Religion and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 21-41(28).

<sup>269</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to First Century of Judaism: Jewish religion and history in the Second Temple Period* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 39



Chapter three paid much attention to the morality of Boaz. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 3:13 declared that:

*Said R. Yose, "There were three who were tempted by their inclination to do evil, but who strengthened themselves against it in each case by taking an oath: Joseph, David, and Boaz.*

*"Joseph: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God" (Gen. 39:9)*

*[Yose continues, citing] R. Hunia in the name of R. Idi: "Does Scripture exhibit defects? What Scripture here says is not, "and sin against the Lord," but "and sin against God."*

*"For he had sworn [in the language of an oath] to his evil inclination, saying, "By God, I will not sin or do this evil."*

*"David: "And David said, "As the Lord lives, no, but the Lord shall smite him" (1 Sam. 26: 10)."*

*"To whom did he take the oath?*

*"R. Eleazar and R. Samuel b. Nahman:*

*"R Eleazar said, "It was to his impulse to do evil."*

*"R. Samuel b. Nahman said, "It was to Abishai b. Zeruiah. He said to him, "As the Lord lives, if you touch him, I swear that I will mix your blood with his."<sup>270</sup>*

The morality of Boaz is emphasized as he can resist any temptation. Those can keep their piety to God are regarded as holy and moral man before God. Boaz's morality is an exemplary figure in royal dynasty and set a model for the learning of the Israel generation.

Ruth Rabbah 3:15 again declared that:

*"And he said, 'Bring the mantle you are wearing':*

*What is written is "bring" in the masculine.*

*This teaches that he was speaking with her in the masculine, so that no one would notice it.*

*"...and hold it out':*

*This teaches that she girded her loins like a male.*

*"...then he went into the city":*

*Should it not have said, "and she went into the city"?*

*How come it says, "then he went..."?*

*It teaches that he went along with her, so that one of the young men should not molest her.<sup>271</sup>*

The above passage using masculine forms underlined the point that there was

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<sup>270</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 163

<sup>271</sup> Idem, 168-9

no sexuality between the two.<sup>272</sup> No sexuality before marriage was an important indicator to show one's morality. On the other hand, Targum to Ruth agreed with Ruth Rabbah. Targum to Ruth 3:15 stated that:

*Then he said, "Bring the scarf which you are wearing and hold it." She held it, and he measured out six seahs of barley and put them on it. Strength and power were given to her from before the Lord to carry them, and immediately it was said to her prophetically that there would descend from her six of the most righteous men of all time, each of whom would be blessed with six blessings: David, Daniel and his companions, and the king Messiah.<sup>273</sup> Then Boaz went to the town.<sup>274</sup>*

Etan Levine realizes that the underlying principle being propounded is the doctrine of "the Merit of the fathers", which bestows accrued merit upon descendants. The targum dramatizes the recurrence of righteous descendants as constituting the reward for righteousness.<sup>275</sup>

The importance of morality and modeling is sharply intensified in Judaism. The moral behavior and piety of Boaz in the ancient Jewish interpretation was rooted in a social context. During the first two centuries CE, charismatic types who claimed miraculous powers played little role in rabbinism. By the middle of the third century, that picture had changed, and miracle powers became a conventional component in the rabbinical dossier. This shift corresponds to a general development among religious virtuosi in the late Roman world. The third century is witness to the emergence of a class of charismatic individuals and holy men.<sup>276</sup> In late antique Christianity and paganism this claim was accompanied by the vigorous expression of individuality and is recounted in individual's lives, in the literary portraiture of hagiography.

This difference, and rabbinism's failure to adopt the pagan and Christian models to portray itself in terms of great and powerful individuals, is partly due to the social system sketched above. But it also a consequence of the distinctly intellectual character of the rabbinic movement having been initially totally

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<sup>272</sup> *Idem*, 169

<sup>273</sup> The same six descendants, Daniel's companions being specified individually by name, are mentioned in *b. San.* 93b and in *Num. R.* 13:1, where they are descendants of Nahshon.

<sup>274</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 28

<sup>275</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 96

<sup>276</sup> Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge and London, 1978)

dependent on his learning. Rabbinical status derived not from the exercise of mysterious and arbitrary divine favor, but from the result of intellectual labor. William Scott Green pointed out that the rabbis of antiquity constituted a recognized group of intellectual specialists in ancient Jewish society. But despite their claims to control Israel's destiny, they lacked the political power to direct their society or to enforce the myriad halakot and scriptural interpretations they believed held the key to society's redemption.<sup>277</sup> In their literature we meet the fiction of an idealized model of rabbinic behavior, a culturally determined construction of how rabbinic society ought to operate. Green further added that the search for the rabbis of antiquity, suggests a degree of conformity among the ways rabbis lived with one another, imagined one another, and represented one another in their literature. It leads not into the lives and careers of great men but into a self-absorbed community of intellectuals who competed with each other but also needed each other and strove to maintain at least the illusion of each other's dignity.<sup>278</sup>

Several themes in the Midrashim are related to the life and character of Ruth, which will reveal Ruth possessing the feminine virtues the rabbis want to hold up for emulation. She is regarded as a moral figure for teaching the generation to follow.

Moreover, the depicted morality of a character demonstrates divine justice. God inflicts punishment in this world but rewards the righteous in the world to come. Jacob Neusner concluded that this point is fully exposed in the theology of the gentiles and Israel, the one getting their reward in this world and punishment in the world to come, the other treated in the opposite way.<sup>279</sup>

#### 4.4.6 Levirate marriage

The levirate laws of the Bible<sup>280</sup> specify that it is the brother(s) of the deceased who must levirate marry a childless widow "to perpetuate the name of the dead" In Ruth, a fixed sequence and legal procedure is involved<sup>281</sup>, indicating that the responsibility involved the entire clan. Furthermore, the use of the

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<sup>277</sup> William Scott Green, *History Fabricated: The Social Uses of Narratives in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* (AAR Studies in Religion, 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 155

<sup>278</sup> *Idem*, 156

<sup>279</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 51

<sup>280</sup> See Dt. 25:5-10

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Rt. 2:20; 3:12

formula “to perpetuate the name of the dead”<sup>282</sup> and the consideration of the child as the son of the deceased<sup>283</sup> indicate levirate marriage. And the extant Assyrian and Hittite laws reveal the extension of levirate responsibility to include surviving kinsman. Etan Levine pointed out that however, the specification “brother” in the Deuteronomic law and the fact that nowhere does the Book of Ruth use the term “levir” or “levirate: argue contrarily.”<sup>284</sup>

Targum To Ruth 1:8 declared that:

*Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return, each to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal faithfully with you as you have dealt with your husbands who are dead, in that you have refused to take husbands after their death, and with me, in that you have sustained and supported me.”*<sup>285</sup>

The targum’s halakic position is that the widows were obligated and entitled to levirate marriage in Judah.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, the Targum to Ruth 1:11 uphold the tradition of levirate marriage. It said that,

*Naomi said, “Go back, my daughters, why would you go with me? Have I yet children in my womb who may be husband to you?”*<sup>287</sup>

This verse is cited both by Rabbanites and sectarians in support of their position about levirate marriage.<sup>288</sup> On the contrary, Ruth Rabbah did not mention the levirate marriage. Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 4:5 is the central verse of describing levirate marriage and stated that:

*“Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also buying Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the dead, in order to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance”:*

*What is written is [not you buy but] I have brought.”*

*This is in line with what R. Samuel b. R. Nahman said: “He was dumb as to words of the Torah.*

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<sup>282</sup> Rt. 4:5, 10; cf.2:10

<sup>283</sup> Rt. 4:6; cf. 4:17

<sup>284</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 100

<sup>285</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 19

<sup>286</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 51

<sup>287</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 20

<sup>288</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 53

*He thought, "The ancients [Mahlon and Chilion] died only because they took them as wives. Shall I go and take her as a wife? God forbid that I take her for a wife! I am not going to disqualify my seed, I will not disqualify my children."*

*"But he did not know that the law had been innovated: 'A male Ammonite' but not 'a female Ammonite,' 'a male Moabite' but not 'a female Moabite' [is subject to prohibition. Hence it was now legal to marry Ruth.]"<sup>289</sup>*

Ruth Rabbah paid much emphasis on the royal position and morality of Ruth, who is a linkage in David. It aims at upholding the position of Ruth. This was included in previous discussion. However, levirate marriage seems to violate this intention. No description on this type of marriage is based on the concern of Jewish commentators. With the verses quoted above, we go over familiar ground about Jewish exegesis.

The term "levir" or levirate" never appears in the Hebrew Scroll of Ruth and rabbinic tradition is unanimous is not regarding levirate marriages as relevant to Ruth. This is because Boaz is simply a redeemer, a kinsman who opted to marry Ruth as an act of charity, thereby perpetuating the name of the deceased Mahlon, and in the process supporting Ruth and Naomi. He is not a levirate, legally obligated to take the woman as a surrogate for the deceased, and subject to public shaming should he renounce his responsibility.

Indeed, with the same verse, however, targum to Ruth 4:5 mentioned the levirate marriage and declared that:

*Boaz said, "On the day that you buy the field from the hand of Naomi and from the hand of Ruth the Moabite, wife of the deceased, you are obliged to redeem<sup>290</sup> and required to act as her brother-in-law and to marry her<sup>291</sup> in order to raise up the name of the deceased upon his inheritance."<sup>292</sup>*

We may conclude that the targum plays an active role in the interpretation of

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<sup>289</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 178

<sup>290</sup> MT: "I have acquired" (Kethibh) or "you have acquired" (Qere).

<sup>291</sup> The Targum is here at odds with Rabbinic exegesis, which did not consider Ruth's second marriage to be a case of levirate marriage. The Karaites, however, who interpreted the levirate law of Deut. 25:5 as applying not to an actual brother but to a more distant relative, found in Ruth an example of the practice exactly as they understood it.

<sup>292</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 30

levirate marriage. Contrary with Ruth Rabbah, targum is the translation of Scripture. It tries hard to harmonize the discrepancies between the Scripture and translation because the former has to record the levirate marriage. Even in the concept of marriage, targum covers a wide range of description on this topic in the following.

The Targum to Ruth 1:4 declared that:

*They transgressed against the decree of the Memra of the Lord and they took for themselves foreign wives from the daughters of Moab. The name of one was Orpah and the name of the second was Ruth, the daughter of Eglon, king of Moab and they dwelt there for about ten years.*<sup>293</sup>

According to the earliest exegetical texts, the sons of Elimelech did not convert their wives to Judaism because they thought that the biblical prohibition against intermarriage with Moab<sup>294</sup> applied to women even after conversion.

Targum to Ruth 1:5 again confirmed the prohibition of intermarriage. Etan Levine thought that the transgression referred to involves the biblical prohibition specifying Moab, which the targum expands into “foreign peoples.” Attributing the dictum to the “Memra of the Lord” rather than to “the Torah implies a revelation warning the brothers against intermarriage.<sup>295</sup> For having married “unclean” women, they were punished by sleeping in “unclean” soil. The targum stresses the sinfulness of intermarriage.<sup>296</sup>

Since their husbands neither proselytized nor immersed them ritually, they remained spiritual Moabitesses.<sup>297</sup> Later sources maintain that they did convert, and that Mahlon, and Chilion were killed (1:5) as punishment for their father’s avarice. The attitude of the targum is conveyed by its use of the verb, “took” which would signify legitimate marriage.<sup>298</sup>

The Targum to Ruth 1:13 declared that:

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<sup>293</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 19

<sup>294</sup> Dt. 23:4

<sup>295</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 49

<sup>296</sup> Idem

<sup>297</sup> Similarly, Karaite tradition maintains that they did not convert to the faith of Israel, since the text (v. 15) reads, “back to her people and to her Gods.”

<sup>298</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 48

*“Would you wait for them until they grew up, as a woman who waits for a minor brother-in-law to take her as a husband? Would you remain tied on their account, so that you would not be married to a man? Please, my daughters, do not embitter my soul, for it is more bitter to me than you, for the blow from before the Lord has gone out against me.”<sup>299</sup>*

That an unborn brother or half-brother, i.e., a mother’s son is a potential levir violates rabbinic law.<sup>300</sup> The targum reinforces this contradiction by explicitly adding “as a woman who waits for a minor brother-in-law (*levir* or *levirate*) to take her as a husband.” In distinction to the Hebrew Book of Ruth which never mentions *levir* or *levirate*, and in distinction to talmudic literature which never mentions levirate marriage in regard to the Book of Ruth, the targum repeatedly uses these terms to describe Ruth’s marriage. Etan Levine believed that since the targum elsewhere uses the term juridically, it may not here be dismissed as a rhetorical reduction by Naomi.<sup>301</sup>

However, the targum repeatedly introduces the concept. Instead of its being a redemptive marriage linked to the voluntaristic redemption of Elimelech’s inheritance, the targum includes the acquisition of the field as part of the juridical transaction of a levirate marriage. Etan Levine concluded that this extends the biblical definition of ‘levir’ from “brother” to kinsman,” an exegesis in accordance with sectarian practice<sup>302</sup> but manifestly opposed to rabbinic tradition.<sup>303</sup>

Chapter three on the Targum to Ruth concluded the principle of levirate marriage. Targum to Ruth 3:10 declared that:

*He said, “May you be blessed from before the Lord, my daughter. You have made your latter good deed better than your former one, the former being that you became a proselyte and the latter that you have made yourself as a woman who waits for a little brother-in-law until the time that he is grown up, in that you have not gone after young men to commit fornication with*

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<sup>299</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, “The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth”, in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 20

<sup>300</sup> See commentaries of Rashi for juridical summation.

<sup>301</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 55

<sup>302</sup> According to Karaite exegesis, the Rabbanites misunderstand the meaning of “brother” (Deut. 25:5). It signifies a fellow Israelite, not a blood brother. The Torah expressly forbids the application of this injunction to brothers by blood. For scripture expressly states, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife...” (Lv 18:16)

<sup>303</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 100-01

*them, whether poor or rich.*<sup>304</sup>

Ruth's deeds recall those events previously recounted in the targum: conversion and behaving as a woman awaiting a minor levir. Although the Hebrew text never refers to levir or levirate marriage, and rabbinic tradition too argues that this is not a levirate marriage, the targum uses it consistently.<sup>305</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

The above illustration of Jewish exegesis on the book of Ruth in terms of the social and cultural context of the interpreters paves the way for the compared study of patristic literature in a next chapter. It proves that the pre-set belief system of the interpreters actually dictated their commentaries. Ruth, as a controversial figure because of her foreign originality, is beautifully drawn under the methods of Jewish exegesis. The rabbis intended to write about Ruth positively as she was the great grandmother of King David. Upholding the position of Ruth in Israel's community was the top priority of the sages' concern. So, they never criticized that she is a Moabite. They just harmonize Ruth as a foreigner by emphasizing the power of Torah. They try to excuse her being foreign because of their pre-determinant opinion.

Moreover, the social and cultural context imposed influence on the exegetical work. There is no king and law order at that age, from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. It is the duty for rabbis to uphold and consolidate the Davidic line of dynasty. God is still in control of the world through the setting up of kingship on the world through the Torah. Ruth, as an ancestress of David, should be linked up to royal dynasty and fully explained for teaching and edification of the Jewish generation.

The indication of this exegetical trend brings us to the fathers of the early church who had the predetermined idea that Ruth was beautiful and a moral example. In their interpretation they wanted to emphasize Ruth's connection to Jesus, especially in the actual social and religious situations, which seem unstable and controversial in the early development of Christian church history. It seems to be true to say that Jesus' position was to be built up and

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<sup>304</sup> D. R. G. Beattie, "The Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth", in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 27

<sup>305</sup> Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 90



strengthened at that stage. This will be discussed in chapter five: patristic literature.

## Chapter Five

### The Patristic Literature

#### 5.1 Introduction

The study of the development of patristic exegesis follows the same approach used for studying early Jewish interpretation in the previous chapter. We first make a delineation of patristic literature. Once the period of time has been decided, the historical, political and social influence on patristic literature is indicated. This may be used to study the influence imposed on commentators of the early Christian church. There was a long tradition of exegetical trends formed during this period. Certain types of patristic exegetical methods were employed by commentators to interpret the book of Ruth.

The standard period of the patristic interpretation should refer to the “*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*”, which places the Patristic Age between the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> That period is full of philosophical innovation and theological development. We may describe this period as the meeting of the Old with the New. The Christian Patristic commentators transformed old problems into new ones, in such a way as to turn the subject in fresh directions. This period of interpretation is continuous, consistent and parallel with early Jewish exegesis. As with Jewish exegesis, we also need to investigate the socio-political and cultural environment of this literature, such as Hellenism, Stoicism and Platonism that affected the patristic interpretation of the book of Ruth in the last part of this chapter.

#### 5.2 The age of hermeneutics in early Christian exegesis

##### 5.2.1 Introduction

The coming of the Christian Church corresponds with some previous religious traditions that interacted with the newly established system of interpretation within the early Christian church. The age of hermeneutics illustrated the dynamics of the merge of old and new values. Moises Silva echoed this view. Christians were faced with the need to confront Greek culture. Philo appeared

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<sup>1</sup> F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 265

to have provided a way for doing this in an intellectually responsible way. Origen in particular made the allegorical method a central feature of his exegesis and his theology and his influence was to be felt for many centuries.<sup>2</sup>

The time delineation of the Christian church coincides with my previous study of early Jewish interpretation in chapter two. These two outstanding schools, Jewish exegesis and patristic interpretation, shared the same historical and cultural background. Julius Scott pointed out these shared circumstances. In his work *Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, he indicates that the two schools of interpretation have their roots in the historical analysis at the beginning of the Second Temple Period at 516.<sup>3</sup> We have already discussed several historical trends in chapter two on early Jewish exegesis. There are still some more important backgrounds and influences that have to be noted for this period of Christian exegesis. One of them is the influence of the Hellenistic period (333 - 64 BCE).<sup>4</sup> The term "Hellenism" refers to the Greek civilization brought about by Alexander the Great. The other political event refers to the turbulent political time of the Hasmonean (Maccabean) that started in 164 BCE. These two events imposed great influence on the political and cultural background of early Christian exegesis.

Charles Kannengiesser made a good contribution to the study of patristic exegesis indicating it as the age of hermeneutics. He believed that patristic exegesis was at the very core of the cultural legacy of the early church.<sup>5</sup> It was due to generations of believers in the church identifying themselves with the divine revelation received from the Bible. These believers initiated a rare process in the history of hermeneutics. They took over an intrinsically exclusivist body of sacred writings, proper to a particular religious tradition and appropriated it to their own tradition, which is born out of the former one but open to a spiritual self-definition which rejected proper and genuine exclusivism. Kannengiesser further elaborated that the inner dynamic of religious faith expressed in the early church was also strong enough to overcome the artifices of syncretism, when Christian believers spoke out against their pagan religious

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<sup>2</sup> Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible*, 46

<sup>3</sup> Julius Scott, *Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), 73-91

<sup>4</sup> The period lying between 333 and 64 BCE was based on the fact that Alexander conquered the world in 333 BCE and the Hellenism was started. Then in 64 BCE the Romans conquered Palestine and the Roman period started.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 13

backgrounds. The hermeneutical circle of early Christianity was complete. Following the Bible the converts to Christianity dared to identify themselves as “Christian”. They could do so only as Christians, as the church community which welcomed them claimed to be nothing else but the concrete and collective embodiment of the scriptural message. For that reason, Scripture never failed to satisfy the needs of early Christians responding to their expectations.<sup>6</sup>

We next discuss the age of hermeneutics in several relationships, in which the meeting of the old and the new was experienced. This meeting created a vivid age of hermeneutics.

### 5.2.2 Old Testament and Jesus relationships

We start with the discussion of patristic exegesis from the Apostolic Period. Richard Norris explains the origin of the term “Apostolic Fathers”. The expression “Apostolic fathers” corresponds to an idea of seventeenth century origin. It originated as the label for a set of writings, at that stage in the process of being recovered and edited, whose authors, though mere “fathers” and not apostles, were taken to have been close to the figures of apostolic authority. Their writings were therefore both associated and contrasted with those contained in the New Testament, since the latter were assumed to have been written either by the apostles themselves or by first-generation contemporaries and disciples of theirs.<sup>7</sup> With regard to Christian interpretation in the Apostolic Period, scholars emphasized the relationship between the Jewish tradition and Jesus’ teaching. Israel’s Scriptures, the TaNaK (Old Testament), testified to the Jewish practice of interpreting and incorporating new community circumstances within an existing understanding of God. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson further pointed out that these circumstances often presented theological challenges to previous thinking about God and God’s relationship to the community of faith.<sup>8</sup> In sum, the early church faced the exegetical challenge already provided to them in Israel’s Scriptures.

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<sup>6</sup> Idem

<sup>7</sup> Richard A. Norris, JR. “The apostolic and sub-apostolic writings: the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11

<sup>8</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation* Volume 1: The Ancient Period, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 37

The period of apostolic exegesis is one of blending the Old with the New. Alan Hauser and Duane Watson commented that the use of Israel's Scriptures by the early Christian church and the writers of the New Testament is both a continuation of the reinterpretation and adaptation of the Jewish Scriptures in the Jewish community as well as a significant departure from it that sends interpretation into new directions.<sup>9</sup> The continuity is grounded in the fact that the early Christians interpreted their Scriptures using traditional Jewish methods. They did not understand themselves to be forming a new religion.

On the other hand scholars agree that early Christians interpreted the Jewish Scriptures in a new way due to their relationship to Jesus himself.<sup>10</sup> It was because the authority of the apostles came from their knowing Jesus, who appointed them as apostles during Jesus' life. Therefore, the exegetical approach of the apostles was mainly Jesus-oriented.

At this stage, the Christian commentators declared that the whole of the Old Testament pointed to him. Jesus as a central focus dominated the direction of the patristic exegesis. He embodied the redemptive destiny of Israel, and in the community of those who belong to him that status and destiny was fulfilled. For Jesus, the key to understanding the Old Testament was located in his own life and work, for he saw everything as pointed to himself. The New Testament writers following the pattern of Jesus, interpreted the Old Testament as a whole and its parts as a witness to Christ.

Scholars call this new method "a Christological reading", meaning that Jesus read the Old Testament in light of himself. In other words, Jesus understood the Old Testament christologically. David S. Dockery laid emphasis on the role of Jesus in the early church in that "it is from him that the church derives its identification of Jesus with Israel."<sup>11</sup> We can agree with C. K. Barrett's words.

*"The gospel story as a whole differs so markedly from first-century interpretation of the Old Testament that it is impossible to believe that it originated simply in meditations of prophecy; it originated in the career of Jesus of Nazareth."*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Idem, 38; See also Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 8-16

<sup>10</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 25

<sup>11</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 24

<sup>12</sup> Quoted at David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary*

On the other hand, a significant departure from the traditional interpretation of Israel's Scriptures could be expected in the early church because the church was guided by a new set of convictions. Scholars agree that the kingdom of God was inaugurated as a spiritual rather than a political kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Old Testament passages took on christological meaning, often through the use of typology. This exegetical approach will be discussed later. The Old Testament was interpreted in light of the understanding that Jesus was the Messiah who had inaugurated the kingdom of God. The early Christian use of the Scriptures of Israel is extensive. Israel's Scriptures were not utilized to create a systematic commentary as in Jewish writings. Rather Alan Hauser and Duane Watson commented that they were utilized for quotations, allusion, and echoes of Christian themes and patterns. Several interpretive methods were indeed borrowed from Judaism. The Old Testament was interpreted according to its plain or literal meaning, especially on ethical issues.<sup>14</sup> This exegetical approach is dominant in patristic circles of interpretation.

Jesus himself quoted several passages from books that are not part of the Torah, yet he granted them legal force. Jesus was doing no more than follow the Jewish and rabbinic view, which saw Scripture as Law and the prophets as interpreters of the Law. Ultimately, it is the problem of interpreting some obsolete laws which therefore needed an interpretation with an authority on a par with the Law itself to give them new legal force and validity. Julio Trebolle Barrera pointed out that Jesus was different from the rabbis since when interpreting the laws he referred directly to the will of God, superior to the Law itself.<sup>15</sup>

We may say that the Christological approach is a kind of charismatic exegesis in the early church development. E. Earle Ellis is one of the pioneers in this area of investigation. Jesus is said to have expounded the Old Testament with an authority that in the Gospels is related to his claim that He possessed the prophetic Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, he attributes the response to his 'kingdom of God'

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*Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 26

<sup>13</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963) 33; Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, "Introduction and Overview" in *A History of Biblical Interpretation* Volume 1: The Ancient Period, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 38

<sup>14</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, *Introduction and Overview*, 38

<sup>15</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 518

<sup>16</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light*

message and to his messianic signs, both of which are rooted in the interpretation of Old Testament promises, to the fact that God revealed it to some and hid it from others.<sup>17</sup>

There is then a paradox in Jesus' biblical exposition. He follows exegetical methods that were current in Judaism and regards them as a useful means to expound the biblical passages. However, E. Earle Ellis commented that he used it in different ways. Jesus recognizes that the meaning of Scripture and even his exposition remains hidden from many and, at least in the latter part of his ministry, he seems deliberately to veil the presentation of his message. The acceptance of his exposition and of his teaching generally, depends on his view of a divine opening of the minds of the hearers.<sup>18</sup>

### 5.2.3 Old Testament and New Testament relationship

History is accessible only through tradition in the view of Ernst Käsemann.<sup>19</sup> Tradition must be selected and interpreted. History is therefore accessible only through tradition and meaningful solely through interpretation. To point out that the New Testament documents are characterized by interpreted traditions is to observe that we have access to the way the gospel and pre-gospel traditions were meaningful to those who passed on those traditions.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> century was the century of the formation of the collection of books, which comprises the New Testament. It seems that the impetus to form the collection of books which made up the New Testament, did not only come from the gospels being put into writing, but rather from the edition of the Acts of the Apostles. Julio Trebolle Barrera commented that in this period, the sacred book of the Christians continued to be the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup> This situation began to change in the period when the most recent book to become part of the New Testament was written: the pseudonymous letter known as Second Peter which, alludes to the rest of Scriptures (3:16), referring to the Pauline letters, including the first letter to Timothy and probably to the gospel of Mark. From that moment

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*of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 117

<sup>17</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 117

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, 118

<sup>19</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989), 15

<sup>20</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 514

on Christianity experienced a double conflict according to Julio Trebolle Barrera's research. The church had to decide whether to accept or to reject the OT legacy, and whether to accept or reject the second *praeparatio evangelica*, the world of ideas and institutions of Greek and Roman culture, which acted as a channel to express and extend the new faith.<sup>21</sup>

With the relationship between Christological exegesis and Old Testament in mind, James H. Charlesworth commented that "Jesus is the power paradigm for all the New Testament writers."<sup>22</sup> We must acknowledge that New Testament theology develops out of the tension between tradition and addition. Robert Grant has also shared the same view and observed the way in which the New Testament writers interpreted the scripture. The apostle Paul developed his Christocentric interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Since Paul was the main exegete of Jesus' life and work and really wrote a lot of epistles, he has been a representative of New Testament's writers. In Paul's case the particular task of his ministry was to make known the mystery of the gospel, namely, the inclusion of the Gentile in eschatological Israel. This purpose of God is a divine mystery or wisdom that was not made known and indeed was hidden for ages but is now revealed, made known and manifest. It is revealed especially in the writings of Paul (and other pneumatics),<sup>24</sup> in his preaching 'by the Spirit'<sup>25</sup> and in his messianic/eschatological exposition of Scripture. Such a pneumatic interpreter of the word of God is best exemplified by Paul himself.

Other epistles also witness the presence of this approach of interpretation. Robert M. Grant regarded the book of Hebrews as a detailed analysis of the Christo-centric meaning of the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup> The Law had only a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things.<sup>27</sup> The epistle to the Hebrews played an important role in the history of exegesis. It encouraged the fancifulness of allegorists and others who sought for hidden meanings in the Old Testament. At the same time it achieved more positive results. Robert Grant even singled out the supremacy of this exegetical approach and

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<sup>21</sup> Idem

<sup>22</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989), 10

<sup>23</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 17-27

<sup>24</sup> Rom 16:26

<sup>25</sup> See the explanation of "in wisdom" at Eph 3:3, 5; cf. Col 1:28.

<sup>26</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 33

<sup>27</sup> Heb. 10:1



commented that:

*“Without the typological method it would have been almost impossible for the early church to retain its grasp on the Old Testament.”<sup>28</sup>*

One of the perspectives views the typological method is that it is based on the presupposition that the whole Old Testament directs one beyond itself for its interpretation. Just as the prophets made predictions, so the other Old Testament writers wrote what they did with a view to the future. Obviously there was some justification for this presupposition. The Old Testament writers did not record past events because the past events had present significance and future significance as well. Robert Grant insisted that they believed that the God who was working in their own times and would work in the times to come was the same God who had worked hitherto. They had what we might call, an “existential concern” with the history of God’s acts.<sup>29</sup> Christian exegetes, believing that the God of the Old Testament was the Father of Jesus who had raised him from the dead, could not fail to regard God’s working as continuous and consistent. They therefore regarded the events described in the Old Testament as being of similar type as those in the New Testament and therefore as pre-figurations of the events in the life of Jesus and of his church.<sup>30</sup>

James H. Charlesworth illustrated well the concept of *kerygma* with regard to the concern of New Testament writers. It is focused on the proclamation that God had raised the crucified one. Preaching was the force that created the Christian communities.<sup>31</sup> Teaching (didache) and tradition about whom the one crucified one was, help to provide a background and disclose a process that explains the production of the Gospels. Hence, the Jesus traditions in the Gospels are the result of preaching, teaching and even conflicts (polemics) with other Jews.

On the other hand, there is another interpretative approach common to the New Testament. It is the use of Israel’s Scriptures in midrash.<sup>32</sup> We also did a

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<sup>28</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 33

<sup>29</sup> Idem, 37

<sup>30</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 37

<sup>31</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989), 12

<sup>32</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation* Volume 1: The Ancient Period, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson

thorough study of this early Jewish interpretation in the previous chapter.<sup>33</sup> Midrash assumes that all the words and passages of Scripture are of equal weight and can be used to interpret one another because they all derive from the mind of God. This provided the base for the comparison between these two exegetical schools in the same period of time.

#### 5.2.4 Old Testament and the Church relationship

Robert Grant pointed out the dynamic relationship between Old Testament and the Christian church. It remains true that the proper place for the Bible is in the church. The religious community existed before there was any New Testament scripture. It is the environment in which scripture functions. Both church and scripture witness to Christ. This environment often allows a sympathetic understanding of scripture, an insight into its genius.<sup>34</sup> Interpreters are not only responsible for the truth as they see it but also to the Christian community, within whose succession of worshippers they stand and to which they are responsible. Humans are not only rational animals but also worshipping ones.<sup>35</sup> Interpreters of scripture have also to realize that like all Christians they stand not only in the community, which is the church, but also in the general community, the world outside.<sup>36</sup>

James H. Charlesworth reported that the Church ultimately derives from Jesus' conviction and proclamation that in his time God was calling into being a special group of people. This group constituted the small band of faithful who awaited and prepared for God's final act at the end of all normal history and time.<sup>37</sup>

The first Council in the history of the Church (56CE), which took place in Jerusalem, had opted for a compromise solution, which would allow the coexistence of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians from Hellenistic origin. Despite the compromise made, Julio Trebolle Barrera comments that it is not surprising that tensions persisted and that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, a strong movement of rejection of the OT, headed by Marcion ran through the whole

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(Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 39

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter Three "The Midrash".

<sup>34</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 6

<sup>35</sup> Idem

<sup>36</sup> Idem, 7

<sup>37</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989), 17

Church. The Christian canon was finalized towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE.<sup>38</sup>

James H. Charlesworth said that the Gospels and other New Testament documents reflect the needs of the early Christian Church.<sup>39</sup> One of these was a concern to remember faithfully something about the pre-cross Jesus.

Marcion marked the rise of different forces imposing a challenge on the traditional and exegetical trends. To understand Marcion's attitude towards the Old Testament it is necessary to observe that it was based on a thoroughgoing dualism. Marcion endeavored to interpret Pauline thought in the light of his own view that there are two gods: the Demiurg God of the law, who created the world and is the God of the Jews; and the good God, who is the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> Marcion not only rejected the Old Testament for Christians. He insisted on a literal interpretation of it in order to emphasize its crudity. It was not a Christian book, and in his opinion no allegorical exegesis could make it one.<sup>41</sup>

The dynamic of the meeting between the Old and the New strengthened the vivid development of exegetical streams in the period of the early church. Its religious and social background indeed influenced the interpretation in the early church.

Scholars also witnessed the presence of another force. Biblical interpretation in the early church indicates in a remarkable way the Jewish-ness of the earliest Christianity. E. Earle Ellis pointed out an important aspect of exegesis related to the traditional background. He stated that:

*"It followed exegetical methods common to Judaism and drew its perspective and presuppositions from Jewish backgrounds."*<sup>42</sup>

However, he also points out an obvious difference. Early Christian hermeneutics differed from that of other religious parties and theologies in

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<sup>38</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 514

<sup>39</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989), 20

<sup>40</sup> Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 42

<sup>41</sup> Idem, 43

<sup>42</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 121

Judaism. In its Christological exposition of the Scripture it totally focused upon Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>43</sup> This different focus decisively influenced both the perspective from which they expounded the Old Testament and the way in which their presuppositions were brought to bear upon the specific biblical texts.

## 5.3 What is patristic exegesis?

### 5.3.1 Time delineation in correspondence with Jewish exegesis

We may witness that patristic exegesis corresponds with Jewish exegeses since Christianity started. This comparison and correspondence are formulated by the use of Farrar's classification in terms of historical development of interpretation.<sup>44</sup> Though the exact date provided by scholars may vary, the time period is more or less the same. It was at the time interval until middle age, in which it coincides with the one of early Jewish interpretation.

The term "patristic" calls on a very ancient and vigorous inner church tradition at least since the fourth century CE<sup>45</sup>, in which certain former leaders of Christian communities were recognized as *patres*, "Fathers."<sup>46</sup> Charles Kannengiesser pointed out the time delineation of the patristic or early Christian period. The "patristic" era is located in history between the gospel event, of which the New Testament witnesses, and the collapse of the Roman Empire, that is, from the middle/end of the first<sup>47</sup> to the seventh century of the Common Era in the West or to the ninth century in the East.<sup>48</sup> The patristic period is the one in which the fathers of the church established the basic doctrinal framework of Christianity. Gerald Bray related this period with the Ecumenical Council in church history. It may be dated from about 100 CE until at least the Council of Chalcedon (451), after which there was a long period of transition to the middle Ages.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 121

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion of "Farrar's historical approach" in the chapter two, starting from page 20.

<sup>45</sup> There is a time difference between the time when the word *patres* was in vogue and became a common term and the actual time of writings by those later on called *patres*. The word was used since the fourth century but the authors lived since the end of the first century

<sup>46</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 3

<sup>47</sup> Jesus was crucified and resurrected approximately in the third decade. Most of the Gospels were written from the middle towards the end of the first century. After that the patristic fathers came upon the scene.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 3

<sup>49</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 77

Generally the calendar of the church in the West differs from that in the East. The period of the church fathers in the West is said to have ended with the death of St. Isidore, Archbishop of Seville in Spain, in 636. In the Eastern Church (Orthodox Church) the period of the church fathers is said to end with the death of John of Damascus who died around 749.

Thus the period of the church fathers of the Eastern Church lasted for about 100 years longer than the period of the Western church fathers. This delineation of time closely resembles the later rabbinic and Jewish period of interpretation. This is why we can make a comparison of interpretation strategies between them on the book of Ruth in this shared social and cultural framework and context.

The Western Church, concerned chiefly with practical theology and its legal organization, left little space to discussion of hermeneutical problems. The acceptance of the canon of Scripture as rule of faith (*regula fidei*), as expressed in the Trinitarian creed, as well as the financing of the apostolic ministry of bishops entrusted with ensuring orthodox doctrine, led increasingly to a greater development of dogma, leaving exegetical and hermeneutic problems behind.

### 5.3.2 Patristic study of exegesis

Charles Kannengiesser pointed out the difficulty of finding the essence of patristic exegesis. He indicated the difficulties experienced in patristic study. The lack of consensus on patristic hermeneutics among the experts was furthermore compounded by the negative attitude towards this type of exegesis entertained in most circles of biblical scholarship.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the study of the interpretation of Scripture in the earliest Christian centuries, prior to the Western and Byzantine Middle Ages, was relegated to the realm of erudite curiosities, seen as irrelevant for any form of creativity in contemporary thought, and dispensable for serious theology. It was not only ignorance or indifference that constantly slowed the needed theoretical clarification of patristic hermeneutics. It was also sectarian prejudice and confessional apologetics in the field itself.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 4

<sup>51</sup> Idem

Frederic Farrar, one of the scholars dedicated to the study of patristic literature, viewed patristic exegesis in a negative way. Farrar's introduction to patristic interpretation is not encouraging:

*The history of exegesis thus far has been in great measure a history of aberrations. If we turn to the Fathers with the hope that now at last we shall enter the region of unimpeachable methods and certain applications, we shall be disappointed...[Though admittedly one can find much that is valuable in the fathers,] their exegesis in the proper sense of the word [is] complete revision both in its principles and in its details.*<sup>52</sup>

The main culprit behind patristic misinterpretation is of course Origen of Alexandria, who gave respectability to Philo's approach. Farrar had already stated that:

*"It must be said quite plainly and without the least circumlocution that it is absolutely baseless... his exegesis is radically false. It darkens what is simple and fails to explain what is obscure. Origen was hardly successful in improving upon Philo. What Origen regarded as exegetical proofs was nothing but the after-thoughts devised in support of an unexamined tradition. They could not have had a particle of validity for any logical or independent mind."*<sup>53</sup>

Farrar concludes that the very foundations of Origen's "exegetic system are built upon the sand".<sup>54</sup> Even St. Augustine, for all his greatness, made little advance in interpretive method. For Farrar, Augustine's exegesis "is marked by the most glaring defects. Almost as many specimens of prolix puerility and arbitrary perversion can be adduced from his pages as from those of his least predecessors".<sup>55</sup>

Charles Kannengiesser however advanced the value of patristic exegesis in the circle of Christian scholarship. He indicated the changing importance of patristic exegesis. The achievements of men and women in the early church became more and more perceived as exemplifying the social, political, and spiritual behavior of their time.<sup>56</sup>

### 5.3.3 Schools/Sects

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<sup>52</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *History of interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961), 162

<sup>53</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *History of interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961), 153, 191

<sup>54</sup> *Idem*, 201

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, 236

<sup>56</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 5

### **(a) The Alexandrian School: Clement and Origen**

The precursor of the Christian School of Alexandria was Philo the Jew. He rejected the literal and obvious meaning of Scripture in cases where there were expressions unworthy of the divinity, or historical inaccuracies or any other difficulties. It was necessary to resort to allegorical meaning and leave open the possibility of an interpretation allowing many probable senses the text had. Philo's exegetical method, then, was basically apologetic: a correct interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures made them reconcilable with Greek philosophy. The allegorical method, Greek in origin, had its natural and original field of application in the interpretation of the Homeric myths. It was perfect for reconciling an ancient classical tradition, whether Homeric myth or antiquated biblical legislation, to a new situation and a new mentality.<sup>57</sup>

### **(b) The Antioch School: Theodore of Mopsuestia**

Wherever Judaism affected intellectual movements in the Christian Church, the result was a return by Christian exegetes to the literal and historical meaning of Scripture. The school of exegesis that had its centre in the Syrian city of Antioch, is a good example of this approach.<sup>58</sup>

Here the "Eastern" or "Greek" tradition was strongly influenced by Neo-platonic philosophical concepts and a mystical approach to the spiritual life. Another was the "western" or "Latin" tradition, which was shaped by Roman legal concepts, though it also felt the influence of Neoplatonism. This will be examined in a later part of this chapter.

## **5.4 The historical, theological, traditional and socio-cultural background for the formation of Christian / Patristic Literature**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

The early church started from the life and work of Jesus as represented to them by the apostles. The formation of patristic exegesis may be regarded as the preservation of the traditional Jesus' teaching. Therefore, the aim of these

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<sup>57</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 528

<sup>58</sup> Idem, 530

exegetes was to uphold the tradition of Christianity as formed by the followers. They were later called “fathers”. The formation of the early church did not happen on an island. It was, influenced by surrounding cultural, religious and political circumstances.

The first two centuries of Christianity were crucial. It was a period of struggle for survival. It was the crucible in which the basic elements of Christian identity and church organization were forged. John Behr points out what the main task of the Christian church was during this time. Christians had to find ways of explaining their relationship to the Jews and also the broader pagan world, while suffering sporadic persecution from both of these. They also had to learn how to resolve internal differences in matters of teaching, liturgy and calendar, church organization and order.<sup>59</sup>

The patristic period of the early church was vivid and diversified. This was the age of the meeting of the New with the Old. There was a tremendous amount of thought and values affecting patristic interpretation. Scholars commented that the early Christian exegetes had to face challenges to Christianity from many sources, including Greek philosophy,<sup>60</sup> Graeco-Roman and Egyptian religions.<sup>61</sup>

It was necessary for the exegetes to distinguish Christianity from Judaism. The early church had to explain why it rejected Judaism, without abandoning the Jewish Scriptures. Christian exegetes faced the challenge of incorporating the new developing tradition into the old tradition. At one extreme were people such as Marcion, who wanted to reject the Jewish heritage altogether, but found that this was practically impossible. On the other hand were people like Tertullian. For him Christianity was a more thorough going legalism than anything the Jews had attempted. The mainline Christian church could accept neither of these positions, but it had to find a viable interpretation of the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. Gerald Bray even described that this task “*was such a top priority throughout this period that the history of exegesis can very largely be written in terms of it alone.*”<sup>62</sup> He further commented the mission of early

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<sup>59</sup> John Behr, “Social and historical setting” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth edi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Marrou’s introduction in *A History of Education in Antiquity*; R. C. Lilla, Clement of Alexandria: *A Study of Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Harold Idris Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Liverpool: At the University Press, 1954)

<sup>62</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 95



Christian exegetes. It was necessary for them to distinguish Christianity from pagan mystery cults and from Hellenistic philosophy.<sup>63</sup> The following surrounding influences that imposed influence on exegetes of the early church can be indicated:

### 5.4.2 Gnosticism

Gnosticism developed a system well known during the second century CE. Gnostic ideas were around and were gradually put together in various combinations arranged around different organizing principles. Everett Ferguson pointed out the development of Christian exegesis under influence of Gnosticism. Gnosticism had grown up concurrently with Christianity in a similar environment with the two having some interactions during the first century before Gnosticism eventually developed into a separate religion in the second century. This could account for contacts and mutual influences and for Gnosticism's contributions, positive and negative to the development of Christian theology.<sup>64</sup>

Gnosticism is often defined as a cult of secret knowledge. It emphasized knowledge that initiates have and others do not. Many Gnostic groups shared with Christians a rejection of the Laws of Moses and salvation by works. It was their belief that other beings created the material world. The shared belief of a divine mediator is present between God and man, and finally the belief that nothing worldly is of any importance. Only faith in or knowledge of this divine mediator<sup>65</sup> would lead one to salvation and eternal life.

Gnosticism envisaged the world as a series of emanations from the highest One, being the origin of a series of emanations. The lowest emanation was an evil god, the demiurge<sup>66</sup>, who created the material world as a prison for the divine sparks that dwell in human bodies. The Gnostics identified this evil creator with the God of the Old Testament and saw the ministry of Jesus as attempts to liberate humanity from his dominion, by imparting divine secret

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<sup>63</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 95

<sup>64</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 289

<sup>65</sup> 1 Tm 2:5

<sup>66</sup> A Demiurge is an inferior heavenly being, who fashioned the world and humanity. See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 290

wisdom in men. Gnostics like Christians take an allegorical view of the Old Testament.

Gnosticism was regarded as a theological dumping ground for heresies as defined by the main stream Christian Church. Everett Ferguson studied the origins of Gnosticism.<sup>67</sup> According to him it was a process of denial and murder. Christianity and what was called Gnosticism both evolved from common roots in Hellenistic syncretism that followed upon Alexander the Great founding his Empire in the fourth century BCE. This empire stretched from Greece to India and led to the syncretism of many philosophies and religions. It provided a conduit for Eastern religion to move west and Greek philosophy to move east. The birth of Gnosticism occurred from the often ignored period between the decline of the Hellenistic empires and the rise of Rome during the first century BCE. This overlaps with the 300 years between Malachi and Matthew.<sup>68</sup> The Apocrypha gives us more information on what really happened during that time.

The following points are common to at least a great portion of the Gnostic schools and other so called secret organization.<sup>69</sup> With regard to a definite principle of authority, the Spirit is the source and norm of all knowledge. Truth is based upon the revelation by the Spirit. It is the Spirit that decides what is divine or not in the books of the Scripture. While the Old Testament was accepted as the canon by most Christians, it is exposed in these circles to the sharpest criticism and partially to rejection, or to an exclusivistic type of interpretation. It is always what they see as the Spirit's interpretation that has the highest authority. In their case, the Spirit decides as to the acceptation and rejection and the interpretation.

Regarding the doctrine of Christology in these groups, the Savior Christ is seen as a spiritual being sent down from the realm of light above to the earth below in order to reveal divine truth to men and to illuminate their minds. As a divine being He was neither born nor did He die. He was only in outward appearance a man such as we are, only clothing Himself with a human body. His work consisted essentially in imparting higher knowledge and the sacraments.

Referring to soteriology, their view was that redemption is affected by the

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<sup>67</sup> Idem, 288-290

<sup>68</sup> The book of Daniel was written in 167-164 BCE and the actual gap is nearer to 150 years.

<sup>69</sup> See B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1990), 7-8; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco, 1983), 53-272.

liberation of man from the bondage of the lower gods and by the due preparation for his return to his true home above. This liberation is brought about by the imparting of superior wisdom, the removal of man's ignorance regarding his origin, his destiny, the hindrances in the road and the way to overcome them.<sup>70</sup> Thereby the divine element in man, the Spirit, becomes self-conscious. Then the Christian has to prepare himself for his homeward journey. This is done first by the reception of the sacraments and the seals, which will procure him a safe passage through all the hosts of hostile spirits. Next he or she has to get rid of ascetic practices, by the mortification of the flesh, of all that is the work of the demiurge. Occasionally an unbridled license took the place of this asceticism, both alike springing from the same root—dualism.<sup>71</sup> Such is the course of man's redemption, at once intellectual, magical and physical.

Basically, gnostic doctrine is dualistic.<sup>72</sup> Gnostic dualism opposed God the Creator and God the Redeemer, the Old Testament and New Testament respectively. Even in the less radical forms of Gnosticism, the Old Testament Law had a position intermediate between God, the Redeemer and evil. David Dockery also shared this view. The Fathers resorted to deny the Gnostics their right to use Scripture, extolling the virtues of simple faith.<sup>73</sup>

Julio Treballe Barrera warned that the mission of the exegete is to prevent early Christianity from fading away into the world of mystery religion and a-historical mysticism or perhaps falling into a philosophy bereft of all reference to time.<sup>74</sup> Basically, the nature of exegesis during that period was homiletical in an effort to uphold its own traditional belief. As a result there was an intense interaction and friction between Gnosticism and the church fathers. This phenomenon is underlined by a vivid but contrasting exegetical approach to the religion and culture of that time.

The main stream church and the patristic fathers developed their answer to heresies in a comprehensive hermeneutical system. This system, stated by Dockery, was to retain the rule of faith as well as both Testaments of the biblical

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<sup>70</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 290

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, 291

<sup>72</sup> Hans Jonas, *Gnostic Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Boston, 1963), 42-47

<sup>73</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 80

<sup>74</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 518

canon while simultaneously seeking to meet the challenges raised by the Gnostics.<sup>75</sup> In reaction to the arbitrary nature of Gnostic exegesis, Irenaeus, one of the church fathers, shows no sensitivity at all for allegorical interpretation based on the symbolism of numbers and etymologies. Against the Gnostics, Irenaeus used the allegorical method to interpret the Old Testament christologically and so be able to link the Old Testament and the New Testament against the division defended by the Gnostics.<sup>76</sup>

Irenaeus fought against the Gnostics in the second book of his work *Against the Heresies*. Irenaeus shows that they have lapsed back into heathen pluralism with their exegetical methods. Their gnosis by its very nature operates through mythological hypostatisations and objectifying modes of thought that are projecting upon God human forms and feelings, and human, mental, psychological and even physiological processes. Such people, Irenaeus insists, will be compelled continually to find out new types of images and will never be able to fix their mind on the one and true God. T. F. Torrance commented that they were being indeed elated in their own assumptions, but in reality turning away from the true God.<sup>77</sup>

Gnosticism operates through allegorical variations upon biblical texts and themes. This can be called allegorizing in reverse of the biblical texts and themes and the biblical accounts of events in the life of the Lord and other New Testament figures. Moreover, the sayings and parables that are taken from the Scriptures here are reinterpreted as allegorical presentations of mythical *aeons* that crowd the intermediate realm between the incomprehensible God and the material world.<sup>78</sup> Thomas Torrance commented that in this way the Gnostics brought to the Scriptures their own preconceived framework of hypotheses and quarried at random from biblical passages, forming them into strange new patterns of their own in order to find support for their notions.<sup>79</sup>

Gnostic type of interpretations could not be regarded as compatible with traditional Christian exegesis. First of all, their interpretations were not

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<sup>75</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 80

<sup>76</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 517

<sup>77</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 32

<sup>78</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 294

<sup>79</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 32

Christocentric. To the Gnostics, Christ was at best the means to an end, and at worst irrelevant. He was not the end in himself. Second, Gerald Bray commented that they forged a radical division between creation and redemption, which the Christian gospel held together in the person of Christ. This is the importance of John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-17, which speak of Christ as co-creator with the Father.<sup>80</sup>

Most important of all, exegetical supremacy did not exceed church tradition in early Christian times. What we call church tradition is in fact the *regula fidei*. Irenaeus already set up this principle of exegesis within the church. This would be further developed later in opposition to what can be called exegesis in cathedra. Exegesis has to be in agreement with the understanding of Scripture held by church tradition. The interpretation does not have to be based only on rational criteria but has to take into account the doctrine and authority of tradition, which the Church transmits from apostolic times onward. Julio Treballe Barrera even concluded that this principle of interpretation is justified since the tradition of the church is in some way earlier than its Scripture, created by the first apostles and their disciples.<sup>81</sup>

### 5.4.3 Hellenism

By the end of the third century BCE, the shadow of Rome started to fall across the eastern Mediterranean. Rome fought its First Macedonian War in 215 BCE as incidental to the Second Punic War and in 212 BCE entered into alliance with Pergamum. The last of the Hellenistic kingdoms to be absorbed by Rome was Egypt in 30 BCE at which time the Hellenistic Age passed into the Roman era. Roman rule played an important role in enhancing the spread and development of Greek culture. Roman government provided a stable political environment with systematic organization for the development of Greek culture and language. Everett Ferguson believed that we need to indicate the contact of Hellenistic concepts with Jewish ideas in Palestine. This contact is of special importance for the background of early Christianity.<sup>82</sup> A common consensus in historic orthodox Christianity is the claim that early Christianity was influenced by the intellectual forces of Hellenism. Hellenism refers to the influence of

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<sup>80</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 98.

<sup>81</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 517

<sup>82</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 15

ancient Greek philosophy and culture, which spread throughout the Mediterranean world after the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE. Specifically, the doctrines of Trinity and the deity of Christ have been identified as ideas that were introduced into Christianity through the influence of Greek philosophy, particularly through the ideas of Plato.

First we examine the features of Hellenism. Thomas Torrance gave a definition of Hellenism.<sup>83</sup> It is from Hellenism that we derive our term hermeneutic, meaning first to bring news or to convey a message and then to interpret or explain or to translate from one language to another. Something similar to this is found in the works of Plato who used myth to suggest in a narrative form a speculative notion that could not be reduced to exact statement. It was the dramatic presentation of a timeless or eternal idea in temporal form. Torrance further indicated the hidden meaning of double interpretation and stated that “the object of knowledge in the proper sense is what is eternal and wholly intelligible that is, ideas or forms, but the objects of sense-experience such as natural events or actual facts, which cannot be considered fully real.”<sup>84</sup>

The above views were set out in many of Plato’s dialogues but they are also found in the *Timaeus*, a work in which he expounded his cosmological theory, and one that fascinated and influenced countless people for centuries, and not least the world of Gnostic and Neo-Platonic thought in the early centuries of the Christian era when the Hellenic mind was struggling with the biblical doctrines of creation and incarnation.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, the theory of Hellenism took two basic forms: a Stoic form in which God came to be thought of in terms of a cosmic soul informing a cosmic body, and a Neo-Platonic form in which the distinction between the two realms was thrown into a sharp difference between the world of reasons and the world of reality.<sup>85</sup> The Platonic concept introduced the two worlds, the intelligible and the sensible.

This Platonic distinction between a realm of sense and a realm of pure thought has had an immense influence upon the history of hermeneutics. The distinction in other words refers to a sharp difference between a crude literal

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 16

<sup>84</sup> Idem

<sup>85</sup> Idem, 18

sense and an underlying spiritual or philosophical meaning. Thomas Torrance commented that the visual image or figure represented in the realm of pure thought was often regarded as mere shadow quite disparate from the reality that casts it. Moreover, he illustrated that therefore once it has played its part it is regarded as something to be left behind in the attainment of knowledge of the real.<sup>86</sup>

Hellenism had indeed an important contribution to make to the history of hermeneutics, through the teaching of Aristotle, notably in his work *De Interpretatione*, which later had a considerable influence upon mediaeval thought. Under the direction of Aristotle attention was given more to form and method, and because form and matter may not be divorced from one another, there resulted a more realistic form of exegesis with serious consideration of the straightforward sense interpreted according to the rules of grammar and logic.<sup>87</sup>

Another significant influence of Hellenism is that individual statements are interpreted in relation to the whole. The whole was interpreted as the sum total of the particulars. It was through analytic and synthetic examination that meaning was determined. At the same time attention was also paid to the author himself in his use of speech, that is, to questions of rhetoric and philology. It was realized that interpretation or translation from one language to another or from one thought-world to another thought-world, required some knowledge of the historical and ideological background. Thomas Torrance pointed out that “in order to bridge the gap between the reader and the letter of older documents some attention to historical matters and philosophical developments were unavoidable.”<sup>88</sup>

Hellenism was a cultural force that touched most areas in the ancient Mediterranean world. Thus, since Christianity arose in the Mediterranean world, it is not surprising that early Christians had to deal with its effects. We know that there were various reactions to Hellenistic philosophy among early Christians. Tertullian claimed that Christianity and Greek philosophy has nothing in common at all. On the other hand, Justin Martyr felt quite comfortable making comparisons between Christianity and Greek philosophy in order to attract

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<sup>86</sup> Idem, 19

<sup>87</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 20

<sup>88</sup> Idem

Hellenistic pagans to the Gospel. Justin was not alone in trying to create bridges from Greek philosophy to Christianity. Like Justin, many early Christians were willing to borrow certain terms and ideas from the cultural world of their day in order to communicate the Gospel to those around them. Hellenistic ideas were allowed to creep into the Gospel message and were used to formulate this message.

Hellenism indeed imposed influence on the development of Christianity. The Jewish world from which, Christianity arose, had already been influenced by Hellenism prior to the birth of Christ. Critics against Hellenism often make it sound as if the life and culture of Jesus and the first disciples were untouched by Hellenism, and that only in later centuries was it allowed to 'infect' the church. However, we know from history that this is simply not the case. In his groundbreaking study, *Judaism and Hellenism*, Martin Hengel<sup>89</sup> has shown that, from the middle of the third century BCE, Jewish Palestine had already experienced the effects of Hellenism in various ways. He listed the following items:

- (1) Under Ptolemaic rule, the Jews were forced to deal with Hellenistic forms of government and administration;
- (2) As inhabitants of an important coastal land, Palestine served as one of the crossroads for international trade, which brought along many Hellenized merchants through the area;
- (3) The Greek language, the common language of the Roman Empire, became a part of Jewish culture (and became the language of the New Testament!);
- (4) Greek educational techniques were, adopted, in part, by the Jews. Thus, the idea of a pristine Judaism, untouched by Hellenism, giving rise to an equally untouched early Christianity that was later "corrupted" by Hellenism is simply a false historical picture.

However, recent studies have shown that the influence of Hellenism on various

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<sup>89</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). See also Hengel's *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the Pre-Christian Period* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); and *The 'Hellenization' of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1989)



peoples in the ancient world was largely superficial, and primarily attracted the ruling class and those with political and administrative hopes. In his comprehensive study of the Hellenistic period, Peter Green demonstrates that the effects of Hellenism on local cultures in the ancient world operated like a forced cultural veneer over an otherwise healthy and distinct traditional worldview.<sup>90</sup> G. W. Bowersock has come to similar conclusions:

*The persistence of all these local traditions has suggested that there was no more than a superficial Hellenization of much of Asia Minor, the Near East, and Egypt . . . [Hellenism] was a medium not necessarily antithetical to local or indigenous traditions. On the contrary, it provided a new and more eloquent way of giving voice to them.*<sup>91</sup>

These observations point to the fact that Hellenism did not tend to infiltrate and “corrupt” the local religious traditions of the ancient world. Rather, people maintained their religious traditions in spite of Hellenistic influence in other areas of their lives.

Although Judaism and early Christianity were affected by the surrounding culture in certain ways, they diligently guarded their religious beliefs and practices from Hellenistic pagan influences, even to the point of martyrdom. We now come to the heart of the issue. The historical and archaeological evidence shows that both Judaism and early Christianity carefully guarded their religious views from the surrounding Hellenistic culture. For example, with regard to Judaism, the archaeological work of Eric Meyers on the city of Sepphoris in first-century Upper Galilee reveals that, in spite of wide-spread Hellenistic influence on various cultural levels, the Jewish people maintained a strict observance of the Torah.<sup>92</sup>

When it comes to early Christianity, it is clear that the religious influences are Jewish rather than Hellenistic. The essence of the Christian Gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenantal promises through the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. It is the climax of the history of Yahweh-God's dealings with the Jewish people through a series of covenants, culminating in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. Gregory Dix's conclusions on the question of the

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<sup>90</sup> Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 312-335.

<sup>91</sup> G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 6-7

<sup>92</sup> Eric Meyers, *The Challenge of Hellenism for Early Judaism and Christianity*, *Biblical Archaeology* 55 (1992), 84-91

Hellenization of the Gospel confirm this claim: the central core of the Gospel consists of “a Jewish Monotheism and a Jewish Messianism and a Jewish Eschatology; which is expressed in a particular pattern of worship and morality.”<sup>93</sup>

This conclusion does conflict with what used to be a popular view of Christian origins in the early twentieth-century. This view, held by a group, of critical scholars known as the “History of Religions School”, claimed that many early Christian beliefs and practices were actually borrowed from Hellenistic pagan mystery cults. In recent years, however, this view has largely been abandoned by the scholarly world. The evidence now demonstrates that early Christianity is best understood as mainly arising from the Jewish thought world. In his book, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World*, philosopher Ronald Nash wrestles with the claims of the History of Religions School. His findings are worth noting:

*Was early Christianity a syncretistic faith? Did it borrow any of its essential beliefs and practices either from Hellenistic philosophy or religion or from Gnosticism? The evidence requires that this question be answered in the negative.*<sup>94</sup>

Nash's conclusion fits the findings of many others. The work of historians and biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright and David Flusser<sup>95</sup> confirm that first-century Judaism is the proper context within which to understand the rise of early Christianity. It is true that Christianity eventually broke with Judaism. Unlike Judaism, it understood God as a Triune Being, and the Messiah as both divine and human. However, these theological perspectives were rooted in the experience of the early Jewish Christians as recorded in the New Testament. As Dix has noted, “Christianity ceased to be Jewish, but it did not thereby become Greek. It became itself--Christianity.”<sup>96</sup>

Many of the central elements of Matthew are diametrically opposed to the Hellenistic mind-set. This claim can be demonstrated by offering the following examples. First, like Judaism, the Christian Gospel proclaims that God created all things “out of nothing” (“*ex nihilo*”). This is contrary to the Greek view of pre-existing eternal matter. Second, since God created all things, including

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<sup>93</sup> Gregory Dix, *The 'Hellenization' of the Gospel* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1953), 3

<sup>94</sup> Ronald Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 270

<sup>95</sup> See the work of N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (New York: Adama, 1987)

<sup>96</sup> Gregory Dix, *The 'Hellenization' of the Gospel* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1953), 29

matter, Christianity (with Judaism) understands matter in general and the human body in particular, as “very good.”<sup>97</sup> The Hellenistic worldview understood matter as questionable at best. The body was seen as something like an unnatural tomb, within which the eternal human soul was temporarily trapped until released by death. Whereas, along with Judaism, Christianity proclaimed that to be human was to have a body, and thus that we would experience resurrection of the body in the after-life, the Greek view of the after-life was freedom from the body.

Some have noted similarities between certain Greek systems of ethics and New Testament teachings on morality. However, even here there are significant differences.<sup>98</sup> While one can identify certain common features, such as literary styles and basic moral codes, there are prominent differences in the motivation. Christians are motivated by regard for God and His call to holiness. The Greeks through the reason urged for living a moral life. Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Greeks rely upon their own innate wisdom and ability. Finally, unlike the Greek philosophical view, the hope of heaven provides the foundation for Christians to persevere under moral pressure.

Finally, we must address the claim that the doctrines of the deity of Christ<sup>99</sup> and the Trinity<sup>100</sup> are later Hellenistic pagan corruptions of the early and 'pure' Christianity. Two responses will suffice to show the weaknesses of these claims. First, the scholars who pointed out that New Testament Christianity was corrupted by later Hellenistic influence fail to give account for the fact that it is the New Testament data itself which led the early Christian fathers to confess the deity of Christ and the Trinity of God. While space considerations do not allow for a detailed biblical defense of these doctrines, reference can be made to a number of significant studies demonstrating that these doctrines are rooted in the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ (see endnote for suggested resources). Second, recent research has forcefully shown that the early

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<sup>97</sup> Gn 1:31

<sup>98</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Paul R. Eddy, "Christian and Hellenistic Moral Exhortation: A Literary Comparison Based on I Thessalonians 4," in *Directions in New Testament Methods* (ed. M. Albl, P. R. Eddy, and R. Mirkes; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993), 45-51.

<sup>99</sup> On the deity of Christ see: Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); Robert M. Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Millard Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991)

<sup>100</sup> On the Trinity see: Robert M. Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Gregory Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992)

Christian idea of Christ's deity developed not in a Hellenistic context but in a distinctly Jewish thought-world. Richard Bauckham, a contributor to this relatively new scholarly movement (sometimes known as the "New History of Religions School") states these conclusions succinctly:

*When New Testament Christology is read with this Jewish theological context in mind, it becomes clear that, from the earliest post-Easter beginnings of Christology onwards, early Christians included Jesus, precisely and unambiguously, within the unique identity of the one God of Israel . . . . The earliest Christology was already the highest Christology.*<sup>101</sup>

In conclusion, although the claim that early Christian belief and practice was corrupted by Hellenistic influence is commonly argued by critics of orthodox Christianity, the historical evidence does not support this claim. Rather, like the Judaism from which it arose, the Christian faith rigorously guarded its unique religious identity in the midst of the religious and philosophical diversity of the ancient community.

#### **5.4.4 Neoplatonism**

The Hellenistic philosophical ideas we have surveyed found their climax in the development of Neoplatonism. The eclecticism of philosophy in the early empire was brought into an ordered system by Plotinus, the creator of Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism was a later form of spiritual Greek religion, although some of its representatives combined it with magic. Everett Ferguson pointed out that Neoplatonism provided the focus for the intellectual challenge to Christianity in the paganism of the fourth century.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, as a metaphysical system it had enormous influence on Christian thought. The Church father Origen was educated in the same thought-world as that from which Neoplatonism came. This philosophy was the background of the work of the Cappadocians in the fourth century CE and through them it influenced Greek Orthodox theology. It was also decisive in the intellectual development of Augustine and through him had a great impact on the medieval Latin development.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), vi-vii.

<sup>102</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 367

<sup>103</sup> *Idem*, 367

The Platonic tradition continued not through these dialogues but through the activities of Plato's Academy, which lasted until 529 BCE, almost a thousand years of intellectual activity and ferment. The philosophy of Plato changed dramatically over the centuries and the general outline of that change is described by dividing the Platonic tradition into two categories: Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism (meaning "new Platonism"). The most significant and far-reaching innovation of the Middle Platonists was the development of the view that the eternal forms or ideas that underly the world of appearances are the thoughts of some single god or divinity. This means that all abstract categories and all mathematics are closer to the mind of God than anything else. The Neoplatonists, on the other hand, sought to combine Platonism with the other major philosophies of antiquity, such as Stoicism, Aristoteleanism, and various theologies. Neoplatonism is often credited to Plotinus (c. 205-70 BCE) and his disciple Porphyry (232-300 BC) who expanded Plato's philosophical ideas into something more like a full-fledged cosmology. Porphyry assembled these teachings into the six Enneads.

During the Middle Ages, the Platonic tradition survived in three distinct traditions: the European tradition, the Byzantine tradition, and the Islamic tradition. In Europe, Neo-Platonism never really died out because it formed the philosophical heart of the thought of Augustine and Boethius. Many of the standard Neoplatonic ideas, such as the existence of higher ideas in the mind of God and the reflection of those ideas in the real world were standard aspects of medieval thought. The knowledge of Plato was never lost. Plato's most thorough description of the structure of the universe, the *Timaeus*, was preserved and read throughout the middle ages in a Latin translation.

The term Neoplatonism is a collective designation of the philosophical and religious doctrines of a heterogeneous school of speculative thinkers who sought to develop and synthesize the metaphysical ideas of Plato. Such synthesis occurred especially in Alexandria and included Hellenistic Judaism, as exemplified by the Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher Philo Judaeus of Alexandria. The doctrine kept its essential Greek character, however.

In summary, the following are distinguishing features of Neoplatonism:

(1) the visible, tangible forms of the physical world are based on immaterial

models, called Forms or Ideas.

- (2) Tangible forms are transitory, unstable, and imperfect, whereas ideal Forms are eternal, perfect, and unchanging.
- (3) Physical forms are many and diverse, but ideal Forms are single and unified.
- (4) Platonism places a definite hierarchy of value on these qualities: Eternity is superior to the temporal; unity is superior to division; the immaterial is superior to the material.
- (5) In Platonism, the fleeting physical world that humankind inhabits becomes a kind of flawed manifestation of a perfect and eternal model that can be perceived only by the intellect, not by the senses.

According to this line of thinking the Soul is a transcendent, ineffable, divine power, the source of everything that exists. It is complete and self-sufficient. Its perfect power overflows spontaneously into a second aspect, the Intelligence (Mind or Nous), which contemplates the power of the One. By contemplating the One, the Intelligence produces Ideas or Forms. The unity of the One thus overflows into division and multiplicity. Neoplatonism is a form of idealistic monism. Plotinus taught the existence of an ineffable and transcendent One, from which emanated the rest of the universe as a sequence of lesser beings. Later Neoplatonic philosophers added hundreds of intermediate gods, angels and demons, and other beings as emanations between the One and humanity. Plotinus' system was much simple.

These Forms are translated into the physical world through the creative activity of the World Soul. In the immaterial realm, the higher part of the Soul contemplates the Intelligence, while in the material realm, the lower part of the Soul acts to create and govern physical forms. According to Plotinus, the Soul, in descending from the immaterial to the material world, forgets some of its divine nature. All human individual souls, therefore, share in the divinity of the One and will eventually return to the divine realm from which they came, after they shed their physical bodies. Porphyry further developed Plotinus' ideas about the soul, asserting that individual human souls are actually separate from and lower than the World Soul. However, by the exercise of virtue and

contemplation of the spiritual, the human soul can ascend from the lower, material realm, toward the highest good, the absolute beauty and perfection of the immaterial One.

The world Soul has the option either of preserving its integrity and imaged perfection or of becoming altogether sensual and corrupt because it is intermediate between the *Nous* and the material world.

The same choice is open to each of the lesser souls. Through ignorance of its true nature and identity, the human soul experiences a false sense of separateness and independence. It becomes arrogantly self-assertive and falls into sensual and depraved habits. The Neoplatonist maintained that that human enabled to choose its sinful course by virtue of the very freedom of will. This traced in the opposite direction the successive steps of its degeneration, until it is again united with the fountainhead of its being. The actual reunion is accomplished through a mystical experience in which the soul knows an all-pervading ecstasy.

Neo-Platonism did not acknowledge Christ. The reality being even if Christians denied it was the Trinity was Platonist in origin. Most of the early church Fathers were Platonists. The ultimate One of Platonism became the Hebrew God for Christians. For Gnostics, the One was still unknowable and was not the Old Testament Hebrew God. They considered an inferior being that created a corrupted material world. Another exception was Neo-Platonism didn't have a devil either. It attributed evil to a lack of good.

They did not believe in an independent existence of evil. They compared it to darkness, which does not exist in itself. Evil is simply the absence of good. Things are good insofar as they exist. They are evil only insofar as they are imperfect, lacking some good that they should have. Neoplatonism also taught that all people will return to the Source, which is called "Absolute" or "One", is what all things spring from and as a super consciousness is where all things return. It can be therefore said that all consciousness is wiped clean and returned to a blank slate when returning to the source. In other words, the soul as defined as immortal. Human body are not part of that soul but of the material sphere.

## **5.5 Developmental period of Christian and patristic exegesis**

### 5.5.1 Introduction

During the first five centuries the canonical texts came into being and acquired its eventual authority. It was also during this time that the doctrinal framework which Christians still regard as normative for their faith was worked out. The patristic period was characterized by debates about the Trinity and the person of Christ. It was during these centuries that the distinctive trend of Christian theological discourse was worked out, and two great traditions of Christian thought made their appearance.<sup>104</sup> The first of these was the so-called eastern or Greek tradition strongly influenced, by Neoplatonic philosophical concepts and a mystical approach to the spiritual life. The second was the western or Latin tradition, which was shaped by Roman legal concepts though it also felt the influence of Neoplatonism. Within these two groups, we have two main exegetical approaches. They are the literal and the allegorical method of interpretation influenced by historical, theological and cultural circumstances.

### 5.5.2 The First Century (30-100 CE): The Beginning of Christian Hermeneutics

An initial stage began in New Testament times and extended to about 100 CE. In this period, living contact with the apostles was still felt in the church. Gerald Bray indicates this stage as the apostolic era. He added that Christian writers often continued to follow the apostolic practice of writing letters to individual congregations, which were then circulated more widely.<sup>105</sup>

Jewish scripture was first and foremost the authoritative, inspired Word of God. Indeed, not only did the earliest church inherit its Scriptures from the Jews, it also inherited various methods of interpretations of it as well. David S. Dockery added one more point. The interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures by the earliest church included an additional factor that stamped a new meaning upon Scripture: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>106</sup> This new method was a Christological reading, meaning that the Old Testament was read in light of

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<sup>104</sup> Gerald Bray, "Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present" (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 77

<sup>105</sup> Idem, 95

<sup>106</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 23



Jesus himself.<sup>107</sup>

David Dockery commented that Jesus understood the Old Testament in terms of his mission and it is from him that the church christologically derives its identification of Jesus with Israel.<sup>108</sup> The view was that the whole of the Old Testament pointed to him. He embodied the redemptive destiny of Israel, and in the community of those who belong to him that status and destiny is to be fulfilled.<sup>109</sup> For Jesus, the key to understanding the Old Testament was located in his own life and work, for everything pointed to himself. The New Testament writers, following the pattern of Jesus, interpreted the Old Testament as a whole and its parts as a witness to Christ.

We have already seen that Jesus and the apostles were dependent upon hermeneutical practices established in late Judaism, but that they adapted these methods to the church with the addition of a Christological focus. The early church practiced the exegetical procedures of later Judaism. However, the Jewish context in which the New Testament was born was not the primary paradigm for the formation of Christian hermeneutics. As C. F. D. Moule maintains, “*At the heart of their biblical interpretation is a Christological and christocentric perspective.*”<sup>110</sup>

Regarding the commentaries and literature of this period, Christian writers often continued to follow the apostolic practice of writing letters to individual congregations, which were then circulated more widely. There are few direct quotations from the New Testament in these letters, though there are several allusions to it. There is little indication that it was regarded as canonical Scripture. Gerald Bray commented that many writings of this period reveal that the church generally regarded the Jewish Scripture as prophetic of Christ. This is the kind of interpretation found in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and in Melito of Sardis.<sup>111</sup>

### 5.5.3 The Second Century: From Functional to Authoritative

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<sup>107</sup> See the section of “Old Testament and Jesus” at page 2

<sup>108</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 24

<sup>109</sup> Idem, 25; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 78

<sup>110</sup> Quoted at David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 44

<sup>111</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 78

## Hermeneutics

At the close of the apostolic age, some marked changes began to occur. Primarily, the New Testament was in the process of becoming accepted canonical Scripture. During the second century CE, Gerald Bray indicates some heresies that the church was battling with.<sup>112</sup> Marcion tried to dispose of the Old Testament and of a large section of the New, which he regarded as being too Jewish. Moreover, Tatian attempted to merge the four canonical gospels into a single text in his *Diatesseron*.

In addition, an issue confronting the 2<sup>nd</sup> century church raised by the Gnostics<sup>113</sup>, was the relation between the New Testament and the Old Testament. David Dockery indicated this as one of the crucial factors affecting the relationship between the church and heretics. The motivating factor that raised the issue among the orthodox Christians was the Gnostic view that the God of the Old Testament was incompatible with the God revealed in Christ in the New Testament.<sup>114</sup> As texts were challenged, altered and even abandoned, the church had to demonstrate on biblical grounds that it was the same God revealed in both Testaments and that the church should not abandon the Old Testament.

We will later focus on how the apostolic fathers continued the New Testament hermeneutical practices and how they modified those practices so that the emphasis was placed on the moral use of Scripture. Dockery named this approach a “functional hermeneutic.”<sup>115</sup> This showed that the exegetical approach undeniably strengthened the position of Scripture in the Christian community.

Besides the defensive function of Scripture against heresies, worshipping God

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<sup>112</sup> Idem

<sup>113</sup> A number of heretics proposed a type of hermeneutic which viewed Scripture as a riddle, pointing to a higher reality, which could be discerned only by those who had some kind of special enlightenment. This super-spiritual approach is now categorized as “Gnosticism”, a term developed in the nineteenth century to describe a series of different movements which had little connection with each other, apart from a similar approach to hermeneutical issues. See *Gerald Bray, Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 78; See also the previous section of “The historical, theological, traditional and socio-cultural background for the formation of Christian / Patristic Literature”

<sup>114</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 45

<sup>115</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 45

was intended to authorize the position of Scripture. We should be aware that hermeneutical activities occurred in a specific context. David Dockery made it clear that the church's hermeneutical concerns developed within the church's worship.<sup>116</sup> The New Testament letters were read in the public meeting of the churches. In this way they became the object of study and meditation. The reading of Scripture was accompanied by its exposition. David Dockery pointed out that almost all of the church's interpretation of Scripture and corresponding theologizing developed in the context of the sermon.<sup>117</sup>

To clearly illustrate the concept of authority during this period, it should be pointed out that the apostles' theology in their preaching was built around the elements of the *kerygma*: the incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ. In this sense preaching in the context of the worshipping community re-enacted the event of Christ. David Dockery illustrated this event and elaborated on the application of the community in the exegetical work of the early Christian church. He stated that the event of preaching provided shape and meaning not only to worship itself, but also to the every day lives of the worshipers.<sup>118</sup> The main mission of the exegetes was based on practical reasons. The Fathers were primarily concerned with moral and ethical instruction, rather than explaining what the text says in detail.

We next examine the characteristics of patristic literature before 200 CE. Gerald Bray summarized the characteristics and delineation of patristic literature.<sup>119</sup> The period up to about 200 CE can be characterized by what might be called "pre-systematic biblical exegesis". Before the time of Origen there were no Christian commentaries on Scripture, and little attempt was made to offer any methodical exposition of its contents. The most frequent type of exegetical literature during this period was "the homily, or sermon, a mode of discourse which has continued to the present, and which was popular throughout patristic times."<sup>120</sup> At that period, the Christian literature was in an

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<sup>116</sup> The exposition of the Word was of utmost importance in the church's worship. The church's pattern followed that established by Jesus' exposition of Isaiah 61 at the beginning of his ministry, which he interpreted in light of his messianic mission and continually practiced in the early church's worship. Justin Martyr, in his First Apology, a work written to the emperor Antoninus Pius, summarized an early church worship service into two basic parts. See idem, 46

<sup>117</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 47

<sup>118</sup> Idem, 48

<sup>119</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 97

<sup>120</sup> Idem

“unsystematic way” in Gerald Bray’s comment.<sup>121</sup> Many writers were probably unaware of what they were doing, as they sought to relate every Scriptural passage in some way or another to Christ.

In this historical context, second century Christianity witnessed a most unique literary phenomenon. Helen Rhee pointed out that it was the concurrent emergence of the Apologies, Apocryphal Acts, and Martyr Acts.<sup>122</sup> The second half of the second century witnessed a plethora of literature that appealed to and engaged with the Greco-Roman values and culture in an attempt to define formative Christianity. These three bodies of literature were the products of the prevailing Greco-Roman literary culture and were deeply rooted in that cultural soil. E. J. Kennedy commented that the general acceptance of classical and contemporary Greek culture by the Romans from the second century CE had been conspicuous in the Roman literary tradition.<sup>123</sup> Educational curricula as well as literary and rhetorical theory and practice followed Greek models and Latin literature was constructed by using Greek methods and in clear reference to the Greek literature.

Earlier second-century Christian writers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus identified both a literal and typologically or allegorical meaning in a number of biblical texts. Justin refers to Noah and the flood as representing a number of important Christological themes:

*For righteous Noah, along with the other mortals at the deluge, i.e., with his own wife, his three sons and their wives, being eight in number, were a symbol of the eighth day, wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead, forever the first in power. For Christ, being the first-born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by Himself through water, and faith, and wood, containing the mystery of the cross; even as Noah was saved by wood when he rode over the waters with his household.*<sup>124</sup>

Irenaeus read Scripture in a number of interesting ways, combining literal exegesis with two different types of allegory. Simonetti distinguishes them as “typological” and “vertical” allegory. Typological allegory presumes that an Old

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<sup>121</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 97

<sup>122</sup> Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 20

<sup>123</sup> Kennedy, E. J., “Books and Readers in the Roman World,” in E.J. Kennedy ed. *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, vol. 2: Latin Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5

<sup>124</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ANF 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 268

Testament text possesses a deeper meaning fulfilled in the actions and words of Christ. For Irenaeus, even the smallest details of a biblical text can bear new and exciting fruit when viewed in light of Christ's coming.<sup>125</sup>

Furthermore, Irenaeus is acutely concerned to preserve the lasting value of the Hebrew Scriptures and the God presented in them against the attacks of Gnostic teachers. Many Gnostic exegetes pictured the Old Testament deity as a lower, second-class god responsible for the mistake of creation. According to Simonetti, "Their dualism and their disregard for the material world led them also to disdain the Old Testament as being the revelation of the God of creation, the Demiurge, in contrast to the New Testament, the revelation of the supreme, good God."<sup>126</sup> Irenaeus's allegorization of key Old Testament passages, then, defended the authority of the Old Testament against its detractors and more fully illustrated the connection of these passages to the New Covenant established by Christ.<sup>127</sup>

Manlio Simonetti argues that Irenaeus never clearly formulated a hermeneutical principle to regulate his own allegorizing. Irenaeus faulted his Gnostic opponents for exercising imaginations that "they having in their hearts surpassed the Master Himself, being indeed in idea elated and exalted above [Him], but in reality turning away from the one true God."<sup>128</sup> Yet Irenaeus, Simonetti believes, left himself open to the same critique. Irenaeus's only defense, as far as Simonetti is concerned, was his dependence upon the principle of authority: "The Catholic Church alone is the touchstone of truth in the interpretation of Scripture in that it is the storehouse of authentic apostolic tradition."<sup>129</sup>

#### 5.5.4 Third century: from 200 to 325 CE (The First Council of Nicaea)

The third century witnessed the development a growing importance of more systematic literature. From about 200, the commentary style of exegesis introduced a note of greater systematization into Christian biblical interpretation.

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<sup>125</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 139

<sup>126</sup> Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 14-15

<sup>127</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 140

<sup>128</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.19.1, 486-87

<sup>129</sup> Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 24

This systematization meant that the exegetes made more regulated interpretation according to different themes. The commentary form itself originated centuries back in the intertestamental period, especially among the Hellenistic literary critics of Alexandria. It was originally applied to the classics of Greek literature, which they interpreted allegorically. The Jewish scriptures were influenced by Hellenists. There are many Jews who adapted this tradition to the interpretation of the Scriptures. Gerald Bray laid much emphasis on the contribution of Philo in this regard.<sup>130</sup> Philo inherited his ideas from disparate sources, and much of what he wrote was basically a collection of earlier material. Following him, commentary writing was initially associated with allegorical exegesis, and the fathers never fully liberated themselves from that tradition.

Philo, living between 20 BCE and 50 CE, relied heavily on allegorical exegesis in an attempt to make the Bible more accessible to a Hellenistic audience by emphasizing the close relationship between Greek philosophy and Jewish theology. In addition, Philo attempted to tame those “aspects of Scripture that seemed barbarous in an alien cultural context.”<sup>131</sup> Moreover, Simonetti commented Philo’s allegorical exegesis:

*... allowed him, on the one hand, to give satisfactory explanations of so many anthropomorphisms in the earlier books of the Old Testament, which, like the Greek myths, upset the sensibilities of educated pagans. On the other hand, by a process of interpretation which made plentiful use of philosophical concepts and terminology, especially Platonic and Stoic, he was able to introduce to the Greek mind a religious perceptive which had been quite foreign to it.*<sup>132</sup>

Simonetti identifies the interpretive key Philo used to perceive and unlock biblical allegory:

*For Philo, the Bible has far greater importance than this or that myth might have for a pagan, so that he does not entirely ignore the literal meaning of the passage before him. But the value he assigns to it is quite secondary; it is for the many, while the hidden meaning, attainable by the allegorical approach, is*

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<sup>130</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 99

<sup>131</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, “Allegory,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland, 1990), 23

<sup>132</sup> Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 7

*for the few who concern themselves with the realities of the Spirit... The progression from the literal to the allegorical level is facilitated by certain indicators in the text which hold special significance for the shrewd exegete. This could involve details to which (for various reasons) the literal meaning is not pertinent: names of people or places. These are then interpreted etymological, following a procedure given general application by the Stoics in their interpretation of the Greek gods. These are all procedures which we shall have to recall when dealing with Christian exegesis in Alexandria.*<sup>133</sup>

Philo's influence was especially strong in the Alexandrian school of theology. Clement and Origen used him freely, and through them and later through St Ambrose and other Latin Fathers his allegorical interpretation of Scripture became an accepted form of Biblical exegesis in the Christian Church.

Scholars also listed another source of influence, the great exegete, Origen (c 185- c 254 CE). Under his influence, we can construct another exegetical stage. The Origenistic stage began about 200 and extended until the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. In this period, biblical exegesis was dominated by the towering genius of Origen. Origen borrowed heavily from the writings of the Jewish Platonist, Philo of Alexandria, whose ideas came into their own in this period. Origen demonstrated a lively faith from an early age as well as precocious intellectual abilities. In Origen we meet someone who Karlfried Froehlich describes as "one of the great minds and probably the most influential theologian of the early Christian era."<sup>134</sup> Joseph Trigg writes Origen is "the most influential early Christian interpreter of the Bible," whose "extant works comprise by far the largest body of work by a single author to survive from the first three centuries of the Christian church."<sup>135</sup>

Origen was guided in his interpretation of Scripture by a deep pastoral concern which is not immediately apparent in his more theoretical writings. His most important work of biblical interpretation is his book on first principles (*De Principiis* or *Peri Archon*), in which he develops his allegorical theories.<sup>136</sup>

Origen argued that the authority of the Old Testament is confirmed by Christ so

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<sup>133</sup> Idem

<sup>134</sup> Karlfried Froehlich ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 16

<sup>135</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation, Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol.9 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 23

<sup>136</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 84

that all interpretation of the Old Testament must ultimately be Christocentric. He added that the Scriptures have a threefold sense, corresponding to body, soul and spirit. This tripartite division is based on an anthropology different from that of Philo, who identified the soul with the spirit --- an option not available to the Christian, for whom soul and spirit were divided by the two-edged sword of the Word of God<sup>137</sup>. The first sense is the literal one, designed for the non-intellectual mind, but necessary as the basis from which the other senses were to be discerned.<sup>138</sup> The second is the moral one, corresponding to the life of the soul. The third is the spiritual sense, the highest and most important of all. Origen gave it the special name *theoria* (vision), because it could only be grasped by revelation. For him, it was necessary for the Christian reader of the Bible to proceed from the literal to the higher senses, which he termed “analogical” (leading), because they led the believer closer to Christ.<sup>139</sup>

Origen regarded the Bible as a divine revelation concealed in human form. God’s commands are eternal and absolute, in accordance with his nature. Our circumstances however are relative. This is why Scripture, which conceals God’s law in human events, is often ambiguous and unclear to us. Only the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, using the gifts of biblical scholarship, can unlock the key to the Scriptures and make them intelligible to the church. The first rule of interpretation is that the clearer parts of Scripture are the basis for understanding the harder parts. It is interesting to note that this principle has survived the test of time, and is widely applied today, even though allegorical exegesis has long been rejected.

In his interpretation of Scripture, Origen usually took the literal sense at face value. He did not want to reduce the miracles of Jesus and other supernatural events to allegory, because he genuinely believed that God had intervened in human history. In these instances, he regarded the spiritual sense as an addition to the literal, not as a substitute for it.

Origen did not see history as an interlocking series of cause and effect, as it was seen centuries later. In fact, he scarcely knew what to make of it. He explicitly stated that historical events are not to be regarded as types of other historical events, but as types of spiritual realities (Comm. On John 10, 18) It is this which distances him from earlier typologists, and which is characteristic of

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<sup>137</sup> Heb. 4:12

<sup>138</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 101

<sup>139</sup> Idem, 102



allegory. Particularly susceptible to allegorical interpretation were proper names, which were known to have a deeper meaning.<sup>140</sup>

Allegory may be summed up both positively and negatively as follows. On the positive side, it emphasized that Scripture must be approached spiritually, and be applied practically to the life of the believer. The Bible had to be a living book in the experience of the church, not a dead historical record. Allegory also made it possible for the church to appropriate very obscure passages of the Bible, which would not otherwise have been usable. We must not forget that the ancients did not have the same understanding of history and the historical context of the Old Testament as we have. We should also remember that much Christian art, and some Christian literature, relies heavily on allegory for its themes. Without allegory, iconography would not have been possible, nor would we now have the great literary monuments of Dante, Milton or Bunyan.

On the negative side, allegory removed the text of Scripture from history, which went against the main thrust of the Christian religion. It encouraged an irresponsible use of the biblical text by permitting interpretations which were fanciful, even if spiritually they were more helpful than harmful. In modern times, an essentially allegorical hermeneutic has made it possible for the Roman church to proclaim dogmas such as the immaculate conception of Mary, her bodily assumption into heaven, and the infallibility of the pope, with little scriptural basis other than an allegorical interpretation of texts which have no literal hearing on any of these things.<sup>141</sup>

### **5.5.5 Exegesis between the third and fifth centuries: the hermeneutic problem of biblical interpretation**

This stage experienced the great importance of patristic exegesis. The great conciliar stage began from the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE) and extended to the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE). This was the golden age of patristic exegesis, in which two main schools of thought vied for influence. Scholars identified two main exegetical schools.<sup>142</sup> One of these was closely associated with the church of Alexandria, and generally followed the Platonic type of exegesis associated with Philo and Origen. The other was rooted in the theological school of Antioch, which offered a contrasting type of exegesis,

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<sup>140</sup> Idem

<sup>141</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 103

<sup>142</sup> Idem, 78

more literal and more in tune with what would nowadays be regarded as scientific.

### **(a) The Antiochene School**

In order to describe the roots of the exegetical school of Antioch, we will have to return briefly to the second century CE. It was the time shortly predating the apologist Irenaeus (130-200 CE)<sup>143</sup> and Tertullian (160-200 CE). The primary representative of the first Antiochene school was the apologist Theophilus of Antioch, who became bishop of Antioch about 169 CE. Karlfried Froehlich observes that the city of Antioch was a scholarly environment well known for producing interpreters versed in “careful textual criticism, philological and historical studies and the cultivation of classical rhetoric.”<sup>144</sup> The Antiochene School and its tradition reacted to the Alexandrian allegorists. Richard Davidson commented that the typological correspondences drawn by the Antiochene school related more to the church and the sacraments while in Alexandrian typology the stress was placed upon the mystical-spiritual (the inner life).<sup>145</sup> Joseph Trigg identified the emergence of a distinctive Antiochene approach with the work of Theophilus of Antioch, the scholar from the late second century mentioned above. It was not until the late fourth and early fifth centuries, however, that a significant flowering of Antiochene hermeneutics took place<sup>146</sup> in the time of John Chrysostom (c 347-407 CE) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (c 350-428 CE), particularly in the influence of Aristotelian thought and the place of typological exegesis in their overall hermeneutical scheme.

#### **(i) Early Antiochene Exegesis: The Beginning of Historical Interpretation**

The distinctive feature of the Antiochenes was their conviction that the primary sense of interpretation was historical. Wherever possible, the Antiochenes adopted an historical interpretation. The most widely known representatives of the early Antiochene school was Tertullian. He was against the free use of allegory and realized the need for tightly formulated rules for governing the use

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<sup>143</sup> See the previous discussion of “The Second Century: From Functional to Authoritative Hermeneutics”

<sup>144</sup> Karlfried Froehlich ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 20; See also Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 530

<sup>145</sup> Richard M Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: a study of hermeneutical typos structures* (Michigan: Andrew University Press, 1981), 17

<sup>146</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation, Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol.9 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 31

of allegory. However, Christopher A. Hall pointed out the inadequacy of literal exegesis as a defensive mechanism against an allegorical approach of interpretation. He states that:

*“...but were less successful in formulating an adequate framework for the safe use of hermeneutic so open to abuse. With the emergence of a rival school of interpretation at Antioch, a school that largely eschewed the allegorical exegesis practiced at Alexandria, the stage was set for a lively debate.”<sup>147</sup>*

When Theophilus was confronted with an anthropomorphism that appeared to contradict the omnipresence of God, he did not shift to allegorical exegesis to handle the enigma, but instead viewed the passage literally and historically as a theophany of the second person of the Godhead. Theophilus placed great stress on the Old Testament as a historical book containing the authentic history of God’s dealings with his people. Dockery presents a thorough discussion of Theophilus’ exegetical work.<sup>148</sup> Theophilus established a biblical chronology from the creation down to his own day. Involved in this historical emphasis was his view of the Bible’s inspiration. He maintained that the Old Testament reveals to humankind that the God to whom it bears witness is the creator of the universe. This is possible because the human writers were inspired and instructed by God, and therefore able to write about those things that happened before or after their own times.

Exegetes such as Theophilus were not averse to viewing Scripture as a layered text. One could interpret the Bible in an anagogical fashion in which, as Froehlich explains, “the biblical text leads the reader upward into spiritual truths that are not immediately obvious and that provide a fuller understanding of God’s economy of salvation.”<sup>149</sup> Though Theophilus emphasized the historical meaning of the biblical text, the Old Testament was also given a Christian interpretation, like the interpretations of Jesus and the apostles. This means that God generated the Logos and through the Logos he made all things.<sup>150</sup> The Logos also spoke through Moses and the prophets. Dockery added the point that Theophilus also emphasized the literal meaning of the moral

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<sup>147</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 156

<sup>148</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 104

<sup>149</sup> Karlfried Froehlich ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 20

<sup>150</sup> Jn 1:3

exhortations in Scripture.<sup>151</sup>

## **(ii) Later Antiochene Exegesis: Rejection of Alexandrian Allegorical Interpretation**

Jerome (c 432-420 CE), the translator of the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate), under the influence of his Jewish mentors, turned from allegorical hermeneutics to an increasing respect for the literal meaning of Scripture. Dockery witnessed the trend of this change. It is likely that wherever the synagogue's influence was felt, the church's interpretation of Scripture had a tendency towards literalism. Certainly this was the case at Antioch. The artificiality of much allegorical interpretation, however, could not fail to cause a negative response and the outright rejection of allegorical exegesis was centered in Antioch.<sup>152</sup> Antioch, the birthplace of Gentile Christianity<sup>153</sup>, and a great city of the eastern part of the empire, had a long tradition of theological learning. David Dockery commented that the earlier tradition of the Antioch school centered round the practices of Theophilus and was passed on to Lucian (d 312 CE), Diodore (d 390 CE), and the later Antiochenes, who were also influenced by the Jewish teachers of Antioch.<sup>154</sup>

Lucian was born at Samosata and completed his education at Antioch. Lucian is best remembered for his revision of the Septuagint (LXX) and is generally regarded as the founder of the later exegetical school of Antioch. In addition to his study at Antioch, he attended school at Caesarea, where he became acquainted with the allegorical method, as well as methods of text-critical studies. His reputation suggests that he was a fine classical scholar and preacher, and supposedly was well versed in Hebrew.<sup>155</sup>

Lucian emphasized careful textual criticism, and philological and historical studies. Following the paths of the pagan schools in the city, Lucian and the Antiochenes applied the classical learning of rhetoric and philosophy. The result was a sober-minded hermeneutic emphasizing the literal sense of the

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<sup>151</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 104

<sup>152</sup> Idem, 105

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Ac 13

<sup>154</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 105

<sup>155</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 106

biblical text. They took the historical sense seriously, but also developed a typological exegetical approach very similar to early Christian typology.<sup>156</sup>

Diodore, the bishop of Tarsus, had become suspicious of allegory. David Dockery commented that in the eyes of Diodore, allegorical interpretation was foolishness.<sup>157</sup> It introduced silly fables in the place of the text. He contended that allegorizers abolish history and make one thing mean another. Moreover, the distinctive feature in the Antiochene hermeneutical method was *theoria*. Joseph Trigg defines it as an interpretive disposition and device that identifies:

*“...the spiritual meaning of a text which both inheres in the historical framework and also takes the mind of the reader of scripture to higher planes of contemplation...Theoria was the disposition of mind, the insight, which enabled prophets to receive their visions in the first place; it was thus both the necessary condition for scripture and its highest interpretation. Diodore then could acknowledge the typological interpretation of the Old Testament which had long been a standard reading in the church without accepting an allegorical reading.”*<sup>158</sup>

Diodore rejected the Alexandrian opinion that the reference of the prophets to the coming of Christ was something added to the original prophecy, and that it was an allegorical understanding. Dockery illustrated the meaning and use of *theoria*. By the use of *theoria*, the Antiochenes maintained that the prophet himself foresaw both the immediate event, which was to come in the history of ancient Israel and the ultimate coming of Christ. The prophets' predictions were at the same time both historical and christocentric.<sup>159</sup> Gerald Bray illustrated more about *theoria*. This type of exegesis corresponded with their Christology, which stressed that the humanity of Christ was not modified in any way by his divinity.<sup>160</sup> The Antiochenes argued that the double sense was different and distinct from that which the allegorists superimposed upon an original literal meaning.

Diodore insisted upon the factuality of the original setting and explored setting and explored the text for clues to its historical reconstruction. However, in addition to the historical meaning, there was the typological or *theoria* that

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<sup>156</sup> Idem

<sup>157</sup> Idem, 107

<sup>158</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation, Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol.9 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 32

<sup>159</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 107

<sup>160</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996)

taught ethics and theology. The content of Scripture was thus lifted to a higher analogy, but the historical meaning did not oppose or contradict the *theoria*.<sup>161</sup> During this time Diodore of Tarsus wrote many significant exegetical and polemical works, among them an important commentary on the book of Psalms. A closer look at Diodore's treatment of Psalms would be helpful again in illustrating the principle of *theoria*. In Diodore's prologue to his commentary on Psalms he writes that "Scripture teaches what is useful, exposes what is sinful, corrects what is deficient, and thus it completes the perfect human being."<sup>162</sup> The applicability of the Psalms, Diodore rightly stresses, reveals itself to those reliving the situation of the psalmist, rather than to the person who simply chants them unreflectively.

Because of this potential of the Psalms for providing God given remedies to the existence to the existential and spiritual quandaries all Christians face, Diodore is eager to explicate sound hermeneutical principles for understanding the Psalms well. He specifically explains that he will discuss the "plain text" of the Psalms. He does not want his reader "to be carried away by the words when they chant, or to have their minds occupied with other things because they do not understand the meaning." Instead, Diodore wants his readers to comprehend "the logical coherence of the words."<sup>163</sup>

As a whole, the school of Antioch protested against the allegorical hermeneutics of Alexandria. Generally it can be said that the Antiochene school had a strong historical and philological interest and wanted exact interpretations based upon historical and contextual factors. The school also had a rational tendency with strong ethical-personalistic interests, in contrast to the mystical-allegorical tendencies of the Alexandrians. The two great Antiochene exegetes were Theodore of Mopsuestia, regarded as "the interpreter par excellence" and Chrysostom as the expository preacher.

Another Antiochene theologian was Theodore of Mopsuestia ( c 350 428 CE). He was one of the greatest interpreters of the Antiochenes, was also the most individualistic of them while remaining the most consistent in emphasizing historical exegesis. It is certainly true that all Christian theology during this

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<sup>161</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 108

<sup>162</sup> Diodore of tarsus, *Commentary on the Psalms: Prologue*, in *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, ed. Froehlich, 82

<sup>163</sup> Idem, 83

period was based on Scripture, yet this was especially true for Theodore. That this was the case can be traced to Theodore's hermeneutical method. Theodore seems to have employed a more Jewish exegesis than many of his contemporaries. He expressed in a clear fashion the exegetical tradition of the Antiochene school established by Diodore.<sup>164</sup>

In order to understand Theodore's method, it is necessary to recognize his distinction between typological, allegorical, and prophetic material. Although this is a useful summary, in reality Theodore did not always clearly make such distinctions. Perhaps, it is better to think of typological as the normative method of Antiochene exegesis. Allegorical exegesis, if legitimate at all, and distinct from Alexandrian allegorical practices, represented "left wing typology," while fulfillment of prophecy represented "right wing typology."<sup>165</sup>

In his study of the Old Testament, it is clear that Theodore's knowledge of the Biblical languages did not carry him too far. Because of his deficiency in Hebrew, Theodore was forced to rely on translations. Following the accepted practice of his day, he accepted the Septuagint as an authorized version, though many including Origen, considered this Greek version to be divinely inspired. Theodore went further by claiming that the Septuagint followed the Hebrew text more closely than other translations. He rejected Job and the Song of Songs as canonical. Job, according to Theodore, was an Edomite who had heathen associations. Song of Songs was unacceptable because, instead of an allegorical picture of Christ and the church, the book, interpreted literally, was nothing more than an erotic poem.<sup>166</sup>

Theodore's exegesis was the purest representation of Antiochene hermeneutics. Theodore was first to treat the Psalms historically and systematically, while treating the Gospel narratives factually, paying attention to the particles of transition and to the minutiae of grammar and punctuation. His approach can be described as "anti-allegorical," rejecting interpretations that denied the historical reality of what the spiritual text affirmed. This was evident in our brief look at his exegesis of Galatians 4. Even where allegorical interpretation could have possibly served to his advantage to bring unity to the

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<sup>164</sup> David S. Dockery, "Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church" (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 109

<sup>165</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 110

<sup>166</sup> Idem

overall biblical message, he failed to use it or see its value. For instance, this he could have seen he chose instead to reject Job and the Song from the biblical canon.<sup>167</sup>

They laid emphasis on the historical nature of biblical revelation, which ought not to be broken up into symbols and allegories. The intellectual temperament of the Antiochenes was more Aristotelian than Platonic. The biblical prophecies had a twofold meaning: at once historical and messianic. The Christocentric meaning of the prophecies was in the text, not something imposed on it through allegorical exegesis. According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, books containing no prophetic elements, either historical or messianic, and so with no more support than mere human wisdom, ought to be removed from the canon since they are not inspired books.<sup>168</sup>

In the Second Council of Constantinople (553 CE), the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who had been the most influential Antiochene exegete, were condemned as tainted with Nestorianism and were, ordered to be burned. As a result, suspicion was cast upon the entire Antiochene School. Its emphasis upon the literal sense was preserved in the sermons and commentaries of Chrysostom, and in the commentaries of Jerome (d. 420) written near the end of his life. Richard Davidson pointed out that the Antiochene school never recovered its lost influence, and the allegorical method of Alexandrian came to dominate medieval Christian exegesis for over a thousand years.<sup>169</sup>

### **(b) The Alexandrian School**

The Alexandria school of exegesis consisted of fathers who expected to find different layers of meaning within a biblical text. The questions they posed to each other were in what way and to what degree this layering manifests itself.<sup>170</sup> The Alexandrian school dealt with typological interpretation, “whereby parts of the Hebrew Bible are read as a foreshadowing and prediction of the events of the Gospels”. This approach was used to a lesser or greater extent by virtually all the patristic fathers.<sup>171</sup> Allegorical interpretation, defined by James L.

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<sup>167</sup> Idem, 112

<sup>168</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 530

<sup>169</sup> Richard M Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: a study of hermeneutical typos structures* (Michigan: Andrew University Press, 1981), 17

<sup>170</sup> Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 25

<sup>171</sup> James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia:



Kugel and Rowan A. Greer as an interpretive approach in which “biblical persons and incidents become representatives of abstract virtues or doctrines,” was enthusiastically embraced by certain fathers and viewed with suspicion by others.<sup>172</sup> Now, we move to the origin, principles and representatives of Alexandrian exegesis.

### (i) Origin of the school

It will be helpful to observe the beginnings of allegorical interpretation and its influence on Philonic exegesis. David Dockery stated that most ancient witness as well as the majority of modern scholars regard Theagenes of Rhegium as the founder of the practice of allegorical interpretation. Some others suggest Pherecydes of Syros (early sixth century BCE) as the founder of this practice. This opinion is based on a quotation from Celsus’s *True Word* found in Origen’s refutation:<sup>173</sup> ‘Regardless, he kept on tracing the allegorical tradition starting at the pre-Socratic period of classical Greece, which eventually influenced much of pagan, Jewish, and Christian philosophical and religious expression’. Several major works have traced this history of allegorical interpretation.<sup>174</sup>

On the other hand, Zeller laid emphasis on the role of the Stoics. The Stoics sought to discover the essentially true contents. This attempt led to allegorical interpretation that served to bring the old myths, taken mainly from Homer and Hesiod, into relation with the philosophy of the interpreters. In Zeller’s works, etymology was the principal instrument for this activity.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, Dockery also echoed the same view. Philo regarded the biblical text as having a multiplicity of meanings. Because of his view of inspired Scripture, every expression, every word, and even every letter contained a hidden meaning. Etymology was an important way to discover the hidden meaning of words, and numbers were also a fruitful source for allegorical exegesis.<sup>176</sup>

The next major influence on the Alexandrians came from heterodox Judaism. While other groups and individuals practiced allegorical interpretation, Philo

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Westminster Press, 1986), 80

<sup>172</sup> Idem, 81

<sup>173</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 76

<sup>174</sup> Idem

<sup>175</sup> Zeller, *History of Greek Philosophy*, 1:55-58; cf. Walter Otto, *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1954)

<sup>176</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 78

Judaeus of Alexandria Philo regarded the Jewish Scriptures as divinely inspired, infallible, and the all-sufficient Word of God, which required an unconditional submission by the interpreter. Dockery even pointed out that the Alexandrian Jews were more cosmopolitan than many of their Palestinian relatives, especially the lower classes of Palestinian Judaism that tended to be reactionary as a result of their disenfranchisement.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, the Alexandrian Jews were more directly exposed to Greek culture and philosophy than their compatriots.

## **(ii) Representatives or commentators of the Alexandrian school**

### **1. Philo (c 20 BCE – c 50 CE)**

What was significant for Philo was his opinion that there is a philosophical meaning contained in the Bible and this is discoverable by using allegorical interpretation. For Philo, this philosophical meaning was the essence of religion, culminating in mystic visions and holy-communion with God. Dockery commented on the contribution of Philo's work that his eclectic appropriation of Greek philosophy was primarily an attempt to communicate the truth of Judaism to his enlightened Hellenistic contemporaries.<sup>178</sup>

Philo the Jew was one of the precursors of the Christian School of Alexandria. He rejected the literal and obvious meaning of Scripture in cases where there were expressions unworthy of the divinity, or historical inaccuracies or any other difficulties. It was necessary to resort to allegorical meaning then and leave open the possibility of an interpretation allowing many senses for the text.

Undoubtedly, Philo's purpose was apologetic in the sense of wedding Judaism and Greek philosophy. In Dockery's opinion in Philo's mind Judaism differed little from the highest insights of Greek revelation.<sup>179</sup> God revealed himself to the people of Israel, God's chosen nation, but this revelation was not radically different from his revelation to the Greeks. The point of tension arose for Philo with Israel's understanding of their election and their special place in God's redemptive plan. Another problem for him was the theological distinction between revelation in Scripture and revelation in nature.

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<sup>177</sup> Idem, 77

<sup>178</sup> Idem, 78

<sup>179</sup> Idem

The Alexandrians' intellectual commitments demanded that they attempt to deal with these issues in a manner superior to the approach of Irenaeus of the Antiocheen school. Just as Philo had sought to reconcile Judaism with Hellenism, particularly Platonism, so Clement and Origen from Antioch turned to Platonic philosophy and allegorical hermeneutics to handle the pressing objections to the rule of faith and the Bible.<sup>180</sup>

Julio Trebolle Barrera indicated that the rise of the allegorical method was led and influenced by contemporary thoughts and traditions. Therefore, Philo's exegetical method was basically apologetic. She regarded it as a correct interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures that made them not unworthy of Greek philosophy. She illustrated that the allegorical method was used in Greek myths, for example Homeric myth.

Naturally, Christians used this process to interpret the Old Testament as well as to interpret difficult and obscure passages from the gospel, such as the parables of Jesus. Some parables went through a whole process of allegorisation, which allows the message of a parable originally aimed at the scribes opposed to Jesus, to be applied to a new audience comprising Christian believers. Paul, who always has elements in common with Philo, uses allegorical methods when speaking of leaven as an image of impurity<sup>181</sup>, or the rock of Moses as a spiritual rock, which accompanies the Israelites.<sup>182</sup>

Another early Christian exegete, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - c.215 CE) used the allegorical method for a Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament in the same way other Christian writers had done previously. Scripture as a whole, each one of its words and even each written sign speaks a mysterious language which has to be uncovered and is made up of symbols, allegories and metaphors. Julio Trebolle Barrera therefore concluded that Scripture according to this view point has a whole range of meanings of every kind: literal and historical, moral and theological, prophetic and typological, philosophical and psychological and finally a mysterious meaning.<sup>183</sup> The philosophical meaning was an inheritance from the Stoics. According to this

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<sup>180</sup> Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, "Christian Theology in the Patristic Period," in *A History of Christian Doctrine* ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones with Benjamin Drewery (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 64-84

<sup>181</sup> 1 Cor 10:4

<sup>182</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 529

<sup>183</sup> Idem

meaning Julio Trebolle Barrera pointed out the following example: The tablets of the Law symbolize the universe, just as Sarah and Hagar symbolize true wisdom and pagan philosophy respectively. According to the mystical meaning, Lot's wife is a symbol of the attachment to earthly things, which prevent the soul knowing the truth.<sup>184</sup>

## 2. Origen (c 185 –c 254 CE)

Another great exegete, Origen of Alexandria, brought the touch of a master to what had “been nothing much more than the exercise of amateurs.”<sup>185</sup> He was the greatest of the interpreters associated with the Alexandrian school of interpretation, those Christian scholars who understood biblical inspiration in the Platonic sense of utterance in a state of ecstatic possession.<sup>186</sup> In Origen's view, Scripture sets out to reveal intellectual truths rather than narrate God's series of interventions in the course of history. Sometimes history does no more than hide the truth. It is not possible to take most OT legislation literally. Origen rejected the literal meaning of the OT on the principle of rationality. The literal meaning is the one seized by more simple believers who are incapable of appreciating the meaning of metaphors, symbols and allegories, believing instead in the raw realism of the more improbable biblical stories. They all have a spiritual meaning, the only one, which allows the mystery contained in Scripture to be perceived.<sup>187</sup>

Origen did not set out precise rules of interpretation. He trusted in an exegete's intellectual ability and common sense more than in conventional opinion and popular tradition. He does not seem to be so inclined as Irenaeus and the Western Church in general to apply what would later be called the “rule of faith” as an exegetical maxim. Origen declares that without the allegorical method it is easy to make countless mistakes in interpretation.<sup>188</sup>

Origen tried to salvage the principle of rationality in faith and gained the intellectual respect of pagan writers. It must be acknowledged that the critical

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<sup>184</sup> Idem

<sup>185</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959), 360

<sup>186</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 75

<sup>187</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 529

<sup>188</sup> Idem, 530

and rational intention that inspired Origen was more decisive than the tool he used the allegorical method, which was prone to great misrepresentation and misunderstandings. For Origen, the three meanings of the Scriptures (literal, moral and spiritual) correspond to the division of the real world into body, soul and spirit, and in turn correspond to interpretation in three stages: grammatico-historical, physical and allegorical.<sup>189</sup>

Origen's typological-allegorical exegesis tended to depreciate the historical value of biblical accounts. The purpose of Scripture was in his thoughts primarily the presentation of intellectual truths and not the account of God's actions in history. Utilizing concepts and means employed by Philo, such as rabbinic gematria, numerical/ geographical/etymological symbolism, and the Platonic dualism of eternal ideas versus the inferior sense perception, Origen assigned to everything in Scripture spiritual-allegorical meanings as well as (or often instead of) literal meanings. Since every text of Scripture was thought to contain a spiritual sense, when this was not readily discernible the fault was considered to lie in the interpreter's lack of spiritual insight. In theory, if not always in practice, Origen actually propounded a threefold sense of Scripture, corresponding to the body, soul, and spirit of man. The "bodily" (or literal) meaning was least important and readily discernible even to neophytes. But only those with a mature faculty of spiritual wisdom could apprehend the highest, i.e. the spiritual (or allegorical) sense.<sup>190</sup>

### 3. Other commentators

In the third century CE, Dionysius the Great of Alexandria (264 CE) asserted that the human experiences of Christ should be taken literally, because of the historical reality of the incarnation and the genuineness of his humanity. This idea was taken up and developed by Athanasius (c 296-373 CE), who regarded the incarnation as the key to understanding Scripture, in spite of the difficulties, which he had in accepting the limitations of Jesus' humanity. For him the Bible was not merely a linguistic shell, behind which ineffable theological truths could be discerned, but the very Word of God in its literal ("incarnate") sense. Athanasius therefore rejected the Platonic (and Origenistic) division between the material and the spiritual, and believed that they were in harmony with one another. For Athanasius, the inspiration of Scripture was directly parallel to the incarnation of Christ, and the relationship between Word and Spirit was the

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<sup>189</sup> Idem

<sup>190</sup> Richard M Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: a study of hermeneutical typos structures* (Michigan: Andrew University Press, 1981), 17

same for both. Like Jesus, the Bible was fully human (though without error) and fully divine. By stating this doctrine in the way he did, Athanasius was able to link the ancient Christocentric interpretation of Scripture with the most up-to-date dogmatic affirmation of Christ's two natures.<sup>191</sup>

In the course of his arguments against the atomistic “proof-texting” interpretation of the Arians, Athanasius said that it was not enough to base one's interpretation of a biblical text on exegesis alone. All interpretation must take place in a context, and for the Christian, that context was the life and spiritual experience of the church. It was the church, and therefore the Scriptures must be interpreted in a way, which is consistent with this testimony. Athanasius was the first Christian exegete to place the church so firmly in the centre of his hermeneutics, and his approach remains characteristics of both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox interpretation to this day.<sup>192</sup>

Once the church's doctrine was established in the creeds, they could be used as rules to govern allegorical interpretation. The more difficult parts of Scripture were regarded as presenting known Christian truth in an allegorical way, and it was the duty of the exegete to point this out.<sup>193</sup>

Didymus the Blind (c 313-398 CE) reaffirmed the value of the literal sense of the Old Testament, by saying that although it had been abolished in Christ, it had previously been fully operational as the Word of God. It was therefore perfectly natural that the Jews should reject allegorical interpretation of their Scriptures, which became necessary only after the coming of Christ. Didymus insisted that the Old Testament was not to be understood as a veiling of eternal truths, which were just as valid as those of the New Testament, but rather as a preparatory teaching, pointing the ancient Israelites towards the future coming of Christ. In other words, even an allegorical reading of the Old Testament could never reveal the fullness of the gospel, which was made plain only at the time of the incarnation of the Word of God.<sup>194</sup>

### **(C) Exegesis in the West: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Gregory the Great**

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<sup>191</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 104

<sup>192</sup> Idem, 105

<sup>193</sup> Idem

<sup>194</sup> Idem

Christopher Hall introduced the concept of “the four doctors of the West”<sup>195</sup>, who reflected the exegetical trend in the West. The four Latin doctors represent an exegetical tradition noted for its variety and richness. Latin exegetes such as Jerome and Ambrose mirror the Alexandrian tradition’s reliance upon allegory in making sense of biblical texts. Jerome, whom Gerald Bray describes as “undoubtedly the greatest biblical scholar that the Latin churches ever produced,” was initially attracted to the allegorical method of Origen, although later he severely criticized it.<sup>196</sup> Ambrose was Augustine’s first instructor in the Scriptures and taught allegorical interpretive methodology to Augustine. Augustine, in turn interpreted Scripture in both a literal and allegorical fashion. Gregory the Great, one of the great pastors in the church’s history, is similar to Ambrose in his love for discerning a deeper allegorical meaning in the text of Scripture.<sup>197</sup>

The history of Western exegesis reflects the same comings and goings between East and West as in the history of the formation of the canon, of the transmission of the text and of translations into Latin. Julio Treballe Barrera affirmed the importance of various study. The interrelationship of canon, text and exegesis is the key to understanding their history as a whole.<sup>198</sup>

The Western Church was concerned with practical theology and its legal organization left little space to discussion of hermeneutical problems. The setting up of the canon of Scripture and of a rule of faith (*regula fidei*) as expressed in the Trinitarian creed and the financing of apostolic ministry of bishops entrusted with ensuring the orthodox of doctrine, led increasingly to a greater development of dogma, putting exegetical and hermeneutic problems into the background.<sup>199</sup>

### **(i) Ambrose (c 339-397 CE)**

Ambrose was born into a Roman family already graced with a distinguished Christian and Roman lineage. Charles Kannengiesser comments on

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<sup>195</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 102

<sup>196</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 91

<sup>197</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 102

<sup>198</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 530

<sup>199</sup> Idem

## Ambrose's Roman heritage:

*While formally enrolled as a catechumen, he remained true to his Christian family heritage but did not become involved in any theological dispute. His training prepared him for public service. His taste inclined him to prefer the Greek authors, old poets, and classical historians, as well as more recent authors. Of course, he knew Virgil and Cicero by heart. A son of wealthy landowners, eager to assimilate the humanistic traditions patronized by the Neoplatonic philosophers of his time, Ambrose is seen as one of the last Roman gifted with complete acquaintance with Greek culture.*<sup>200</sup>

Christopher Hall summed up Ambrose's background. He indicates that this cultural and linguistic background proved quite handy when Ambrose's career path suddenly changed, and he found himself chosen to replace the Arian bishop Auxentius as bishop of Milan. Ambrose's exposure to the Greek fathers such as Basil, would clearly influence how Ambrose interpreted the Bible.<sup>201</sup> Ambrose's background had prepared him well for the Christian ministry of the exegete, including "his knowledge of Greek, his exegetical aptitude from the practice of reading and interpreting the literal and allegorical sense of a poetic text (Homer and Virgil) and above all its moral meaning".<sup>202</sup>

With regard to Ambrose's exegetical approach, Julio Treballe Barrera commented that Ambrose promoted allegorical interpretation, which emphasized the hidden meaning of the biblical text and so favoring the loss of interest in philological study of the Scriptures.<sup>203</sup> Christopher Hall widened the scope of the exegetical method of Ambrose that Ambrose tended to read the Bible in a new way, arguing that any biblical text possessed three senses --- the literal, moral and anagogical or mystical. The possibility that the Bible might have a deeper meaning layered within its literal sense.<sup>204</sup> Most important of all, Christopher Hall commented that Ambrose developed a moral and mystical sense from interpreting the text.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Early Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 26

<sup>201</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, III: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 103

<sup>202</sup> Bertrand de Margerie, S. J., *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis*, vol. 2, *The Latin Fathers* (Petersham, Mass.: Saint Bede's Publications, 1995), 76n.2.

<sup>203</sup><sup>203</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 530

<sup>204</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, III: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 105

<sup>205</sup> Idem, 106



## (ii) Jerome (c 342-420 CE)

Jerome's exegetical approach involved both East and West. He was led to change from allegorical exegesis to literal and historical interpretation. He is the best example of the kind of influence, which Jewish hermeneutics could have on Christian exegesis. Julio Trebolle Barrera commented on the impact of the fusion of different cultures on Ambrose. The rabbis with whom he kept contact influenced his intellectual conversion, which involved a complete change of direction towards the Hebrew language and the Hebrew text of the bible, to Greek translations by Jews and towards rabbinic methods of interpretation.<sup>206</sup>

Jerome was undoubtedly the greatest biblical scholar that the Latin church ever produced. Jerome undertook a fresh translation into Latin, which he based on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and on the Hexapla of Origen.<sup>207</sup> The result was a magisterial translation which, together with the deuterocanonical books which were added by later hands, became known subsequently as the Popular, or "Vulgate" Bible (*Biblia Vulgata*). The Vulgate quickly established itself as the main Latin version of the Scriptures, and for over a thousand years it was the standard text of the western church. Jerome began to translate a number of Origen's homilies on the prophets and two on the Song of Songs. But as Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew and of Jewish exegesis increased, so his attraction to Origen diminished.<sup>208</sup>

Jerome's exegetical work reflects the development of his thought away from Origen and back to the Hebrew. A closer look at two letters of Jerome to Pope Damasus will illustrate how Jerome functioned as a skilled biblical exegete. Christopher Hall commented that we have here a good example of how Jerome moved easily between what he understood as the literal, moral and allegorical meanings of a text.<sup>209</sup> As a whole, Jerome's letters reveal his views on a wide variety of theological topics and exegetical possibilities. His commentaries on Ecclesiastes and Psalms belong to his Origenistic phase, while that on Genesis marks the later transition. His later work on the minor prophets belongs to his

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<sup>206</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 530

<sup>207</sup> Jerome produced his new Latin translation of the Old Testament based on the Hebrew text, the older Latin versions that were based on the Septuagint continued to be preferred by most in the church. See Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 38

<sup>208</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 91

<sup>209</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 112

anti-Origenist phase.<sup>210</sup>

### (iii) Augustine of Hippo

For Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), the literal and spiritual meaning is equally valid (*signum et res*). The *regula fidei* determines which of the two meanings, literal or figurative, dominates in each case. This resort to the *regula fidei* poses the problem concerning the kind of relationships between biblical hermeneutics and dogma. Any progress of hermeneutics with respect to dogma results in a contradiction.<sup>211</sup>

Augustine's treatment of Scripture is very extensive. *De doctrina christiana* stands as his testament to scriptural hermeneutics. However, Augustine's axioms of biblical interpretation are scattered throughout his works, especially throughout his sermons.

Frederick Van Fleteren indicated the vivid diversification of Augustine's exegesis. In Augustine's interpretation, an entire theological enterprise is involved. This meant that biblical exegesis is at the core of the theological undertaking in the patristic era. Scientific, philosophical, dogmatic, polemical, catechetical, homiletic, ascetical, moral and historical considerations are within Augustine's purview. Scripture is not merely an historical document to be explained. It is a living text of salvation.<sup>212</sup> Christ himself guarantees the success of Scriptural study. The exegesis's task is to ask, to seek, and to knock on the door of knowledge.

Frederick Van Fleteren believed that Augustine's exegetical technique varied according to purpose and audience. His exegesis was scientific according to late antique science.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, Augustine was also under the influence of his surrounding exegetical schools. He developed allegorical interpretation along the line of Origen and Ambrose as a response to Manichean ultra-literal exegesis. Richard M Davidson echoed the same view. In the West, Augustine

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<sup>210</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 92

<sup>211</sup> Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 530

<sup>212</sup> Frederick Van Fleteren, *Principles of Augustine's Hermeneutic: An Overview in Augustine: Biblical exegete*, ed. Frederick Van Fleteren, Joseph C. Schnaubelt, OSA., 2

<sup>213</sup> Idem, 3

made liberal use of the Alexandrian mode of allegorical exegesis.<sup>214</sup> The Latin world had its own literalist tradition, which went back to Tertullian. In the fourth century, this was systematized by Tyconius (400 CE) in his famous seven rules, which provided Augustine with his basic exegetical framework. The seven rules are as follows:

- (1) *De Domino et corpore eius* (on the Lord and his body)
- (2) *De Domini corpore bipartito* (on the twofold body of Christ)
- (3) *De promissis et lege* (on the promises and the Law)
- (4) *De specie et genere* (on the particular and the universal)
- (5) *De temporibus* (on times)
- (6) *De recapitulatione* (on abbreviation)
- (7) *De diabolo et corpore eius* (on the devil and his body)<sup>215</sup>

The above rules of exegesis can be compared with the Jewish principles of Hillel's seven rules in terms of importance. In practice, Gerald Bray explained that Tyconius's exegesis was governed by the fact that he was a renegade Donatist. It was a basic Donatist belief that the church was spotlessly pure, and Tyconius spent much of his time demonstrating that this was not so.<sup>216</sup> Augustine adopted Tyconius's rules and made great use of them, especially of the first, but he was also aware of their deficiencies. In an effort to make up for these, Augustine added the following important points:<sup>217</sup>

- (1) The authority of Scripture rests on the authority of the church. It is according to the order in which the church receives the sacred text that it acquires its authority, so that books which are less universally recognized are correspondingly less authoritative.
- (2) The obscurities in Scripture have been put there on purpose by God, and may be interrupted on the basis of the many plain passages. This doctrine, which repeats the view of Origen in a non-allegorical context, has continued to function as a main principle of biblical exegesis up to the present time.

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<sup>214</sup> Richard M Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: a study of hermeneutical typos structures* (Michigan: Andrew University Press, 1981), 17

<sup>215</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 107

<sup>216</sup> Idem, 108

<sup>217</sup> Idem

- (3) When Scripture is ambiguous, the rule of faith can be used to interpret it.
- (4) Figurative passages must not be taken literally. In the debate over liberalism, attention must be paid to the literary form of each text. Of course, Augustine had his way of deciding what was figurative, which causes problems for modern readers.
- (5) A figure need not always have only one meaning. Meaning may vary with the context, as when the word “shield” signifies both God’s good pleasure (Ps. 5:13) and faith (Eph. 6:16). Augustine goes on to say that because a figure may have several meanings, it may be interpreted in a way, which the author did not intend, but which accords with what can be found in other parts of Scripture. Augustine believed that the Holy Spirit had already provided for this possibility, and legitimized such a handling of the text.
- (6) Any possible meaning, which a text can have, is legitimate, whether the author realized it or not. Augustine argued that truth could be apprehended at many different levels, and it was wrong to limit a biblical text to only one meaning. This was the argument he used to justify his widespread use of figurative (allegorical) interpretation.<sup>218</sup>

### 5.5.6 Fifth-seventh century: From 451-604 CE

Gerald Bray identified the final phase of patristic study in this section of the developmental processes. The final or late conciliar was staged from after the Council of Chalcedon to the time of Gregory the Great (604 CE) or even to that of Charlemagne (800 CE).<sup>219</sup> Subsequent exegetes did little more than repeat the classics, often abbreviating them in the process, confined originally to their own speculations about the meaning of obscure words and phrases, or the peculiarities of biblical style. The one truly creative writer was Gregory the Great (c 540-604 CE) from whom we have the Gregorian Calendar. He insisted that the historical or literal sense must be preserved as the foundation on which typological and moral allegory could be built. With these principles in mind, he sifted through the vast store of patristic exegesis, and retained only those elements, which he believed were of permanent value. In a sense, Gregory made a canonical selection of patristic exegesis for the benefit of future

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<sup>218</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), 108

<sup>219</sup> Idem, 78

generations. His own contribution to the development of exegesis lay mainly, I his belief, in his view that Scripture is a mirror of the soul. In reading the Bible, the Christian learns, from the way in which God dealt with the saints, how God also deals with us.<sup>220</sup>

### **5.5.7 Summary**

The period of early Christian interpretation is from second century to eighth century that patristic writings start to appear. They are the reflection of patristic theology and church's dogma, which are undeniably influenced by its surrounding thoughts and philosophy. In other words, they are the exegetical products of patristic socio-political circumstance starting from the coming of Jesus Christ. We also witness the continuity of the trend and direction from exegetical method, which impose effect on the interpreters when the process of exegesis starts.

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<sup>220</sup> Idem, 110

## Chapter Six

### Typology in Patristic Exegesis

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with some techniques of patristic exegesis. Most scholars will acknowledge some form of development both in exegetical trends and in Christian theology. Various models of development have been constructed in order to characterize what is meant by the idea of development. The development of exegetical method involved the most influential factor affecting how this method was presented. David Dockery singled out the importance of context. He indicated that the context was an influential factor in the early Christian trends of interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the Christian exegetical features, context including historical, political and cultural background played a major part.

He further introduced some kinds of techniques found in Christian exegesis. There have been at least three different approaches to patristic hermeneutics. The first concentrated on describing how the text of Scripture is assimilated by the theology of the early church. This was in reality, eisegesis, reading the meaning of a passage into Scripture rather than reading of the meaning out of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> This approach views the early church's interpretation as a major misunderstanding of the Bible. A second approach to patristic hermeneutics as a descriptive method does not seek to evaluate the correctness or validity of the interpretations. The above two approaches can be severely criticized by the standard of modern interpretation. He went on pointing out the third one: typology. It focuses upon the method being used more than the contents of the early church interpreters. The strengths of the third approach enable us to see the relationship between Christian exegesis and its Hellenistic and Jewish sources, as well as the relationship between the various Christian

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<sup>1</sup> He points out that models of development include four perspectives: contextual, syllogistic, innovational and inherent advancement. Each of these, to various degrees, is present in the early church's hermeneutical developments. The uniqueness of this study involves not only the comparison of the hermeneutical debate in the early church with the contemporary issues in modern hermeneutical theology, but primarily the synthetic overview of the patristic approach to Scripture. See David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 17

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the chapter three of Midrash

perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Scholars indicated typology as a major exegetical trend in early Christianity against a vivid cultural background. Typological interpretation had been employed earlier in Judaism.<sup>4</sup> One of the outstanding examples was the salvation of Israel out of Egypt in the book of the Exodus, which provided the model or “type” by which the Old Testament prophets understood God’s subsequent acts of redemption of Israel (Isa. 40-66) and of Gentiles. Moreover, Hays added that typology was widely used in early Christianity, as a basic key by which the Scriptures were understood.<sup>5</sup>

Undeniably, the discussion of this approach in this section resembles my previous indication of the context as a major factor affecting the exegetical trend in early Jewish interpretation and early Christian church. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson echoed this view. They believed that the surrounding background will impose some effect on hermeneutics. Several interpretive methods are borrowed from Judaism. The Old Testament is interpreted according to its plain or literal meaning, especially on ethical issues.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that the comparative study of early Jewish and patristic exegesis lies on legitimate ground. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson pointed out that common to the New Testament is the use of Israel’s Scriptures in midrash.<sup>7</sup> They advocated that Midrash assumes that all words and passages of Scripture are of equal weight and can be used to interpret one another because they all derive from the mind of God. Any word or passage of Scripture can be used to interpret any other word or passage.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the arrangement of midrash in early Jewish exegesis, which was discussed in chapter three, was an exegetical approach to interpret the book of Ruth in chapter four. This part referred to typology of Christian and patristic stage as an illustration of an exegetical method to provide the interpretation on patristic Ruth.

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<sup>3</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 19-20

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Fishbane, “Use, Authority and Interpretation of Mikra at Qumran,” *Compendia* II, 1 (1988), 373; D. Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London 1963); D. Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic* (Missoula 1975), 170.

<sup>5</sup> R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, (New Haven: CT, 1989), 91-102.

<sup>6</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 38

<sup>7</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>8</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 38

## 6.2 Definition and meaning

Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woollcombe gave a brief definition of typology. Typology has often been used in a broad sense to cover the study of the linkages between the two Testaments.<sup>9</sup> He further elaborated that typology, considered as a method of exegesis, used in term of the relationship between Old and New Testament, may be defined as the establishment of historical connections between certain events, persons or things in the Old Testament and similar events, persons or things in the New Testament. He also considered typology as a method of writing. It may be defined as the description of an event, person or things in the New Testament, borrowed from the description of its prototypal counterpart in the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup>

We can only be sure of types identified in the New Testament. A real point of resemblance must be found between a type and its New Testament antitype. There must be an integral, internal connection between the two. There should be scriptural evidence that a particular person or event is a type; that God in His foreknowledge of history intended this to be a pre-figuration of Christ and His redemptive work. This does not mean, however, that nothing should be regarded as typological which is not expressly identified as such in the New Testament. The *Protevangelium*<sup>11</sup> is nowhere specifically quoted as fulfilled in Christ with the exception of the allusion to the passage in Romans 16:20. Yet, none of us would deny that it is directly Messianic. The viewpoint that one dare speak only of types identified in the New Testament as true types is far too restrictive.

Julio Trebolle Barrera joined the discussion and indicated the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament in terms of the principle of typology. The understanding of the Old Testament as promise and as prophecy of the New Testament developed into the understanding of the Old Testament as a type of the New Testament. The events, characters and institutions of the Old Testament are changed into pre-figurations of the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> Ellis also echoed this view. In the New Testament usage of this method it rested upon the conviction of a correspondence between God's acts in the past and

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology, Studies in Biblical Theology* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1957), 39

<sup>10</sup> Idem, 39-40

<sup>11</sup> Gn 3:15

<sup>12</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 521



those in the person and work of Jesus that inaugurating the age to come. From past Old Testament events and institutions it drew out the meaning of the present time of salvation and in turn interpreted present events as a typological prophecy of the future consummation.<sup>13</sup>

Other scholars also presented a definition of typology. They also paid much emphasis on the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson indicated that typology is an interpretive method that combs the Jewish Scriptures to find a fore shadowing or prototypes of the work of Christ and the church in form of the persons, events, things, and ideas mentioned in the text.<sup>14</sup> David Dockery pointed out that typological exegesis seeks to discover a correspondence between the people and events of the past and of those of the present or future.<sup>15</sup>

### 6.3 Different Types of “Types”

Typology is a study of types. Etymologically the word “type” is derived from the Greek word *tupos* which denotes the impression made by a blow, the stamp made by a die, thus figure or image and an example or pattern. The latter is the most common meaning used in the Bible.<sup>16</sup> It is a type which prefigures some future reality. Types are Old Testament pointers which direct one to the New Testament’s concrete realities. God preordained certain persons, events, and institutions in the Old Testament to prefigure corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New. These types point to and anticipate their matching historical New Testament antitypes.

Therefore, Julio Trebolle Barrera introduced and illustrated the concept of a type and its antitype. Typology combines a type and its anti-type. Types prefigure something or someone, but their nature can only be seen in the light of the anti type. It reflects and interprets an event, which has already happened or a person already revealed. The new becomes the hermeneutic key to the old.<sup>17</sup> The antitype is no mere repetition of the type, but is always greater than

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<sup>13</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 105-6

<sup>14</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 39

<sup>15</sup> David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the light of the Early Church* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 33

<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of meaning and definition of typology above.

<sup>17</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the*

its pre-figuration. This type-antitype relationship can be compared to an object reflected in a mirror. The type is the vague mirror image or picture of the New Testament reality. Typological exegesis then is based on the conviction that God the Father determined that certain persons and events in the history of Israel would prefigure what He would accomplish in the fullness of time in the person of His only begotten Son. Geoffrey Lampe and Kenneth Woollcombe pointed out that the matter is summarized in this statement of Augustine:

*Abraham our father was a faithful man who lived in those far-off days. He trusted in God and was justified by his faith. His wife Sarah bore him a son . . . God had a care for such persons and made them at that time to be heralds of his Son who was to come; so that not merely in what they said, but in what they did or in what happened to them, Christ should be sought and discovered.*<sup>18</sup>

Typology does not denigrate the verbally inspired text. The literal sense of the text is its basis. It does not ignore the historical meaning of the Scripture but begins with that historical meaning and looks to its New Testament fulfillment. Typology has its origin in God's own foreknowledge of history. Horace Hummel speaks of this relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament fulfillment as a "sacramental" connection. He stated that "especially Lutherans should have little difficulty with the use of the word "sacramental" in this connection. The external history (or elements) must be real enough but "in, with, and under" it lies the ultimate meaning. There is an integral and internal connection between type and antitype."<sup>19</sup>

Types may be divided into three different categories: Persons, events, and institutions. The judges of Israel, who were actually deliverers, are types of Christ, our true Deliverer from the bondage of sin. Moses is a type of the real Prophet who should come, namely Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> David is a type of his Greater Son. The flood in the days of Noah prefigures Baptism.<sup>21</sup> Christ is the anti-type of Passover, *Yom Kippur*, and all the Old Testament sacrifices.

These categories may also be subdivided into vertical and horizontal typology. Most typology is by far horizontal. It prefigures some earthly future reality. It is

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*History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 521

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology, Studies in Biblical Theology* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1957), 13

<sup>19</sup> Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 17

<sup>20</sup> Dt 8:18

<sup>21</sup> I Pt 3:21

both eschatological and Christological, reaching its full consummation in Christ. For example, the tabernacle is a type of the Incarnate One who tabernacled among us and who had far greater glory than Solomon's temple.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the tabernacle and the temple appear to have had a vertical aspect. They are a pattern or a copy of heavenly worship.<sup>23</sup> Also this vertical typology is fulfilled in Christ who in the new heaven and new earth will dwell with His people and be their God and will wipe every tear from their eyes.<sup>24</sup> He is the true tabernacle and the true temple.

We can witness that there are many types in the Old Testament that are not specifically designated as such in the New. However, some examples are certain of those which are identified in the New Testament. The bronze serpent pointing to the cross<sup>25</sup> is a good example. An uncertain case refers to Samson, who accomplished more in his death than his life, is a picture of Christ's passion even though this type was used throughout the history of the church. Samson can be seen as a type or picture of Christ, as were all the judges of this era. Each of these saviors was to remind Israel of God's full liberation in the Promised Messiah. Already in his wonderful birth with the appearance of the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, we are reminded of the far greater conception and birth of Jesus Christ. They were also alike in their lives' purpose. Samson was to defeat the enemies of God's people, while Jesus' purpose was to defeat our greatest enemy, the old evil foe. Finally they were alike in their death. Concerning Samson it must be said that he accomplished more in this death than he did in his life, for in His death he destroyed the temple of Dagon and thousands of his enemies.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Christ's death was the purpose of His life. He gave Himself as a ransom for many so that He might conquer hell. A typological figure was used for the illustration of doctrinal concept of gospel by early Christian exegetes.

In patristic exegesis, a typological passage touching a certain doctrine must be expounded in the light of passages which speak of the matter in plain literal terms. The account of Melchizedek as an illustration giving bread and wine to Abram may be seen as a picture of the Lord's Supper, but it is not proof for the sacrifice of the Mass. Such an interpretation is contrary to the clear passages of

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<sup>22</sup> Jn 1:14

<sup>23</sup> Ex 25:9

<sup>24</sup> Rv 21:3-4

<sup>25</sup> Nm 21:9; Jn 3:14

<sup>26</sup> Jdg 16:30

Scripture, the analogy of faith. Typology has primarily been used by our forefathers in homiletical and devotional purposes. Here lies the practical value of typological interpretation for the Lutheran pastor and teacher. In patristic typology, the Old Testament is the book of Christ. It demonstrates that the passages of the Old Testament are prefigured for the work of Christ.

Moreover, most patristic perspectives are eschatological, pointing to the coming of an ideal world and type. The exegetes introduced a judgment type of typology. In judgment typology God's earlier acts of destruction are understood as types or examples of eschatological judgments, also appearing in the New Testament. The flood and Sodom, for example, are used in eschatological way. Likewise, the faithless Israelite is a type of the faithless Christian; the enemies of Israel a type of the religious enemies of the eschatological Israel, that is, of the church.<sup>27</sup>

## 6.4 Development of typology

### 6.4.1 From Biblical stage

Although it derives from a word frequently used in the Bible itself, it should be stressed that "typology" does not refer to some exegetical method by which one extracts meaning from Scripture, but primarily connotes an underlying mentality or confession. Because Yahweh is taken as constantly guiding history toward its Messianic goal, not merely occasionally bestirring Himself to intervene (although certain events and people will stand out), one sometimes gets the impression that, humanly speaking, the biblical writers made an almost random selection of examples to illustrate the point. That would explain why the Old Testament is often quoted very freely in the New Testament, why it usually follows the LXX rather than the Hebrew, and why modern scholars often vary as much as they do in their perceptions of what kind of typological patterns are being followed. That is also why debate about precisely how many types or prophecies there are, is misguided. All of the Old Testament is prophetic and in the same broad sense all of it is typological, all of it Christological, and all of it eschatological. Basically typology is simply an expression and exemplification of the conviction that type and antitype are of the same genus or family, which is commonly referred to as the unity of Scripture. For all the external differences,

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<sup>27</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 109

both are religions of grace, not of works, and both center in Jesus Christ.

Some biblical examples can illustrate this concept of typology. In I Corinthians 10:6 the Greek word *typos* is employed to speak of certain Exodus events as a type of Christian life, in Romans 5:14 that Adam is a type of Christ, and in I Peter 3:21 a related word is used to indicate that Baptism is an antitype of the flood. Julio Trebolle Barrera added some more examples. The first Adam is a type of the second Adam who is Christ. Baptism is the anti-type of Noah's ark (Col 2:17; 1 Pt 3:21). Manna is the type of the true eschatological bread, which is Christ (Jn 6:31). Moreover, Israel's wandering in the desert is the type of the Christian community (Heb 3:7-4:13).<sup>28</sup>

#### 6.4.2 Early Church Fathers

Numerous recent studies have examined the patristic use of typology.<sup>29</sup> We summarize the more significant results of this research. Through the patristic literature the Scriptural "types" are generally understood to consist of divinely designed pre-figurations of Christ or of the realities of the Gospel brought about by Christ.<sup>30</sup>

While in the extant works of the Apostolic Fathers typology often seems to be "surprisingly unimportant," it does appear in I Clement<sup>31</sup> and particularly in the Epistle of Barnabas.<sup>32</sup> Barnabas' typology is consistently Christocentric. However, the NT eschatological perspective seems lacking, and his typological correspondences frequently appear to be based upon incidental and

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<sup>28</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 521

<sup>29</sup> For analysis of method and listing of major proponents during this period, see especially Brown, *Hermeneutics*, 611-12; Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulstan Hibberd (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1960); Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 161-242; Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 57-101; Richard P. C. Hanson, *Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church*, 412-53; Glen W. Olsen, "Allegory, Typology and Symbol: The Sensus spiritualis" Part I: Definitions and Earliest History Part II: Early Church through Origen *ICRC 4* (1977): 161-79 and Kenneth J. Woollcombe, "The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology", in *Essays on Typology, Studies in Biblical Theology*, No. 22 by Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woollcombe (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1957), 56-75.

<sup>30</sup> This understanding of the "types" of Scripture by the Church Fathers can be deduced from numerous examples of patristic usage. See Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 1419 and see also Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulstan Hibberd (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1960)

<sup>31</sup> *1 Clem.* 12:7

<sup>32</sup> See especially Barn. 7:3, 6-11; 8:1-7; 12:2-6; 13:5

superficial resemblances.<sup>33</sup>

The Apologists of the second and early third centuries, especially Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Irenaeus made copious use of typology. In defending Christianity (primarily against the Jews and the Gnostics) they often employed typology to establish that the OT had value (contra the Gnostics) but was fulfilled or super-ceded by the New Testament (contra the Jews). In their desire to make Christianity appealing to their contemporaries, however, the Apologists sometimes allowed typology to become blurred with Hellenistic allegory.<sup>34</sup>

The fathers often also spoke of a “mystical sense” as they called it in their catechetical instructions. Contemporary Roman Catholic usage does not speak of any mystical sense but in their common talk about the paschal mystery they combine typological, liturgical, and sacramental perspectives. We are acquainted to speak of a “mystical sense” of Scripture to some sort of esoteric allegory or mysticism as a theological posture. Another option is to speak of a spiritual sense.

### 6.4.3 Exegetical schools

#### (a) The Alexandrian school

It was in the exegetical school of Alexandria that Christian typology became thoroughly fused with Hellenistic allegorism. In Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE) the allegorical method of Philo was “baptized into Christ.”<sup>35</sup> Danielou summarized the various elements of Philo’s exegesis which molded Alexandrian allegorism. For Philo, Scripture cannot contain anything unworthy of God or useless to man, and therefore insignificant details, accounts of

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<sup>33</sup> “While recognizing a strand of allegorization already in the Apostolic Fathers and the early Apologists, nevertheless contends that the biblical perspective on typology was also maintained in the early church even in numerous instances where only ostensibly surface resemblances are drawn between type and antitype. See Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, 244-60

<sup>34</sup> We are here employing the distinction that is commonly drawn in modern discussion of allegory and typology. In typology the literal, historical meaning of the passage is taken seriously, and the typological correspondence is built upon --- not unrelated or opposed to the original meaning. Allegory, on the other hand, is not primarily concerned about the literal meaning, but assigns to the words and phrases of the text meanings that are foreign to the original meaning. Irenaeus was somewhat more cautious than other early Apologists in his application of typology.

<sup>35</sup> Richard M Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: a study of hermeneutical typos structures* (Michigan: Andrew University Press, 1981), 21

patriarchal misdeeds must have a non-literal, hidden meaning.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, everything in Scripture is declared to have a figurative meaning. The literal meaning must be peeled off in order to get at the deeper allegorical sense. In harmony with Platonic dualism, Philo sees the inferior, transitory world of the senses as a reflection of the superior eternal ideas. Thus the narrative accounts are hidden allegories of the moral states and progress of the soul, to be unlocked by the initiated interpreter. This involves the assigning of allegorical meaning to details of the narrative.<sup>37</sup>

Philo's activity falls into the first half of the first century CE. It was natural that towards the end of this century and beginning of the next Alexandria should become a point of fusion for Christian and Philonic exegesis. We can see the process at work in Origen, who praised Philo, while regarding himself as a disciple and continuator of St. Paul. He combated and borrowed from both Jewish rabbis and Gnostic heretics.

Origen inherited the Christian teaching that the Old Testament prefigures or foreshadows the New. This conception of allegory differs from Philo's in that both the sign and the thing signified are conceived as historical and would have no significance if they were not. Today it is sometimes distinguished from allegory and called typology. Beryl Smalley advocated that Origen found four kinds of types in the Old Testament: prophecies of the coming of Christ, prophecies of the Church and her sacraments, prophecies of the Last Things and of the kingdom of heaven, finally figures of the relationship between God and the individual soul as exemplified in the history of the chosen people.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, in the stage of Origen, the method was systematically developed and clearly expounded.<sup>39</sup> Origen's typological-allegorical exegesis tended to depreciate the historical value of biblical accounts. The purpose of Scripture

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<sup>36</sup> Danielou, Jean, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), 103-12

<sup>37</sup> Philo shows how the account of creation in Gen 2 is not to be taken literally. Heaven and earth refers to Mind and Sense-perception. The garden is Virtue. The four rivers are the four particular Virtues, Prudence, Courage, Self-Mastery and Justice. The man is a symbol of Mind and the creation of Eve signifies the origin of Sense-perception which becomes active when Mind sleeps. See Richard M Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: a study of hermeneutical typos structures* (Michigan: Andrew University Press, 1981), 21

<sup>38</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 7

<sup>39</sup> For discussion of Origen's allegorical method, see his *De Principiis*; Robert M. Grant, "A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible" rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1963), 90-104; Richard P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1959)

was primarily the presentation of intellectual truths and not the account of God's action in history. Utilizing concepts and means employed by Philo—such as rabbinic gematria, numerical / geographical / etymological symbolism, and the Platonic dualism of eternal ideas versus the inferior sense perception. Origen assigned to everything in Scripture spiritual-allegorical meanings as well as literal meanings.<sup>40</sup> Since every text of Scripture was readily discernible the fault was considered to lie solely in the interpreter's lack of spiritual insight. In theory, if not always in practice, Origen actually propounded a three-fold sense of Scripture, corresponding to the body, soul, and spirit of man.<sup>41</sup> The “bodily (or literal) meaning was least important and readily discernible even to neophytes. More advanced insights could grasp the “psychical” (or moral) sense. However, only those with a mature faculty of spiritual wisdom could apprehend the highest, i.e., the spiritual (or allegorical) sense.

In the West, such Latin Fathers as Hilary of Poitiers (315-67 CE), Ambrose (339-97), the early Jerome (ca 329-419 CE), and especially Augustine (354-430) made liberal use of the Alexandrian mode of allegorical exegesis.<sup>42</sup>

### **(b) The Antiochene school**

The exegetical school at Antioch, founded by Lucian of Samosata, reacted strongly against Alexandrian allegorism. Adherents to the Antiochene school notably Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote treatises denouncing Origen and his allegorical method.<sup>43</sup> The exegetical principles of this school were also propounded in these works and popularized in the writings of John Chrysostom. Antiochene exegesis, in contradistinction to that of Alexandria, was firmly anchored to history and to the literal meaning of Scripture. The Antiochene concept of “theory”<sup>44</sup> in which the prophet saw and recorded both the immediate historical and the future Messianic meanings did

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<sup>40</sup> De Principiis 4.1.20 (ANF, 4:369): “For, with respect to Holy Scripture, our opinion is that the whole of it has a “spiritual”, but not the whole a “bodily” meaning, because the bodily meaning is in many places proved to be impossible.”

<sup>41</sup> De Principiis 4.1.11 (ANF, 4:359): “For as man consist of body, and soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture, which has been arranged to be given by God for the salvation of man.” In practice however, Origen often makes use of only two senses, the literal and the spiritual.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>43</sup> Diodorus of Tarsus wrote *On the Difference between Theory and Allegory*, of which only fragments remain. The five volumes of Theodore of Mopsuestia *Concerning Allegory and History against Origen* were ordered burned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 CE and are no longer extant.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter five



not depreciate the literal meaning of Scripture but rather was grounded upon it. The relation between type and antitype was seen to be real and intelligible, not hidden and discernible only to the spiritual initiates as in allegory. The number of types employed was of a limited number in contrast to the Alexandrian application of allegory to every text of Scripture. The typological correspondences drawn by the Antiochene school related more to the Church and the sacraments while in Alexandrian typology the stress was placed upon the mystical-spiritual (the inner life).

In the Second Council of Constantinople (553 CE), the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who had been the most influential Antiochene exegete, were condemned as tainted with Nestorianism and were ordered to be burned. As a result, suspicion was cast upon the entire Antiochene School. Its emphasis upon the literal sense was preserved in the sermons and commentaries of Chrysostom, and in those commentaries of Jerome written near the end of his life.

## 6.5 Exegetical presuppositions of typology

Behind the use of the typology by the earliest Christians stood not only a body of testimonia portions, but also certain distinctive presuppositions. If we are to appreciate their exegetical practices, it is necessary to have an awareness of their basic hermeneutical outlooks and attitudes.<sup>45</sup> It has been pertinently observed that “it is doubtful whether we can hope to understand the contents of any mind whose presuppositions we have not yet learned to recognize.”<sup>46</sup>

### 6.5.1 Corporate Solidarity

In the first place, the concept of “corporate solidarity” or “corporate personality” had a profound effect upon the exegesis of early Jewish Christians. Since H. Wheeler Robinson’s pioneer essay on this subject of 1935, this fact has been increasingly recognized.<sup>47</sup> Reumann indicates that the concept has been defined as “that important Semitic complex of thought in which there is a constant oscillation between the individual and the group --- family, tribe or

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<sup>45</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 93

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology, Studies in Biblical Theology* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1957), 18

<sup>47</sup> H. W. Robinson, “The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality,” in *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (1964), 1-20

nation --- to which he belongs, so that the king or some other representative figure may be said to embody the group, or the group may be said to sum up the host of individuals.”<sup>48</sup> He further elaborated that the precise nature of the relationships involved is not always entirely clear from the literature of the Jews, nor from that of their Semitic neighbors. Probably this is due in large measure to the fact that “ancient literature never does fit exactly into our categories.”<sup>49</sup> Richard Longenecker however believed that though there are uncertainties as to precisely how the idea expressed itself in ancient life generally and as to the degree of influence it exerted in specific instances in the literature, there seems to be little question of its presence in the structure of Jewish and early Jewish Christian thought.<sup>50</sup>

In biblical exegesis, the concept of corporate solidarity comes to the fore in the treatment of relationships between the nation or representative figures within the nation, on the one hand, and the elect remnant or the Messiah, on the other. It allows the focus of attention to “pass without explanation or explicit indication from one to the other, in a fluidity of transition which seems to us unnatural.”<sup>51</sup>

### 6.5.2 Correspondence in History

J. Danielou commented that the history of the people of God was evidenced as forming a unity in its various parts.<sup>52</sup> Dodd echoed the same view. Referring to both Jews and Jewish Christians, he says historical occurrences are “build upon a certain pattern corresponding to God’s design for man His creative.”<sup>53</sup> The nature of man, the relations between man and man, the interaction between man and the universe, and the relation of both to God, their Creator and Redeemer, are viewed in wholistic fashion. In such a view, history is neither endlessly cyclical nor progressively developing due to forces inherent in it. Rather, in all its movements and in all its varied episodes, it is expressive of the divine intent and explicating the divine will. With such an understanding of history, early Christians were prepared to trace correspondences between persons then and persons now. Such corresponding were not just analopous in

<sup>48</sup> J. Reumann, “Introduction” to H. W. Robinson’s *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, v

<sup>49</sup> Idem, 16

<sup>50</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 93-4

<sup>51</sup> J. Reumann, “Introduction” to H. W. Robinson’s *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, 15

<sup>52</sup> J. Danielou, “The New Testament and the Theology of History,” *Studia Evangelica, I*, ed. K. Aland (1959), 25-34

<sup>53</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According To the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 128

nature, or to be employed by way of illustration. Richard Longenecker pointed out that for the early Christians they were incorporated into history by divine intent, and therefore to be taken typologically. Their presence in the history of a former day is to be considered as elucidating and furthering the redemptive message of the present.<sup>54</sup>

### 6.5.3 Eschatological Fulfillment

An obvious presupposition also affecting early Jewish Christian interpretation is the consciousness of living in the days of eschatological fulfillment. This theme is recurrent throughout the preaching of the earliest Christians. As with the covenanters of Qumran, early Jewish believers in Jesus understood their ancient Scriptures in an eschatological context. Unlike the Dead Sea sectarians, however, whose eschatology was mainly proleptic and anticipated, Christians were convinced that the coming of the Messiah had been realized in Jesus of Nazareth, and the last days inaugurated with him. Richard Longenecker pointed out that while awaiting final consummation, their eschatology was rooted in and conditioned by what had already happened in the immediate past. The decisive event had occurred and in a sense all else was epilogue.<sup>55</sup>

### 6.5.4 Messianic Presence

In addition, as F. F. Bruce reminds us, “the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament is not only eschatological but Christological.”<sup>56</sup> This theme was thoroughly discussed before.<sup>57</sup> For the earliest believers, this meant (1) that the living presence of Christ, through his Spirit, was to be considered as a determining factor in all their biblical exegesis, and (2) that the Old Testament was to be interpreted Christocentrically. W. D. Davies has pointed out that at least in popular and haggadic circles within Judaism demonstrated this trend of Messiah’s coming through the Davidic line of dynasty. There existed the expectation that with the coming of the Messiah the enigmatic and obscure in the Torah “would be made plain.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, such an expectation seems to have become a settled conviction among the early Christians, as evidenced by the exegetical practices inherent in their preaching.

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<sup>54</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 95

<sup>55</sup> Idem

<sup>56</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts*, 77

<sup>57</sup> See the discussion of the section of “*Old Testament and Jesus relationship*” in Chapter Five.

<sup>58</sup> W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (1952), 84-94

## 6.6 Typology, allegorism and others techniques

Probably the best introduction to and survey of the patristic use of typology is Jean Danielou's *Sacramentum Futuri*<sup>59</sup> Danielou has published other important works in this area, perhaps most significantly his 1951, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (English, 1956). However, when one reads these books, especially the first, he is often hard pressed to distinguish what we would call allegory from typology. It is usually agreed that Pauline and patristic allegory ultimately differs radically from the Philonic type, usually called symbolic vs. the biblical historical type. Allegory has today almost universally come to imply an approach which demeans, ignores, or even denies the literal or historical sense of the text, and hence, is no longer useful. In contrast, typology builds on the literal sense although aware of discontinuities, proclaims the extension, prolongation, and consummation of the literal sense of the text.

John Breck pointed out that typology stressed the connection between actual persons, events, places, and institutions of the Old Testament, and their corresponding reality in the New Testament which they foreshadowed.<sup>60</sup> Moses the Lawgiver foreshadows Christ, the ultimate Lawgiver. Aaron, the High priest, foreshadows Christ, the ultimate High Priest. Manna, which fed the people in the wilderness foreshadows the Christ (the Heavenly Bread), which provides ultimate spiritual nourishment.

We now focus on the difference among various kinds of exegetical approaches. New Testament typological interpretation is to be distinguished from certain other approaches. Earle Ellis pointed out that unlike allegory it regards the Scriptures not as verbal metaphors hiding a deeper meaning but from the salvation-history of Israel.<sup>61</sup> Unlike the use of "type" in pagan and some patristic literature, which assumes a cyclical-repetitive historical process, Earle Ellis illustrated that it relates the past to the present in terms of a historical correspondence and escalation in which the divinely ordered pre-figuration finds a complement in the subsequent and greater event.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> English translation subtitle: *Studies in the Origins of Biblical Typology* (1950), translated into English a decade later under the title, *From Shadows to Reality*.

<sup>60</sup> Fr. John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2001), 22

<sup>61</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 106

<sup>62</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light*

However, typology shared some similarities with other exegetical approaches. Like rabbinic midrash, it applies the Old Testament to contemporary situations, but it does so with drawn historical distinctions different from those of the rabbis. Like Qumran exegesis, it gives to the Scriptures a present-time, eschatological application, but it does so with an eschatological and messianic orientation different from that at Qumran.

Allegory, on the other hand, finds hidden or symbolic meaning in the Old Testament, which is inherent in text and does not depend on a future historical fulfillment. It seeks to go beyond the text. Allegory searches for a secondary and hidden meaning underlying the obvious meaning of the narrative. This deeper level of meaning may have no connection with the historical framework of revelation. Because the allegorical interpretation is not intimately bound to the framework of salvation history, it has a potential of utterly abusing the biblical text. Allegory divorced from a historical base drifts into artificial and absurd analogies.

The following biblical examples illustrate the concept of allegory. I Corinthians 9:8-10 see the law forbidding the muzzling of an ox while it treads the corn as having the hidden meaning that a minister of the Gospel should be supported by the people he ministers to. The Song of Solomon is also often interpreted as an allegory of God (the Lover), and His love for His people (the beloved). The allegorical approach also often sees multiple correspondences in a given narrative which illustrate some point. For example, St. Paul explicitly uses allegory in Galatians 4, in which he sees the child of the slave woman (Hagar) as representing those under the Law, while the child of the free woman (Sarah) as representing those under the New Covenant, and the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael as representing the inferiority of the Old Covenant to the New.<sup>63</sup>

Allegory often makes connections on the level of words and numbers. That is, associations of words or numbers trigger the reader to recall some aspect of Christian thought not directly in view in the text. Sometimes the connection is quite fanciful. In the *Epistle of Barnabas* we find a lesson about Christ's Cross drawn from the story of Abraham having his 318 servants circumcised (Genesis 17). Greek uses letters for its numbers, so that "A" stands for 1, "B" for 2, etc.

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of *Modern Research* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 106

<sup>63</sup> GI 4:21-31

The author works out the connection as follows:

*Notice that he [Moses] first mentions the eighteen, and after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I (= ten) and H (= 8) -- you have Jesus [because IH are in Greek the first letters of the word Jesus] -- and because the cross was destined to have grace in the T he says 'and three hundred' [T = 300 in Greek]. So he indicated Jesus in the two letters and the cross in the other.<sup>64</sup>*

We are now in a position to see the difference between allegorism and typology as methods of exegesis. Typological exegesis is the search for linkages between events, persons or things within the historical framework of revelation, whereas allegorism is the search for a secondary and hidden meaning underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a narrative. Geoffrey Lampe and Kenneth Woolcombe made a clear point that this secondary sense of a narrative, discovered by allegorism, does not necessarily have any connection at all with the historical framework of revelation.<sup>65</sup> Beryl Smalley pointed out that the chief function of allegory was apologetic.<sup>66</sup>

The allegorical interpretation marks a stage in the history of any civilized people whose sacred literature is primitive. It is only at a much later stage that they come to see it as a process of historical development. Greek commentators found allegories in Homer, and the Hellenized Jew, Philo of Alexandria, found them in the Septuagint, Philo Judaeus has been called “the Cicero” of allegory. Beryl Smalley pointed out the importance of Philo that he did not invent but popularized without reconciling a number of allegorical traditions.<sup>67</sup> Philo’s purpose of allegorical interpretation was to show that whatever the letter of the inspired text might say its inner or spiritual meaning was in harmony with Platonism, the current philosophy of the Gentiles. Beryl Smalley again believed that Philo was a practicing Jew. He represented his people on a delegation to the Roman emperor.<sup>68</sup>

Philo, on the other hand, paid much emphasis to the importance of literal

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<sup>64</sup> Epistle of Barnabas 9:8.

<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology, Studies in Biblical Theology* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1957), 40

<sup>66</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 4

<sup>67</sup> See chapter five; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 3

meaning. The Law is an historical institution, literally binding on Jews, as well as having an inner meaning. Philo must have admitted the propriety of a study of the literal sense of the text, since he says that he will leave it to those who specialize in such matters.<sup>69</sup> His *Questions and Answers* even contain an occasional literal solution to the difficulties arising from Scripture.<sup>70</sup> But he brings out the overriding importance of the allegorical sense when he says of the prophet Samuel:

*“Probably there was an actual man called Samuel; but we conceive of the Samuel of the scripture, not as a living compound of soul and body, but as a mind which rejoices in the service and worship of God and that only.”*<sup>71</sup>

Allegory conferred the quality of a university on Jewish law and history. Philo expressed this view in a metaphor which gains in meaning if we think of its political background: the Romans had fused their conquests into a world empire. Those who interpret in the literal sense only are “citizens of a petty state.” Beryl Smalley pointed out that the allegorists are “on the roll of citizens of a greater country, namely, this whole world.”<sup>72</sup>

Philo conformed to the intellectual tendency of his day, which stressed the “other worldly” and moral element in Platonism and sharpened the contrast between indulging the appetites and cultivating the spirit. Introspection was revealing a ghostly demesne of abstractions and experiences which could be expressed most naturally. Scripture enabled Philo to make his conceptions more precise and intelligible. Further, it allowed him to develop a train of thought and yet dispensed him from the need to build up a system. He allegorized not only the text he had taken as his starting point, but other passages suggested by the first. Any attempt to classify or systematize his ideas involves the construction of a gigantic card index. The result may be something that Philo himself would hardly have recognized.<sup>73</sup>

## 6.7 Conclusion

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<sup>69</sup> H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), 57-63

<sup>70</sup> For the editions and translations of the *Questions and Answer* see H. L. Goodhart and E. R. Goodenough, *A General Bibliography of Philo* (New Haven, 1938), 133

<sup>71</sup> *De Ebrietate*, xxxvi (Loeb Classical Library, op. cit.), iii 395

<sup>72</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 3

<sup>73</sup> See the review of E. R. Goodenough of A. Wolfson's *Philo*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1xvii, 87-109

Typology was widely used as an exegetical mean to interpret the Biblical texts in the early Christian Church. We may witness a pair of exegetical methods. There was midrash in early Jewish interpretation, which was discussed in Chapter Three and typology of the patristic age discussed in this chapter. We will focus on this last approach in the next chapter to see how typology was used to explain the book of Ruth by Christian writers. Once again, this exegetical method cannot be separated from the study of the historical, theological and social background in early Christianity, and the purpose of exegetes themselves. They are all interrelated and interdependent.



## Chapter Seven

### Patristic Ruth

#### 7.1 Introduction

Patristic literature refers to the writings of the Fathers<sup>1</sup> of the Christian church between the latter part of the 1st century CE and the middle of the 8th century CE. It can therefore be distinguished from New Testament literature at the one end and from medieval scholasticism and the Byzantine era at the other.<sup>2</sup> It reflects the philosophical and religious thought of the Hellenistic and Roman world, which in return reacted to Judaism. The themes found in this vast literature are manifold, but the theological reflection of the Fathers focused for the most part on questions of doctrinal formation as Christianity progressed as newly formed religion. This literature includes mainly the discussion and formulation of Christology and of the Trinity. Other parts are dedicated to the discussion of the relation between the Law, mainly the doctrine of the Old Testament and the gospel on the other hand forming the center of Christianity.

Although writers of the East and West had much in common, vast differences can be found in their theologies, affecting their exegetical approaches.<sup>3</sup> A scientific theology developed in the East and was marked by a mixture of biblical theology and Platonic idealism, especially in Alexandria. In Antioch the main trend was Aristotelian realism. On the other hand, in the West, Christian writers generally depended on the Greek theological tradition, which they often clarified in definitions or interpreted in juridical categories until the emergence in the late fourth century CE of a sophisticated Latin theology. The meeting of the East and West introduced a controversial and debatable environment for the growth of patristic literature. Each camp of exegetical school urged for the protection of its own interest and belief. Therefore, this resulted in a vivid and diversified exegetical influence on the patristic interpretation of the book of Ruth. We next aim at comparing the exegetical patterns and principles found in patristic exegesis of Ruth with the early Jewish exegesis of Ruth as discussed in chapter two to four.

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *patristikos* means "relating to the fathers".

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Farrar's delineation of the history of interpretation in chapter two.

<sup>3</sup> The exegetical features of their were discussed in Chapter Five under the section of "Developmental Processes of Exegetical School"

## 7.2 The corpus of patristic literature

Defining the corpus of patristic literature is a difficult and confusing task. One cannot approach the subject by assuming that there is available a list of authors compiled according to a logical system. This is not to say that appropriate lists of primary contributors could not be proposed. Many constructive lists of patristic authors have been proposed in the past. Proposals tend to agree on some authors, such as the Cappadocians. However, there is rarely complete uniformity or agreement on which patristic authors are the most significant. So, no specific corpus of patristic literature is preferred here. Most important of all, what the thesis wants to do is making an examination of exegetical trends and approaches found in the early Christian Church. We mainly focus on those patristic exegetical directions or trends, that were imposing influence on exegetes under specific historical and theological circumstances rather than doing detailed work on specific individual patristic commentators.

Unlike the Scriptures, there does not exist any closed canon for patristic literature. Patristic writings represent an ongoing historical process as sacred tradition unfolds through the mind of the Church. The difficulty in defining patristic literature is an absence of clearly defined boundaries. Outside of the defined dogma of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Church in her wisdom has allowed for a certain ambiguity, most likely flexibility. This flexibility provides the creative freedom necessary for the transmission of the patristic mind of the Church. A living tradition may be expressed within the historical context of each new generation of the Church. It is for this reason that Florovsky concludes that restrictive definitions of patristic literature is the death to living tradition:

*A restrictive commitment of Seven Ecumenical Councils actually contradicts the basic principle of the Living Tradition in the Church. Indeed, all Seven. But not only the Seven.*<sup>4</sup>

The corpus of patristic literature is not a sealed collection, closed by a form of canon or time restraints. It is rather an instrument of living tradition. The New Testament said that "*not of the letter but of the Spirit.*"<sup>5</sup> This organic nature of patristic writings is the very reason that strict definitions of its corpus are so elusive.

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<sup>4</sup> Florovsky, Georges, *Aspects of Church History* Volume IV, Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987, 20.

<sup>5</sup> See II Corinthians 3:6

Patristic literature is recognized by its contents, consisting of a synthesis of several elements. The patristic tradition is consistently harmonious in its Hellenistic and Hebraic epistemology. While some critics view this adaptation of Greek thought as a decline in the purity of the Gospel through the Hellenization of Christianity, Lossky explains that it was quite the opposite:

*...this was not the rationalization of Christianity but the Christianization of reason, a transmuting of philosophy into contemplation, a saturation of thought by a mystery which is not a secret to conceal, but an inexhaustible light.*<sup>6</sup>

We may witness the occurrence of the diversification of exegetical trends in such an absence of defined patristic literature. Flexibility guaranteed the presence of different thoughts. During the patristic age, diversified literature rather than strict verse-by-verse commentary as found in early Jewish exegesis<sup>7</sup> was made popular. Most important of all, flexibility and creativity assured the patristic type of typology used by exegetes to achieve their theological and apologetic purposes.

## 7.3 Patristic Literature related to the Book of Ruth

### 7.3.1 Main translation

In chapter four, we dealt with early Jewish exegesis. The commentators composed their writings in the form of commentary. We indicated two main kinds of Jewish commentary: Ruth Rabbah and The Targum to Ruth as the illustration of the Jewish interpretation on the book of Ruth. When we refer to patristic exegesis, we rather deal with a different form of literature. These are writings rather than commentaries. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson gave us a good explanation for this. The early Christian use of the Scriptures of Israel is extensive. They explained that Israel's Scriptures are not utilized to create systematic commentary as in Jewish writings. Rather they are utilized for quotations, allusion, and echoes of themes and patterns.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the format of patristic exegetical works rather in the form of free literature, in which commentators may be free to write a letter or some passages to exegete the

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<sup>6</sup> Lossky, Vladimir. *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978, 38

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter four at the section of "Commentary development in Jewish community".

<sup>8</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, "Introduction and Overview" in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 38

meaning of the text.

My main investigation will be based on the translation, called the Gloss on Ruth. The Gloss on Ruth is made up mostly of Rabanus Maurus's commentary on Ruth, including selections from the exegesis of Isidore of Seville.<sup>9</sup> We depend on the translation of this work.<sup>10</sup> Almost the entire Ruth Gloss is taken from Rabanus Maurus's (776/84-856) Commentary on Ruth.<sup>11</sup> A few of the extra phrases are not from Rabanus, and the meanings of the Hebrew names, especially those in the genealogy at the end of chapter four, are from Jerome's *Book of Interpretations of Hebrew Names*.

Rabanus (sometimes written as Hrabanus), born in 784 CE and died in 865 CE, was a highly influential theologian, poet, and churchman who held the offices of Abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz. As well as biblical exegesis, he wrote manuals for the clergy and a quasi-encyclopedia, "*On the Nature of Things*", which continued the mystical interpretation of the world promoted in his biblical work. Rabanus as a representative of commenting patristic exegesis did a lot of compilation, translation and exegetical work of early Christian writings, which were so diffused and piecemeal at that period. It was too difficult to find a distinct and comprehensive work at early age of Christianity. Moreover, we cannot reach the patristic exegesis through a closed canon or well-defined commentary. Until eight century, the Rabanus' work was used to illustrate the exegetical trends on the book of Ruth.

The Gloss is not taken verbatim from Rabanus but is usually presented in an abbreviated and paraphrased form. Rabanus often began his comments with questions, which the Gloss turned into statements. These transformations can make the Latin of the text somewhat hard to fathom, especially when the compiler contracts several sentences into one, with a number of sub-clauses more or less obviously dependent on the main subject. Latin syntax makes it rather simpler to understand the structure of the sentences than English being more reliant on word order. An effort was made in the translated English form to retain at least some of the original Latin flavor, so that students can get a sense of the language and method of the Gloss. We have no real idea of who might have compiled the Ruth section of the Gloss.

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<sup>9</sup> Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xiii

<sup>10</sup> See the translation work of Lesley Smith.

<sup>11</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xv

The Ruth Gloss consists of short allegorical readings, glossing difficult words and adding brief explanations of opaque phrases. There is no central line running through the Gloss. Rather, it is a series of changing allegories, containing a fluidity of imagery that marks much medieval exegesis. The three names of Naomi, Ruth, and Orpha varies in their meaning, with Naomi indicating both the Synagogue and the Church (and sometimes “the faith of the Church”), Ruth as representing the faithful Jewess and obedient Gentiles, and Orpha as both being Jewish and a baptized believer. The Gloss’ interpretation is not anti-Jewish, simply totally Christian, since its allegorical intent ignores most of the Jewish character. It may be summed up in one of its own phrases: the exegesis of the Gloss is intended to illuminate “the spiritual lineage of the race.”<sup>12</sup>

The Gloss on Ruth contains some selections from the earlier exegesis of Isidore of Seville. Isidore of Seville (560-636 CE) was a Spanish monk and bishop known particularly for his *Etymologies*, a sort of encyclopedia of knowledge on many subjects, arranged by definitions of key words. Isidore tried to create a compendium of the best of learning to date, but his desire for completeness means that standards of accuracy vary widely. This very completeness, however, meant that his work was very influential, and many of its explanations and definitions, however, loosely based in fact, became the norm for centuries. Isidore’s short treatment of Ruth here is entirely spiritually interpreted: for him, the story is simply a vehicle for Christian allegory. Isidore’s central point is to show that Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, like Peter Comester, he keeps much of the original dialogue and with it the original savor.<sup>13</sup>

The other work having been consulted for this research was the Ordinary Gloss. It comes from the twelfth century CE, but it acquired accretions over the years, so that, by the time it was printed, some texts were much enlarged. The Ordinary Gloss is the name generally given to the commentary on the Bible probably originating in Laon in the early twelfth century. It contained, in effect, a digest of the opinions of all the important patristic commentators, as well as some selected “modern” interpreters on any given text, and apparently functioned as a reference work for teachers and students of biblical

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<sup>12</sup> Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xiv

<sup>13</sup> Idem

commentary. It achieved something of a best-seller status, and Paris became a center for the production and distribution of manuscript copies, remarkable for their standardized layout ---- a central biblical text with glosses added in the margins and between the lines. There is no difference, apart from length, between the marginal and interlinear glosses; they may change places at will.

### 7.3.2 Other patristic works

Moreover, we will also include some works of other patristic theologians and commentators. The works are so extensive but diffused due to different exegetical schools and trends. Jerome, on whose translation the Gloss's text is based, is also a major source for the individual glosses, along with Ambrose, Augustine, Bede, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, Origen, and their ninth-century editor, Rabanus Maurus. These are the main contributors, but others, especially Carolingian authors, are sometimes quoted on particular *lemmata*, or text-phrases.

#### (a) Jerome's Vulgate translation of Ruth

It appears twice, first standing alone so that readers can get to know the biblical text a new and, second, forming the base text (the central column) of the Ordinary Gloss. Only Hugh of St. Cher, with his Paris Bible, has slight variations on this central text. Around Jerome's text are arranged the comments of the Gloss, which I have taken from Adolph Rusch's first edition of the text (Strassburg, 1480-81) checked against a sample of Gloss manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.<sup>14</sup>

A biblical linguist and commentator of unsurpassed skill in his day, Jerome made new translations of the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew. His best-known translation became to be termed the Vulgate and was the standard text used in Western Europe. He also composed introductory prologues to each of the biblical books or groups of books, which was the standard approach to the overall meaning of the text. His commentaries were the norm for centuries, especially in their linguistic questions and answers. By the thirteenth century, a standard Bible, even if it contained no commentary as such, comprised Jerome's translation, with his prefaces (or those attributed to him), and his book

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<sup>14</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xiii.

on the interpretations of the Hebrew proper names. Jerome's translation is used here as the central text of the Bible and Ordinary Gloss sections. He appears briefly in the Additions to the Gloss to set time and place and to place Ruth in the list of four sinful women from Matthew's Gospel.<sup>15</sup>

**(b) John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407)**

A monk and bishop of Constantinople, Chrysostom ("golden mouthed") was especially famous for his homilies. He was an enthusiast for the literal interpretation of Scripture against allegories. The Gloss on Ruth uses both genuine Chrysostom homilies on Matthew as well as the spurious *Opus Imperfectum*, an incomplete second series of homilies on Matthew widely attributed to him. In fact, the *Opus* was probably the work of a fifth century Arian scholar. Both real and pseudo-Chrysostom are used in the Gloss Additions to ask *why* Boaz married Ruth, by considering what traits are praiseworthy in them both.

**(c) Theodoret (ca. 393-ca. 466)**

Greek monk and bishop of Cyrrhus, Theodoret attended the crucial early Church councils at Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), where he was on the losing side of the Christological debate with Cyril of Alexandria. Little of his work remains to us, but what is available shows him to be a fine biblical exegete, an early Apologist, and a Church historian. He appears surprisingly often in the Gloss Additions, on the issue of what should be admired in Ruth and Boaz, and on the rewards given to the virtuous.

**(d) Ambrose (ca. 339-397)**

He was Bishop of Milan famous for being acclaimed bishop by the Milanese laity when still being un-baptized. He was known in the Middle Ages for his Letters, and his works *On the Sacraments*, *On Virginity*, and *On the Offices the Church*. He is, usually little used in the Gloss on Ruth, being simply quoted on widowhood, which he counted as one of the forms of virginity. The Gloss Additions use Ambrose to comment on the goodness of Ruth's and Naomi's souls.

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<sup>15</sup> Idem, xiv

In conclusion, it should be remarked that it is strange to exclude the great theologian and commentators, Augustine of Hippo (354-430). This generally used reference lists of patristic exegetes does not mention Augustine of Hippo. Christian theology is sometimes said merely to be a footnote to Augustine, a prolific Latin author who wrote massively on virtually all aspects of Christian life and doctrine. However, Ruth contains few theological problems or doctrinal difficulties. Its problems are more those of understanding the linguistic queries and the Hebrew customs. Thus it is that the Gloss compiler did not choose to include any of Augustine's comments on Ruth, and he is not quoted by any other author.

## 7.4 Some general patterns arising from the study of patristic exegesis on the Book of Ruth

### 7.4.1 Law and Gospel

#### (a) Heretic challenge

The gospel is the main foundation of Christian doctrine. *Keryma* is the preaching of Christian gospel. Since Christianity has been a new born religion, it faced many challenges and influence from surrounding religious thoughts and philosophical trends. Therefore, it was the main task of exegetes to defend Christianity as orthodox against the challenge of heretics.<sup>16</sup> The Book of Ruth 2:22 had mentioned this apologetic purpose. It stated that:

*Her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, it is better for you to go out to reap with his girls, in case someone stops you gleaning in another field."*

"*Another field*" is interpreted as the doctrine of heretics or schismatics, where there are quarrels and disputes.<sup>17</sup> The book of Ruth 2:8 again illustrated the challenge of Christianity under the heretic and philosophical attack. The Christian church should uphold the role and position of the gospel. Therefore, it stressed the faith of believers to Christ and the Church. Ruth 2:8 said that:

*And Boaz said to Ruth, "Here me, daughter. Do not go to another field to collect the grain, nor leave here: but join my young girls, and where they reap the grain, follow them."*

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter Five under the section of "the influence of Gnosticism".

<sup>17</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 20



The phrase “do not go to another field” is interpreted, as “do not leave the state of faith, lest you follow the errors of the heretics or schismatics.”<sup>18</sup> Once again, Christianity faced the challenge of heresy<sup>19</sup> or even some kinds of schism.<sup>20</sup> Facing this religious diversity, the patristic exegetes encouraged the believers to join with the minds of the saints, so that you fear the Holy Scriptures, meditating them by deeds. The position of the Bible in the community of believers has been strengthened. The Christian interpreters gave the believers the example of the saints. The saints have drunk divine wisdom from the books of the two Testaments. The believers may drink of it too.

Moreover, Ruth 3:10 also echoed the unstable doctrine of heretics. It stated that:

*And he said, ‘Daughter, you are blessed by the Lord, and you have surpassed your former pity with your latest pity, because you have not run after young men, poor or rich.*

From the above text, it is explained as “heretics and schismatics who do not have mature counsel, because they are always unstable and uncertain.”<sup>21</sup> Once again, they are not accepted as orthodox in the view of Christian Church. We often witness the comparison between heresy and Christianity in the interpretation of the patristic fathers.

This background of theological challenge imposed direct influence on the patristic Ruth in the early Christian Church. The central place of the struggle between orthodoxy and heresy in the history was neatly summarized by the Jesuit scholar Karl Rahner (1904-84), one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. He stated that:

*The history of Christianity is also a history of heresies and consequently of the attitudes adopted by Christianity and the Church towards heresy, and so involves a history of the concept of heresy itself. In all religions that possess any kind of definite doctrine...there are differences of opinion about that doctrine and as a consequence quarrels and conflict about it and about the socially organized forms in which the different religious views find expression.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Idem, 17

<sup>19</sup> From the Greek word *hairesis*, it originally means simply “choice”, but eventually coming to denote religious speculations that deviated from correct belief.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter five.

<sup>21</sup> Lesley Smith, 23

<sup>22</sup> Karl Rahner, *On heresy* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 7

It could be said that the debate was visible already in the origins of Christianity being a form of Judaism. This occurred when those who would come to call themselves Christians redefined their relationship with Jewish law and the traditions of ancient Israel, and advocated new truths based on Jesus' teachings. Mark Humphries remarks that just as Christianity splintered away from other forms of Judaism, there was a risk that Christianity itself might fragment, as different groups or individuals came to regard different versions or aspects of Jesus' message as more significant.<sup>23</sup>

### **(b) The importance and role of the Law**

The Christian Church committed that, on the other hand, the truth of the Law is forever lasting. The Book of Ruth 3:18 illustrated well this point and stated that:

*And Naomi said, "Just wait, daughter, and see what the outcome will be. For the man will not rest until he has done what he said."*

*"For the man will not rest"* is interpreted that the Church promises faithfully that Truth will not cease to fulfill the promise. The promise of God is the important doctrine in the theology of the New Testament. It is appropriately presented by the use of typology. This means that the promise made by God in the Old Testament is finally actualized at the times of New Testament.<sup>24</sup> It will occur among the community of believers. We may refer to the phrase *"whoever believed and was baptized will be saved."*<sup>25</sup> Actually, the climax of God's promise is the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the believers should study, mediate and obey the law. As a community of faith, the Christian Church should learn and mediate the Law in order to work according to the will of the Lord. The book of Ruth 2:14 also pointed out this command and stated that:

*And Boaz said to her, "When it is evening, come here and eat the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar." And so she sat beside the reapers and he collected barley-flour for her, and she ate and was satisfied and took the rest away.*

From the above quotation, patristic interpretation emphasized the role and

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 159

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Six

<sup>25</sup> Mk 16:16

position of the Law in the Christian Church. “*She ate*” is interpreted as Ruth refreshed her faithful mind by knowledge of divine Law. “*And was satisfied*” referred to the fact that Ruth considered deeply each word she heard. Moreover, “*Took the rest away*” meant because Ruth retained the words in her heart, and worked so that she might understand more by concentrated meditation.<sup>26</sup> We again point out the importance of the Law in the community of Christian believers. The book of Ruth 2:23 states that:

*And so she joined herself to Boaz's girls, and reaped with them until the barley and wheat were stored in the granaries.*

This means, that as long as Ruth stays with learned men, meditating on the Scriptures, she can store away knowledge of the Old and New Testaments in the storeroom of her heart, to have enough food for her soul.<sup>27</sup> This Law should be treasured and respected by the Israelite and Christian community. Ruth 2:2 also illustrated the important role of the Law in the community. It stated that:

*Ruth, the Moabite woman, said to her mother-in-law, “If you agree, I will go into a field<sup>28</sup> and collect the gleanings which have escaped the hands of the reapers, wherever I meet with kindness from a merciful landowner.” She answered her, “Go, my daughter.”*

This field is the knowledge of heavenly study. The harvest is spiritual discernment. The harvesters are preachers. The remaining ears of corn are the opinions of the Scriptures which, by the mystery of concealment, are very often left behind for the exercise of contemplation, like fuller, deeper senses. The Gentile people, therefore, ardently desire the Church’s learning, so that they might be admitted to the contemplation of divine Law and the fellowship of the saints, and they might be refreshed by the lessons and examples of the saints.

Ambrose confirmed the importance of the Law and introduced the fruit of good instruction. It is a great benefit both for the support and for the advantage of widows that they train their daughters-in-law to have in them support in full old age. It was the payment for their teaching and the reward for their training. Naomi has well taught and well instructed her daughter-in-law. Ruth will never

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<sup>26</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 19

<sup>27</sup> Idem, 20

<sup>28</sup> Ordinary Gloss interpreted “the field” as the Church. See Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 16

be wanting, will prefer the widowed life of her mother-in-law to her father's house, and if her husband also dies, will not leave her, but will support her in need, comfort her in sorrow and not leave her if sent away; for good instruction will never know need. So that Naomi, deprived of her husband and her two sons, having lost the offspring of her fruitfulness, did not lose the reward of her pious care because she found both a comforter in sorrow and a supporter in poverty.<sup>29</sup>

### **(c) The relationship between Gospel and Law**

The relationship between gospel and law raised the debate of the meeting between the Old and New. This is the meeting of Christianity and Judaism. Patristic interpreters tried hard to accommodate the old keeping the new values by modifying the former and transforming the latter. Ruth 1:1 states that:

*1:1 In the days of a certain judge, when judges ruled, there was a famine<sup>30</sup> in the land. And a man went out from Bethlehem of Judah to exile in the country of the Moabites, with his wife and two sons.*

*1:2 And he was called Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi, and two sons, one Maalon, the other Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem of Judah. And having come to the country of the Moabites, they stayed there.*

*1:3 And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her sons,*

*1:4 They took Moabite wives, one of whom was called Orpha, and the other Ruth. And so they continued there for ten years.*

The birth of Chilion is interpreted as the theme of fulfillment by the Ordinary Gloss.<sup>31</sup> These are the apostles who have brought the enigmas of the prophets out into the fulfillment of full understanding. These were born, deservedly, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah who, filled with heavenly bread themselves, gathered the fruits of preaching by preaching the Gospel. “*Ephrathite*” means someone bearing fruit, “*Bethlehem*” means house of bread, and “*Judah*”

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<sup>29</sup> P. Schaff et al., ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 2 series 13 vols (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature, 1887-1894), 396-7

<sup>30</sup> The Ordinary Gloss pointed out that the famine meant a famine of the Word.

<sup>31</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 11

confession. This is the copy of the gospel's doctrine. We can witness this kind of interpretation in the New Testament's theology as well. Whence, *give them these things to eat.*<sup>32</sup> Again, *Go out and preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God.*<sup>33</sup> And elsewhere, *I chose you from the world that you should go and bear fruit.*<sup>34</sup>

From verse one to four of chapter one, Ambrose interpreted that we know that Tamar was included in the Lord's genealogy<sup>35</sup> on account of mystery. It is not a usual way to include Tamar because of her foreignness and the Lord's command. The Law of Moses prohibits marriage to Moabites and excludes them from the church. It is written that "No Moabite shall enter the church of the Lord even to the third and fourth generation forever."<sup>36</sup>

Including Tamar in the genealogy of Jesus, Ambrose believed that we ought also to conclude without doubt that Ruth was not omitted for a similar reason<sup>37</sup>, which the holy apostle seems to sense when he foresees in the Spirit that the calling of foreign nations will be accomplished through the gospel, saying that the law was given not for the just but for the unjust.<sup>38</sup>

A second concern related to the law and gospel is marriage. It is unacceptable for Ruth as a foreigner to marry a Jew. Some evangelists believe that this marriage which was forbidden by the weight of the law should not be included in the genealogy of Christ. It is a disastrous result if the Savior descends from an illegitimate heritage.

This discrepancy may be resolved by patristic exegesis. We return to the apostolic principle that the law was not given for the just but for the unjust. This is a new interpretation of law in an outstanding perspective of New Testament exegesis. Under such new interpretation of law, Ruth can enter the church because she was made holy and immaculate by deeds that go beyond the law.

It is because the law was given for the irreverent and sinners and then surely Ruth, who exceeded the limits of the law and entered the church. John R.

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<sup>32</sup> Mk 6:37; Lk 9:13; Mt. 14:16

<sup>33</sup> Mk 16:15

<sup>34</sup> Jn 15:16

<sup>35</sup> Mt 1:3 states that "and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram."

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Dt. 23:4-8

<sup>37</sup> See Mt. 1:5

<sup>38</sup> See 1Tm 1:9

Franke pointed out that in the ancient Christian commentaries she was made an Israelite and deserved to be counted among the honored figures in the Lord's genealogy. She was chosen for the kinship of her mind, not of her body, therefore setting a great example for us<sup>39</sup> because she prefigures all of us who were gathered from the nations for the purpose of joining the church of the Lord.

We should emulate her, therefore, who merited by her deeds this privilege of being admitted to his society, as history teaches, so that we also, by our deeds and accompanying merits, might be chosen for election to the church of the Lord.

Ruth 1:15-17 states that:

*15 Naomi said to her, 'Look! Your sister has gone back to her people and to her gods: go with her.'*

*16 She answered, "Do not oppose me to make me leave you and go away. I shall go wherever you go; I shall stay wherever you stay. Your people are my people, and your God is my God.*

*17 Whatever earth receives you when you die, I shall die there and I shall be buried there. May the Lord do these things for me, and let him add things, if even death separates me and you."<sup>40</sup>*

Thus, the two of them went on to Bethlehem. When Boaz, David's great-grandfather, came to know her deeds, therefore, and her holiness in relation to her mother-in-law and her respect for the dead and her reverence for God, he chose her to be his wife.<sup>41</sup>

The final chapter on the book of Ruth included the description of genealogy, which indicated the main principle of the gospel according to the views of patristic exegesis. The book of Ruth 4: 13-17 also proved that foreigners were not excluded. It states that:

*13 And so Boaz took Ruth and made her his wife; and he went it to her and the Lord made her*

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<sup>39</sup> John R. Franke ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: Old Testament IV Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005), 182

<sup>40</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 13-14

<sup>41</sup> H. de Lubac, J. Danielou et al., eds. *Sources Chretiennes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941), 45: 136-138

*conceive and bear a son.*

*14 And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord who has not allowed your family to die out, and his name will be known in Israel.*

*15 And you have someone to console your spirit, and to care for you in your old age. For he is born from your daughter-in-law who loves you, and he is far better for you than if you had seven sons."*

*16 And Naomi took the child and placed it on her bosom and acted as his nurse and nanny.*

*17 And, indeed, the neighborhood women congratulated her, saying, "A son is born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse the father of David.*

Theophylact commented on the genealogy. Boaz begets Obed of Ruth whereas Ruth was a foreigner. However, she was married to Boaz. So, by typological analysis, the church is from among the Gentiles. For like Ruth, these Gentiles had been foreigners and outside the covenant, yet they forsook their people, their idols and their father, the devil. Ruth was wed to Boaz of the seed of Abraham, and so too was the church taken as bride by the Son of God.<sup>42</sup> Chapter Four of the book of Ruth also witnesses the fact that the Gospel was fully Christ-centered, which will replace the Law and save the Gentile. First 4:3 mentioned the limitation of the Law. It stated that:

*He said to his neighbor, "Naomi, who returned from the country of the Moabites, is selling part of the field belonging to our brother Elimelech.*

Boaz offered the lawyers a part of Naomi's land to buy. This "part of the field" refers to that part of the people which was left behind after grace had appeared. He showed it to the matters of the Synagogue as a remedy, so that they should know their sickness and, because they could not heal themselves, they might trust themselves to a true doctor, as was said to the lepers. Go, show yourself to the priests,<sup>43</sup> and when they went they were made clean. The Gentiles are accepted and saved by the saving gospel. Therefore, the law can't function as a saving agent but Christ can do that. Christ replaced the Law. Ruth 4:1 stated

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<sup>42</sup> Theophylact, *The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew* Introduction by Fr. Christopher Stade (House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 1992), 16

<sup>43</sup> Lk 17:14

that:

*Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. And when he saw his relative (whom he had spoken of earlier), go past, he said to him, calling him by his name<sup>44</sup>, "Pause a little while, and sit here." And he paused and sat down.*

"*Pause a little*" indicated the coming of the gospel in a new age. Because Christ saw the Law had been established for the Jews in their time, and He ordered it to submit in him, because He directed it to give witness to the mystery of His over-lordship. In another way, He sees the kinsman "pass by" at the coming of His precursor whom, after the fashion of human life, He saw hurrying past, and He turned, in compassion, to the office of herald.

In the book of Ruth 4: 5 forms the climax of the Law's and Christ's relation to the Gentiles. It stated that:

*To which Boaz said, "When you buy the field from the woman's hand, you must also take on Ruth, the Moabite woman whose husband is dead, to keep alive the name of your relative in your heredity."*

"To keep alive" indicates that this signifies no other possession of the people (as if it were a part of a field) than the marriage of the Church with Christ, which revived the ancient name "sons of God", that the saints had had from the beginning: *Sons of God, seeing the daughters of men*<sup>45</sup>, and Luke says that Adam was the son of God.<sup>46</sup> It revived in the Church of the Gentiles through the grace of God, whence, *He gave them power to become the sons of God.*<sup>47</sup>

The Decalogue of the Law was not able to revive this name among the nations. If, however, you refer this to John the Baptist, you will find him yielding to the authority of his kinsman. John, the writer of the Gospel of John described said that "*I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me. I am not worthy to unite the thong of his sandal*".<sup>48</sup> He further stated that "*I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.*

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<sup>44</sup> Although Boaz called him by his name, we are not told what this was. The Hebrew tradition says that, because the man was not willing to do his duty by Ruth, he was not worthy to be named.

<sup>45</sup> Gn. 6:2

<sup>46</sup> Lk 3:38

<sup>47</sup> Jn 1:12

<sup>48</sup> Jn 1:26-27



*He who has the bride is the bridegroom”.*<sup>49</sup>

Thus the Law gives way to the Gospel because the Law entered so that wrongs might abound. However the Apostle Paul believed that where wrongs abounded, grace abounded so much more.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, reproof was made to the previous covenant on account of its weakness. Rather, the introduction of a better hope, through which we are made neighbors to God, was made through Jesus Christ. 4:7 also reflected the replacement of the Law by Christ. It said that:

*Now this, indeed, was the ancient custom in Israel amongst kinsmen, that whenever anyone ceded his right under the law to another, so that it was conceded definitely, the man undid his own sandal and gave it to his neighbor.*<sup>51</sup> In Israel, this was proof of the giving up of the right.

“Now this was the custom” pointed out the occurrence of the new order replacing the old one. The sandal is a veil of mysteries. The Old Law released the sandal from his foot, and gave it to Christ, because it could not show the sacraments to the magistrates of the people, but reserved this for Christ to do. John, therefore, did not claim the sandal for himself but for Christ, because he understood Christ alone to be fit for the bride, whence he says, I am not worthy to lose the thong of his sandal.<sup>52</sup>

#### **(d) The Gospels include gentiles**

Basically the positions of the gentiles were lowered under the circumstances of the early Christian Church. Ruth 2:10 illustrated the inferiority of the gentiles. It states that:

*And she, falling on her face on the ground and revering him, said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should think me, a foreign woman, worthy?”*

In traditional exegesis the phrase “*Why have I found favor in your sight*” was used to point out the humility expected of the Gentile church. It should not dare to compare itself to the people of God. This showed the traditional view on the

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<sup>49</sup> Jn 3: 28-29

<sup>50</sup> Rm 5:20

<sup>51</sup> Jerome’s translation is clear here: the man undoes his own (*suum*) sandal. Other writers lost the reflexive pronoun, letting in much confusion about who was to do what to whom.

<sup>52</sup> Lk 3:16

inequality of the Gentile and the Chosen. The Israelite community believed itself to be a supreme race, accepted by God's promise. The Gentile is seen as inferior and a second-class people. In Christian interpretation, the New Testament focused on the dilemma of this unequal relationship. "She says, *For I am not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs...*"<sup>53</sup> And elsewhere, *O Lord, I am not worthy to come in under your roof but only speak the word.*<sup>54</sup>

However, in Christian and patristic interpretation, the gentile is graciously included in God's promise. In verse four of chapter one "*They took Moabite wives*" it is pointed out that these who took gentile wives are the faithful people from amongst the Jews. They were the first to understand the stronghold of faith and the strength of religious service. Among them is found the obedience and trust of the Gentiles, of whom it is said, *People whom I had not known, served me.*<sup>55</sup> And elsewhere, *Ethiopia hurried to give a hand to God.*<sup>56</sup> Therefore two peoples, one from faith and the other from the chosen people, will be called to marriage by holy preachers, so that one sheepfold may come from a diverse flock.<sup>57</sup>

The early church promoted that gentiles should be accepted. The Book of Ruth 1:8 said that:

*"Go home to your mothers; may the Lord have mercy on you, just as you had mercy on my dead family, and on me.*

This verse indicated that the Church does not act indiscriminately, nor accept anyone indiscriminately.<sup>58</sup> The ordinary gloss was elaborated with the help of the New Testament, *Do not believe every spirit, but test whether the spirits are of God.*<sup>59</sup> The book of Ruth 1:18 further elaborated the acceptance of the gentiles according to the interpretation of the patristic fathers. It is stated in Ruth that:

*Therefore, seeing that Ruth had made up her mind and had decided to go with her, Naomi was not willing to resist her nor to persuade her to return to her own people.*

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<sup>53</sup> See Mt 15:27; Lk 16:21; Mk 7:28

<sup>54</sup> Mt. 8:8; Lk 7:6

<sup>55</sup> Ps 18:43

<sup>56</sup> Ps 68:31

<sup>57</sup> Jn 10

<sup>58</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 12

<sup>59</sup> 1 Jn 4:1

This is interpreted as the Gentile people, having stubborn hearts, followed preachers into the holy land, and into Bethlehem, the city of God, expecting to receive a spouse there, born of the lineage of Abraham, in whom all nations of the earth might be blessed.<sup>60</sup>

The wordplay between “wings (of refuge)” (2:12) and “edge of a garment” (3:9) may also imply a connection between Ruth’s marriage to Boaz and membership of Israel. In any case, its consummation ended in Ruth’s two tragedies, her widowhood and her foreign status (4:9-10). The blessings at the gate (4:11-12) testified to the popular acceptance of Ruth as a full-fledged Israelite, thereby implying that others like her are welcome to its membership. For Christians, Ruth’s acceptance foreshadowed the welcome accorded to Gentiles to become part of the people of God.<sup>61</sup>

Ruth 2:20 stated that:

*And Naomi replied, “May he be blessed by the Lord, since he has performed a service for the dead with the same kindness which he has shown to the living.”*

Mother Church herself was gathered together by God’s gracious kindness. She now experienced the same grace shown to the Gentile people and recognized them as her neighbor. Having heard the Lord’s name, she recalled his past kindness. The Psalmist said that *“I was mindful of ancient days and I meditated on all your works.”*<sup>62</sup> The Synagogue knows the goodness of the Gentiles, the power of the Lord, and the strength of her protector, through the preaching of the Church. Having grasped the truth, she blesses the name of the Lord who held to His kindness towards the dead as much as He offered it to the living. He offered it to the Jews as well, since they enjoyed kindness through the understanding of the life-giving Law.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, the position of the gentile is upgraded. According to patristic exegesis Ruth 3:1 illustrates this point. It stated that:

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<sup>60</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 14

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Gn 12:3; Ps 117; Ac 1:8; 10:34-35; Rm 11:17; Eph 2:19; Rv 5:9; Cf. Archer, *Survey*, p. 281; Bauer, “Ruth,” pp.118-19; et al.)

<sup>62</sup> Ps 142:5

<sup>63</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 20

*When, however, she returned to her mother-in-law, she was told by her, "My daughter, I will try to get you rest and provide for your welfare.*

The primitive Church takes care of the Gentile Church to make her the bride of Christ. The book of Ruth 3:14 also echoed this view. It stated that:

*And so she slept at his feet till daylight. And she arose before men knew each other, and Boaz said, "Take care, in case anyone knows that you came here."*

"She arose before men knew each other" indicated that before the Jews had been imbued with the teaching of the Law, they had grasped the rules of its nature. The Gentile Church arose, shaking off the sleep of idleness, being born into the dawn of faith, and hastened to the grace of Christ.

As a whole, the Christian exegetes added an allegorical meaning to the characters. This means that they fit the actors and their actions into a broader and more general interpretation of the story as salvation history. According to this reading, Naomi, Orpha, and Ruth represent stages in the creation of the Church. There was not, however, one single allegorical interpretation. The participants are assigned different roles depending on the context. The story moves through time, so the allegories similarly shift, from pre-Christian to post-Christian times, but their movement is not in a straight line. At the opening of the story, Christ has not appeared, and Naomi is the Synagogue, whose sons are kingly and priestly honored. Later she becomes the Church, whose sons are now learned men. Naomi regularly shifts between being interpreted as the Synagogue and the early or primitive Church, or even the faith of that Church.<sup>64</sup>

The unnamed closer relative was seen to represent John the Baptist, who came before Christ in time but was not himself the Messiah, the Church's bridegroom. This relatively simple allegorical reading is most easily seen in the interlinear comments of the Gloss, where the allegorical representations of each character are glossed above their names as they appear in the text so that the text could be swiftly scanned and the Christian allegory picked up instantly by "reading between the lines".<sup>65</sup>

### **(e) Historical and theological background governing the relationship**

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<sup>64</sup> Lesley Smith, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xii

<sup>65</sup> Idem, xiii

## between law and gospel

The loss of Temple in the time of Titus was the leading cause for the increasing importance of teaching and upholding the Law in the community of the early Christian church. This also introduced another phase in the relation of Christianity to Judaism. Jerusalem temple was destroyed in 70 CE. Richard Norris observed the significance of the temple destruction. One result of that event was the disappearance of the Jerusalem Church, whose leader James had been executed even before the great revolt. Along with it occurred the marginalization of Christian groups whose members, whether Jewish or Gentile, observed the Mosaic Law.<sup>66</sup> One further far-reaching effect can be pointed out. The disappearance of the Jerusalem Temple, given the insecurities it doubtless brought to some quarters of diaspora Judaism, seems to have been the expulsion of the secluded Jewish-Christian cells that had existed within certain synagogue communities.<sup>67</sup>

The relation between the law and gospel was a hot topic in the early Christian Church. In the middle of the second century CE a Christian apologist named Justin composed a work titled *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in which this relationship was critically discussed reflecting on the influence of early Christian exegetes. Justin relates to Trypho how he had been converted from philosophy to Christianity whereas Trypho identified himself as a Hebrew who had fled Palestine. These two men are the representation of the meeting of the New (Christ's gospel) and the Old (Jewish commandments). The dialogue was deeply rooted in a historical and exegetical context.

First, Justin defended the accusation of the Christians' that they claim the Old Testament sets forth their religion, while in fact they do not obey the religious laws. Ronald E. Heine commented that the Jews' objection is that Christians do not practice circumcision, do not keep the Sabbath, and do not observe the festal days. In fact, Trypho complains that the Christian lifestyle appears to be

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<sup>66</sup> Richard A. Norris, JR. "Articulating identity" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76

<sup>67</sup> Richard A. Norris, JR. "Articulating identity" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76

very similar to that of the Gentiles or the heathen.<sup>68</sup> Trypho claims that Christians despise the old covenant, rejects its duties and claim to know the God of the Old Testament. He challenges Justin to defend how he can hope for anything when he does not observe the law.

Trypho in his reaction insists that the Old Testament must be taken as a whole and that the law, especially, must be read and obeyed literally. Christians, however, ignore the literal meaning of the law and claim that the Old Testament is a book about Christ and Christianity. It should be noted that the Jews in the second century, however, are also neglecting to observe all of the Old Testament laws literally. No sacrifices had been offered since the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Marcel Simon pointed out that after the second defeat of the Jews by the Romans in 135 CE all hopes of Jewish sacrifices being offered again in Jerusalem must have been completely shattered. The literal keeping of the law had been rather severely curtailed even by the Jews in the second century.<sup>69</sup>

Justin continues his defense by arguing that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the Christians is the same God. He maintains strongly that Christians and Jews worship the same God. That common God is the God of the Old Testament. However, Justin continues, Christians do not focus on Moses or on the Law of Moses, for then they would be the same as the Jews. The law given through Moses on Sinai has become old, he says, and is exclusively for the Jews. The Old Testament itself anticipates a new covenant. Justin appeals that God had promised to make a new covenant with the house of Israel that would be different from the one he had made earlier when he brought them out of Egypt.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, there is a new law that has canceled the old one. Ronald Heine concluded that in the patristic mind the new law is eternal and not limited to a particular race of people. The new law, Justin adds, is Christ.<sup>71</sup> Justin asserts that the followers of Christ are the true Israel and true descendants of Abraham. The latter received both testimony and blessing from God before he was circumcised and was promised that he would

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<sup>68</sup> Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 49

<sup>69</sup> See Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; first published in Paris, 1948), 12-50

<sup>70</sup> See Jr 31:31-32

<sup>71</sup> Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 50

be the father of “many nations.”<sup>72</sup> Justin’s argument dismisses the law as antiquated since the coming of Christ, who inaugurated a new covenant. Christ, he argues further, is the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophets had spoken.

## 7.4.2 A diversified social background in the period of the early church

### (a) The patristic exegesis of famine

The occurrence of famine was due to Israel’s disobedience to God’s word. This interpretation illustrates the patristic views on sin and free will of choice of the human being. First, the book of Ruth 1:1 states that:

*In the days of a certain judge, when judges ruled, there was a famine<sup>73</sup> in the land.*

There was a famine of the word of God because of the scarcity of men learned in spiritual matters (to whom the authority to judge is given), for even the Law was corrupted by Jewish traditions.<sup>74</sup> Amos 8:11 also refer to the people not hearing God’s word. The reason pinpointed the anti-Jewish sentiment. It was a common phenomenon in the early stage of Christianity. We will discuss the relation between Judaism and Christianity in chapter eight.

Jerome accounted for the occurrence of the famine. He pointed out that Elimelech’s involuntary exile was due to the famine, which resulted from disobedience. This is similar to the Jewish cause. Jerome further elaborated on Jewish tradition. The Hebrews’ tradition is that this is Elimelech in whose time the sun stood still, on account of those who did not keep the law, so that, when they had seen such a miracle, they should have turned to the Lord God. Because they scorned to do such a thing, therefore the famine grew worse, and he who seemed foremost in the tribe of Judah not only was expelled from his native land with his wife and sons, made helpless by famine, but even continued in that same exile with his sons.

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<sup>72</sup> Gen. 17:4; *Dialogue 22*

<sup>73</sup> The Ordinary Gloss pointed out that the famine meant a famine of the Word.

<sup>74</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 11, 31

The cause of the famine was deeply rooted in theological and cultural circumstances. Disobedience was closely related to the patristic discussion of free will. The early Christian church was under the influence of Hellenism.<sup>75</sup> Because the Greeks perceived the world as fundamentally knowable through reason, and because the Greeks saw this world as conforming to certain predictable standards, they naturally concluded that proper moral behavior was the natural product of correct knowing. Conversely, John Keefe pointed out that error and failure had little to do with a failure of the will, but to a great deal with ignorance of the good and the true.<sup>76</sup>

This Greek principle of reason presented a great difficulty for Christian thinkers when the Greek tradition confronted the Scriptures. In the biblical world, reality is not primarily understood as being rational and accessible to human thought through observation of the world. Reality rather depends upon the will of God. God is completely free to create or to destroy. Since God is the author of all reality, all things are contingent upon the divine will. Individuals living in such a cosmological system gain access to the ethical norms and the functioning of the world in a way vastly different from those operating under the Greek model.

Right acting can only be understood in terms of obedience to the will of God as it is revealed in the law. Stability is guaranteed by God's promise and not by any natural necessity. This formed the background to the developing Christian theology of sin and salvation. John Keefe further elaborated that in order to make sense of the ideas inherent in the biblical message, God is free to do whatever he wishes and that human being must make a response, not through "knowing" but in the obedience of faith. Christian theology had need of a clearly defined theory of will.<sup>77</sup>

### **(b) Human sinfulness urges for the coming of a saving king**

It is important to note again that Christ-oriented interpretation dominated the patristic exegetical trends and the direction in the early Christian Church.<sup>78</sup> This Christological interpretation is presented by typological analysis of the text. Jesus' followers located themselves squarely in that tradition when they used the phrase "in accordance with the scriptures." The statements were not

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<sup>75</sup> See chapter five.

<sup>76</sup> John J. O'Keefe, *Sin and Freedom of the Will in Gregory of Nyssa*, 52

<sup>77</sup> *Idem*, 53

<sup>78</sup> See chapter five



intended as ornamentation. Nor may we view the phrases as indicative of missionary efforts to convince “Jews.”<sup>79</sup> D. Juel pointed out that the Jews, for whom conversation with the Sacred Scriptures was the primary mode of theological reflection, identified the coming of the Messiah.<sup>80</sup> Exegesis was fundamental to Christian reflection. It was in the language of the Scriptures that Jesus’ followers spoke about the “gospel.” The study of early Christian exegesis takes us to the heart of the interpretive enterprise, as C. H. Dodd noted in his *According to the Scriptures*:

*The attempt to discover just how the Old Testament was employed to elucidate the kerygma in the earliest period accessible to us and in circles which exerted permanent influence on Christian thought, is one which we are bound to make in seeking the substructure of New Testament theology.*<sup>81</sup>

Ruth 1:1’s “A man went” is interpreted as Christ, born in Bethlehem in Judah, who made the pilgrimage of this world with his wife, the Church and with his two sons namely the two orders of prophets and apostles.<sup>82</sup> The characters represented are identified with the outstanding groups in the Bible. This man is Elimelech. The book of Ruth 1:2 echoed this typology. 1:2’s Elimelech means “my God is king.” This is typified as Christ. The Old Testament had identified a saving figure belonging to the royal kingship of God. The Scripture echoed this expectation. *Listen to the voice of my prayer, my king and my God.*<sup>83</sup>

Ruth 2:14 indicated the incarnation of Christ and identified the pre-figuration of Christ a long time ago. It stated that:

*And Boaz said to her, “When it is evening, come here and eat the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar.” And so she sat beside the reapers and he collected barley-flour for her, and she ate and was satisfied and took the rest away.*

The phrase “dip your morsel” is interpreted as the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. The Law having been practiced for a long time and followed by the first people, has completely lost its native flavor being corrupted by the reasonings and the traditions of the Pharisees. The Church dips her morsel. In doing this,

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<sup>79</sup> The view is espoused by Lindars in his classic study, *New Testament Apologetic*.

<sup>80</sup> D. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 8

<sup>81</sup> Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 27

<sup>82</sup> Lesley Smith, 11

<sup>83</sup> Ps 5:2

Ruth shows that the incarnation was taught in the Old Testament already. Therefore, she believes more firmly because she grasps what was prefigured long ago.<sup>84</sup>

Again, the Christian exegesis explained Ruth 4:18 as the climax of God's promise of a royal Messiah from the seed of King David. It said that:

*These are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron.*

It started with "These are the generations", which indicated the long period of fulfillment of God's promise. The genealogy showed that there are ten generations of the sons of Judah up to David. It was made known that the intention of the whole of the divine Law is directed towards Christ, who was born from the seed of David. Therefore, it proclaims His coming and the fulfillment of the Law is manifested in Him. The theology of Paul also echoed this view. He said that "*For Christ is the end of the Law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*"<sup>85</sup>

Besides the New Testament's interpretation, the Old Testament also prefigured and presumed the coming of the Messiah. Before the Law is given, Jacob says regarding the incarnation of Christ that "*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the leader from his legs, until he comes who has been sent.*"<sup>86</sup> Moreover, David joined the group of Messiah exegetes. To David, he is the tenth of the seed of Judah and it was said that "*From the fruit of your womb, shall I place upon your throne.*"<sup>87</sup> It was clear therefore that the oracle of all prophets and patriarchs refers to the over-lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>88</sup>

The work of Christ<sup>89</sup> has been mentioned in the patristic exegesis. Christ came for the salvation of the people. Ruth 1:1 mentioned the work of Christ and indicated the "*two sons*", who might be freed<sup>90</sup> by the blood of Christ, from kingly and priestly honor to the order of prophets and apostles. Moreover, Ruth 1:6 illustrated well the salvation of Christ:

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<sup>84</sup> Lesley Smith, 18

<sup>85</sup> Rm 10:4

<sup>86</sup> Gn 49:10

<sup>87</sup> Ps 131:11

<sup>88</sup> Lesley Smith, 29

<sup>89</sup> See Chapter Five

<sup>90</sup> The Latin has a possible double meaning here, since *liberi* suggests both "free" and "children", referring back to the two sons.

*And she arose in order to start for her native land from the Moabite country, with both her daughters-in-law, for she had heard that the Lord had looked after his own people and had given them food.*

From the above quotation, the patristic exegetes explained that the Church pays her debts conscientiously, so that the people whom the apostles and prophets taught might be led in their time to the unity of faith and the society of the Christian religion. The Scripture teaches that the just man will not be abandoned. The Psalm illustrated that people will be accepted and stated that *“neither shall his seed seek bread”*<sup>91</sup> which comes down from heaven.<sup>92</sup> Ruth 2:23 mentioned the grace of salvation given by the surrender of Christ:

*And so she joined herself to Boaz’s girls, and reaped with them until the barley and wheat were stored in the granaries.*

*“Wheat”* means the grace of the New Testament which was gathered to be food for reasonable people, in which the body and blood of Christ is offered. The New Testament writer, John believed that the influence of Christ’s surrender was tremendously great. Once surrender came, salvation resulted. John stated that *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it alone remains.”*<sup>93</sup>

Ruth 3:4 also echoed the salvation of Christ by stating:

*But when he leaves to go to sleep, take note of the place where he sleeps, and go and turn back that part of the blanket covering his feet, and slip yourself underneath, and lie there.*

The words “turn back” identified the promise of God to those believe in Christ. It is a common doctrine that Christ died for us. The salvation came with a devout mind and scatter the cloaking letter of the Old Testament in which the sacrament of the incarnation of Christ is covered turning it back. Furthermore, when you have known the salvation promised you, you should humbly take refuge in His help so that you might remain there for all time.<sup>94</sup>

Messianic exegesis expresses the theological hope that existed in the

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<sup>91</sup> Ps 36:25

<sup>92</sup> Lesley Smith, 12

<sup>93</sup> Jn 12:24-25

<sup>94</sup> Lesley Smith, 22

community of the early Christian Church. This formed an important cultural and religious background, which shaped the patristic exegesis on the book of Ruth.

### 7.4.3 Ruth's type relates to the Christian church

#### (a) Typology of Ruth

Beside the Holy Scripture, the Church enjoyed authority and legitimacy among the community of believers. Being an example of believers, Ruth is prefigured as representative of the Christian Church. Ruth 1:16 states that:

*She answered, "Do not oppose me to make me leave you and go away. I shall go wherever you go; I shall stay wherever you stay. Your people are my people, and your God is my God."<sup>95</sup>*

The Ordinary Gloss interpreted 1:16 as indication of the Church, having been called from the Gentiles. The interpreters held a close relation of the formation of the Christian Church to the faith of Israelite patriarchs, who cited Abraham as their representative. The book of Deuteronomy mentioned that Israel abandoned her native land, which is idolatry and gave up carnal longings.<sup>96</sup> The Church followed suit and declared her God to be that God in whom the saints believed and whom the believers would follow wherever the flesh of Christ ascended. Moreover, for whose name the church would suffer in this world until death, and unite with the people of the saints and patriarchs and prophets. Paul committed this doxology and Rom. 15:10 described that *'Rejoice, you nations, with his people'*, in which the believers celebrated the joyful union with Jesus Christ.

In verse sixteen of chapter one in Ruth's answer to Naomi, we may witness the use of a patristic exegetical method, the use of typology. Ruth prefigures the Christian church. Isidore of Seville advocated that Ruth is a type of the church.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, he agreed with the Ordinary Gloss. First Ruth is a type because she is a stranger from the Gentile people who renounced her native land and all things belonging to it. She made her way to the land of Israel. And

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<sup>95</sup> **Idem, 13**

<sup>96</sup> Dt 32:43

<sup>97</sup> By "type" or typology, Isidore and other patristic and medieval exegetes mean a signification --- something symbolized or (pre-) figured by something else. Christian exegesis often sees an Old Testament person, object, or even as prefiguring some person or object in the New Testament or in the Church. The Old is seen as a "type" of the New. See the discussion in Chapter Six.

when her mother-in-law forbade her from coming with her she persisted, saying, *“Wherever you go, I shall go; your people shall be my people; and your God shall be my God. Whichever land receives you as you die, there I too shall die”*. (Ruth 1:16) The patristic exegesis indicated that this voice without doubt shows that she is a type of the church. This company, by virtue of which Ruth might be joined to, the longed-for-saints from the lineage of Abraham, Moses revealed to us in the canticle, saying, *“Rejoice, you nations, with his people, (that is, people of the Gentiles), pour forth what you believe; exult with those who were first chosen for eternal joy.”*<sup>98</sup>

Ambrose also agreed with Isidore of Seville and interpreted Ruth 1:16 using typological interpretation. Ambrose recognized Ruth as a part of the Church. Ruth entered the church and was made an Israelite. She deserved to be counted among God's greatest servants. She was chosen on account of the kinship of her soul, not of her body. Ruth set a good example for the believers. We should emulate her because she deserved this prerogative because of her behavior. When following her example we may be counted among the favored elect in the church of the Lord. Continuing in our Father's house, we might through her example call upon him who, like Paul or any other bishop, calls us to worship God, your people are our people and your God my God.<sup>99</sup>

Ruth 4:13-22 stated the birth of Obed. The union of Boaz, the son of Abraham, with Ruth, a foreigner, prefigures the marriage of the Son of God to the Gentile-born church. Moreover, 4:13-17 recorded that the Lord provides a next of kin. Ephrem the Syrian advocated that Ruth's love is rewarded. The following Christian hymn praised the works of God:

*Let Tamar rejoice that her Lord has come, for her name announced the son of her Lord, and her appellation called you to come to her.*

*By you honorable women made themselves contemptible, (you) the One who makes all chaste. She stole you at the crossroads, (you) who prepared the road to the house of the kingdom. Since she stole life, the sword was insufficient to kill her.*

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<sup>98</sup> John R. Franke ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: Old Testament IV Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005), 184

<sup>99</sup> Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 32; H. de Lubac, J. Danielou et al., eds. *Sources Chretiennes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941), 45:137

*Ruth lay down with a man on the threshing floor for your sake. Her love was bold for your sake. She teaches boldness to all penitents. Her ears held in contempt all (other) voices for the sake of your voice.*<sup>100</sup>

## **(b) Upholding of the position of Ruth**

The typology of Ruth was under the influence of its cultural and social background. Ruth should be upheld as an important figure serving as model and example for all believers. Ruth as a foreign woman might have caused some doubt among the believers about her position in the preaching of Christian doctrine. Therefore, the position of women in society formed an integral force in shaping the interpretation of the book of Ruth. John Behr was interested in the position of women in social terms. He pointed out that the preponderance of women, especially among the upper classes, had significant implications not only for their role with respect to family life, but also within the Christianity community becoming the dominant religion. It has already been noted how Pliny examined the case of two deaconesses.<sup>101</sup> However, the views on the position of women were controversial throughout the age of the patristic church.

Traditionally there existed an inferior image of women. Women are castigated as inferior and supplementary image. The woman's role in a family and society context was regarded as submissive and supplementary. Helen Rhee first pointed out the role of the husband. The husband's virtue lies in his exercise of authority over his wife as a *"guide, philosopher, and teacher in all that is most lovely and divine."*<sup>102</sup> Plutarch, however, diminished the role of the wife. The wife, in turn, is to be submissive to her husband and *"have to feeling of her own, but she should join with her husband in seriousness and sportiveness and in soberness and laughter"*<sup>103</sup> and share her husband's gods as well as his friends. Similarly, Pliny, while stressing the moral qualities and public decorum of both husband and wife, expresses the ideal virtue of wife as devotion to her husband's interests and deference and obedience to him.<sup>104</sup> Thus, the ideal of

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<sup>100</sup> Lesley Smith, 42.

<sup>101</sup> John Behr, "Social and historical setting" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63

<sup>102</sup> Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 113.

<sup>103</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife*, ed. S. B. Pomeroy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14

<sup>104</sup> *Ep.* 4:19; 7:19

harmonious partnership also preserves the basic social hierarchy and conforms to the traditional expectations of gender roles.

However, Christianity tended to upgrade the position of women. Most of the early Christian authors regarded by the mainstream churches as fathers, agree that women are created in God's image. This belief accords with Gen 1:27, "*Male and female he created them,*" In most patristic theology the *imago Dei* was regarded as constitutive of human identity and is essential to the process whereby humans attain salvation. These two opposed opinions formed a strong force affecting the patristic interpretation on the book of Ruth.

On the other hand, the Christian Church imposed, in turn, a positive interpretation on the role and position of women. The Antiochene fathers shared the idea that men and women are alike in soul though different in body, and that accordingly they have the same moral and spiritual capacities and tasks and the same ultimate vocation to holiness and salvation. This is a commonplace idea among the Greek fathers. It is found in Clement of Alexandria and in the Cappadocians. Nonna Verna Harrison confirmed that Theodore draws an ontological conclusion that parallels his practical affirmation of woman's moral and spiritual equality with man.<sup>105</sup> He infers from the fact that Adam could not find a helper like himself among the animals that woman as a human being is like man equal in honor. Theodore says that God took a little bit of material from the man and built it up into a woman so that she would be of the same essence as the man.

Theodoret's welcome suggestion that women can be good advisors could serve as an appropriate response to Theodore's condemnation of Adam for listening to Eve when he should have rather commanded her. Nonna Harrison commented that since women have the same means of divine grace to help them fulfill their duties, namely, church attendance, baptism, Eucharist and the ascetic struggle inherent in the life of all Christians.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, Theodoret strongly affirms the equality of men and women in virtue and in the service of God. He recounts how Peter the Galatian exhorts his

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<sup>105</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Summer 2001 Vol. 9 Num. 2 (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2002), 214

<sup>106</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Summer 2001 Vol. 9 Num. 2 (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2002), 234

mother to stop wearing cosmetics, jewelry and other adornments. According to Theodoret, virtue and holiness overcome the inherited shame that burdens women. He does not explain the source of shame whether it is due to Eve's role in the fall or to age-old cultural prejudice. In any case, women ascetics demonstrate their freedom from this disgrace by their actions and show that women are not bound by their nature but can choose between sin and virtue.<sup>107</sup>

Frankly speaking, Bradley Nassif commented on the validity and effectiveness of the Antiochene exegetes. He confirmed that they sought to understand biblical events within the stream of human history and avoided viewing them as mere icons making present in symbolic form a spiritual realm that transcends history.<sup>108</sup> Hence Diodore understood the original creation of humanity and by implication Paradise before the fall and God's original intention for his human creation, in terms of the social conditions of his own culture in his own time. In rejecting Alexandrian methods, Diodore and Theodore abandoned interpretive tools that could have enabled them to view the identity and destiny of women in a broader perspective. This was the limitation of literal interpretation. On the other hand, David Dawson affirmed that allegory enabled the Alexandrians to create an interpretive distance between different levels of meaning that opened a space within which they could conceptualize human identity in terms of alternative social structures they perceived as reflecting the ethics of the kingdom of god, such as those of ascetic communities.<sup>109</sup> Allegory could thus serve as a means of cultural critique and cultural transformation. Moreover, it could provide more dimensions of meaning to the text.

#### **7.4.4 Ruth's and Boaz's morality as a good illustration of Christianity being a moral religion**

##### **(a) The importance of morality and modeling**

Patristic fathers upheld their moral figuration of biblical characters in a positive way. Ruth is described by Jerome, following Origen and John Chrysostom, as one of the four *pec-catrices* or sinful women in the Matthean genealogy of

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<sup>107</sup> Irene Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, tr. Anthony P. Gythiel, Cistercian Studies 116 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 273

<sup>108</sup> Bradley Nassif, "Spiritual Exegesis" in the School of Antioch," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 343-77

<sup>109</sup> See David Dawson, *Allegory Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)



Christ<sup>110</sup> This sobriquet may disguise the possibility that Jerome would have described the male members of the list as *peccatores* or sinful men, themselves. Be that as it may, the inclusion of Rahab<sup>111</sup> and Bathsheba<sup>112</sup> along with Tamar<sup>113</sup> and Ruth has laid an emphasis on the supposed sexual sinfulness of the four.

In fact, this is unjust and misleading. Rahab, a harlot, most often comes under discussion by exegetes because she lied in order to save the Israelites. This sin of untruth was seen as greater than her harlotry, even as she is pronounced just by St. Paul<sup>114</sup>. Tamar, like Ruth, is only following the dictates of the Law for widows. She disguises herself as a prostitute in order to trick her father-in-law into fathering a new son. The legality, indeed righteousness, of her action is recognized in the Genesis text. Ruth is always seen as blameless, since she is merely following the advice of her Jewish mother-in-law. This leaves only Bathsheba as an adulteress, but in comparison to the sins of David, hers seem relatively minor. Nevertheless, this shared title given to these women was used to single them out to indicate that they carry with them a frisson of sexual impropriety.<sup>115</sup>

### **(b) Theme of virtue as indication of the morality of Ruth and Boaz**

As quoted before, the Ordinary Gloss added to the words of Ruth 1:16 “*Your people are my people*” the phrase “*through merits, aided by grace alone, by free vocation*”.<sup>116</sup> It showed that doing right was a standard of being a part of God’s community. Again morality was given the greater emphasis and importance in the early Christian interpretation, just like in the early Jewish exegesis.<sup>117</sup> Morality and virtue was commanded by God. Moreover, Ruth 2:12 illustrated the relationship between morality and reward. God did reward those who have virtue. It stated that:

*The Lord repays you for your deeds, and you shall receive full reward from the Lord God of Israel, to whom you came, and under whose wings you flew.*

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<sup>110</sup> Mt 1

<sup>111</sup> Jos 2

<sup>112</sup> 2 Sm 11

<sup>113</sup> Gn 38

<sup>114</sup> Heb 11

<sup>115</sup> Lesley Smith, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), x

<sup>116</sup> Idem

<sup>117</sup> See Chapter Four

The Ordinary Gloss indicated that reward means eternal glory and linked it to the reference of John 16:24, which tells that *Up to now you have made no request in my name: do so, and it will be answered, so that your hearts may be full of joy.* The reward is paid to those who have done good deeds, that means being faithful. This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent.<sup>118</sup> The Ordinary Gloss said again that the two Testaments say that God protects those who flee to him. The Psalmist also indicated the protection of the righteousness by God's guidance. He stated that *"I will hope in the shadow of your wings, until I might cross over."*<sup>119</sup>

Again Theodoret of Cyr pointed out the relationship between reward and virtue. He indicated that divine reward was given for Ruth's virtues in verse twelve. The blessing followed as Boaz said it would. Ruth received the full reward from God, so that she was the progenitor of the blessing of the nations.<sup>120</sup> Theodoret even commented that God generously rewarded Ruth's virtues as she was deemed worthy to be an ancestor of Jesus.<sup>121</sup>

Naomi's attitude to Ruth also indicated the importance of morality in patristic exegesis. Ruth 2:20 illustrated this principle and stated that:

*And Naomi replied, "May he be blessed by the Lord, since he has performed a service for the dead"<sup>122</sup> with the same kindness which he has shown to the living."*

Ruth 2:20 identified that Naomi utters a blessing to Ruth as a reward of her kindness and piety to Naomi. Theodoret of Cyr. described the thankful heart of Naomi. With a heart thankful for the remembrance of kindness, Naomi rewarded the absent benefactor of her daughter-in-law with a blessing. The patristic fathers commented that *"May he who has acknowledged you be blessed, for he has filled an empty soul by doing what he did. He took notice not of poverty but only of the Lawgiver, who ordered that widows be shown care."*<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> John 6:29; Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 18

<sup>119</sup> Ps 56:2

<sup>120</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 186

<sup>121</sup> Idem

<sup>122</sup> It is followed by "to the Gentiles [people] who were buried in sin.

<sup>123</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 186

Theodoret of Cyr gave credit to the praiseworthy loyalty of Ruth. The constancy of Ruth, who because of the piety of her spirit and the memory of her husband preferring him to her parents, showing loyalty to a woman worn out in old age and laboring in poverty, is praiseworthy.

It is the merit of Ruth's faith. Boaz married Ruth on account of the merit of her faith because she scorned her own people and land and nation and chose Israel, and because she did not despise her mother-in-law, a widow like herself, and an exile; but she was led by desire to Naomi's people rather than to Ruth's own. She rejected the god of her native land and chose the living God, saying to her mother-in-law, "Do not oppose me."<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, Theodoret of Cyr. indicated that there was a generous minister of kindness. It is the Lord, who recompenses you. The story of Boaz also teaches us about virtue. Theodoret summarized Ruth 2:8-23 as indicating the fact that Boaz treats Ruth kindly. In this text, he commented that Boaz teaches us the virtues of generosity and kindness in his actions toward Ruth.<sup>125</sup> For he not only liberally shared his grain with Ruth, but also consoled her with words. Not only did he share food with her but also was himself the minister of kindness; so that whoever does not order another person to be his minister, but prepares the flour and bread himself, will have given very liberally indeed.<sup>126</sup>

Referring to the morality and virtue of Boaz, their humility and chastity indeed were praised, because Boaz did not touch her as a lascivious man, who would touch a girl or abhor her as a chaste man would a lascivious girl. As soon as he had heard her speak of the law, he ascribed her actions to religion. Nor did he despise her as a rich man would a pauper, nor was he in awe of her, as a mature man might be of a young woman. However, more experienced in faith than in body, he proceeded in the morning to the gate, calling the neighborhood together and prevailing not by the law of kinship to her but, rather, by the favor of being the chosen one of God.<sup>127</sup>

Ruth 3:11-13 said that:

*11 Do not be afraid, therefore; but what you have asked me, I shall do for you. For everyone*

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<sup>124</sup> Idem

<sup>125</sup> Idem

<sup>126</sup> Idem

<sup>127</sup> Idem

*who lives within the gates of my city knows you to be a woman of virtue.*

*12 I do not deny that you are my relative; but there is someone who is a closer relative to you than me.*

*13 Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wishes to preserve the law of propinquity<sup>128</sup>, all well and good; but if he does not wish it, I will receive you into my household without any hesitation, as the Lord lives. Sleep until morning.”*

Ruth 3:11-13 emphasized the outstanding virtues of Ruth and Boaz. Unless God's inspiration had been in Ruth, she would not have said what she said or done what she did. She desired to have sons out of the seed of Israel and become one of the people of God. Her simplicity is also praised, because she came in under Boaz's coverlet voluntarily. She feared neither that he would perhaps spurn her, as a just man might spurn a lascivious woman, nor that he might deceive her and, worse, despise a deceived woman, as many men might have done. However, obeying her mother-in-law's plans, she confidently believed that God would bless her action, knowing her conscience, because lust did not push her to it but rather religion was her encouragement.

### **(c) Teaching Morality and Modeling as the task of patristic commentators**

Ruth 4:1-6 stated that:

*4:1 Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. And when he saw his relative (whom he had spoken of earlier), go past, he said to him, calling him by his name,<sup>129</sup> “Pause a little while, and sit here.” And he paused and sat down.*

*4:2 Then Boaz, bringing over ten men from amongst the town elders, said to them, “sit down here.” And when they were settled,*

*4:3 he said to his neighbor, “Naomi, who returned from the country of the Moabites, is selling part of the field belonging to our brother Elimelech.*

*4:4 I wished you to hear this and to tell you this in front of the whole seated assembly and elders*

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<sup>128</sup> The law of propinquity or of the closer relation refers to the institution of “levirate marriage” described in Deut. 25:5-10. If a woman were widowed, without a male heir, it was her husband's closest relative's duty to marry her and conceive a son, who would both carry on his father's name and provide for his mother. See further T. Thompson and D. Thompson, “Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth,” *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968), 79-99

<sup>129</sup> Although Boaz called him by his name, we are not told what this was. The Hebrew tradition says that, because the man was not willing to do his duty by Ruth, he was not worthy to be named.

*of my people. If you wish to have the field, buy it and have it, by the law of propinquity. However, if you do not want it, tell me, so I know what I should do. For there is no nearer relative than you, who have priority, and I who am second.” Whereupon he replied, “I will buy the field.”*

*4:5 To which Boaz said, “When you buy the field from the woman’s hand, you must also take on Ruth, the Moabite woman whose husband is dead, to keep alive the name<sup>130</sup> of your relative in your heredity.*

*4:6 To which he replied, “I cede my right by the law of propinquity; for I should not harm the future of my family. You may have my privilege, which I declare that I give up freely.”*

Theodoret of Cyr praised the chastity of Boaz. The man was so virtuous that he did not rush into a marriage outside the law, but he spoke with his neighbors about the marriage. However, his words are also worthy of admiration. For his first words were not about the marriage but about the possession of fields, etc.

Moreover, when, on account of the prospective marriage he (the relative) in fact refused the contract for the land and indeed took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz, in accordance with the law, Boaz then took Ruth to be his wife. Furthermore, because he was not serving lust, he took her in the right spirit that one should take a wife, and his words also showed themselves worthy of praise, You are witnesses today, etc. “I do not”, he said, “transgress the law in marrying a Moabite woman; rather, I diligently fulfill divine law, so that the memory of the dead is not extinguished.”<sup>131</sup>

#### **(d) The cultural and social background**

Christian morality cannot establish itself in a vacuum. It was rather influenced by its surrounding culture and philosophy. The patristic interpretation of morality and virtue illustrated well the impact of pagan influence and the challenges of its age. One of the most distinctive aspects of the “democratized asceticism” of Christianity was its claim of sexual purity. Helen Rhee commented that the interpreters all boast of Christian purity in contrast to pagan immortality and fornication. However, the Christian renunciation described in them also attests to a sharp dichotomy between the conservative ascetic ideals and the radical

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<sup>130</sup> “Name” is literally “seed”.

<sup>131</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 188

ascetic ideals that had developed since the inception of Christianity.<sup>132</sup> They became the subject of bitter disputes as to their concepts of sexual purity, their positions regarding marriage and family and their social repercussions and implications even in their attempt to portray the Christian self-definition under the Greco-Roman culture. In the imperial period, these issues of sexuality and marriage became matters of public concern and were intertwined with the traditional and social conventions and mores. Helen Rhee pointed out that for the patristic interpreters, the issue of sexuality did relate to the women martyrs, whose familial and social renunciations in terms of the traditional family identity and loyalty represented resistance to the established social order.<sup>133</sup>

With the change of the Roman political system from a republic to a monarchy in the first century BCE, there came a coalition of Stoic ethics with the Roman government in a conservation moral ethos for marriage, family and social order.

Indeed, Stoicism of the imperial period, endorsing the Augustan legal, social, and political acts, provided the ideological backbone of marriage and family with a corresponding conservative ideal and ethos of sexual moderation and restraint.<sup>134</sup> Concerning sexual purity, Musonius saw procreation in marriage as the only legitimate reason for sexual intercourse and regards sex for pleasure as unjust and unlawful.<sup>135</sup> In this regard, he condemns all extramarital sex, such as adultery, homosexuality and even relations with slaves, not only for women but also for men, as showing lack of self-restraint.<sup>136</sup>

## 7.4.5 Marriage

### (a) Marriage as a moral example

The patristic fathers believed that Boaz's marriage was an act of piety.<sup>137</sup> Boaz took Ruth to be his wife because of the merits of her faith, so that a royal nation might be born out of such a holy marriage. For this Boaz was given credit. As an old man, he did not take a wife for himself. For God, this marriage was not on

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<sup>132</sup> Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 108

<sup>133</sup> Idem, 109

<sup>134</sup> Idem, 111

<sup>135</sup> Lutz, C. E. "Musonius Rufus: The Roman Socrates", *Yale Classical Studies* 10, 1947, 86

<sup>136</sup> Idem, 87

<sup>137</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 189

account of his justice of the law and to revive the seed of his kinsman. It was also not serving love so much as it did religion. The patristic exegetes concluded that he was old in age but youthful in faith.<sup>138</sup> The marriage was made holy and full of gospel sense by the use of typology. Theodoret commented that Ruth's marriage was free from voluptuous impulses.<sup>139</sup>

Ruth 3:10 stated that:

*And he said, "Daughter, you are blessed by the Lord, and you have surpassed your former pity with your latest pity, because you have not run after young men, poor or rich.*

Theodoret of Cyr. interpreted Ruth 3:10 as indicating a holy marriage. Boaz praised Ruth's deeds.<sup>140</sup> "You show by your deed", Boaz said, "that this was not done out of voluptuousness. In fact, you might have gone to those who are young and blooming, with only the intent of enjoying voluptuousness, but you went to the man who stands in place of a father to you."<sup>141</sup>

Ruth 4:7-12 stated that:

*7 Now this, indeed, was the ancient custom in Israel amongst kinsmen, that whenever anyone ceded his right under the law to another, so that it was conceded definitely, the man undid his own sandal and gave it to his neighbor.<sup>142</sup> In Israel, this was proof of the giving up of the right.*

*8 Boaz therefore said to his neighbor, "Take off your sandal." And he immediately undid his sandal.*

*9 And he said, before the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I will take over all the things which belonged to Elimelech and Chilion and Machlon, handed down to Naomi;*

*10 and Ruth, the Moabite woman, the wife of Machlon, I will take in marriage, and I will revive the name of his family and brothers will not be lost amongst the people. I call you as witnesses of this act."*

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<sup>138</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 189

<sup>139</sup> Idem, 187

<sup>140</sup> It was given credit that there was no sex before the marriage.

<sup>141</sup> Lesley Smith, 34

<sup>142</sup> Jerome's translation is clear: the man undoes his own sandal. Other writers lost the reflexive pronoun, letting in much confusion about who was to do what to whom.

11 All the people who were at the gate and the elders answered, "We are witnesses; the Lord made this woman, who has come into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who built the house of Israel, so that she may be an example of virtue in Ephrathah, and she may have a name famous throughout Bethlehem.

12 And may your house be from the seed which the Lord will have given to you from this girl, as was the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore of Judah."

Isidore of Seville and Chrysostom both explained that in this text the marriage of Ruth and Boaz has a profound symbolic meaning; it prefigures salvation of all peoples in Christ and his church.<sup>143</sup>

Ruth 4:1-6 described that Boaz speaks with the elders. Through this marriage, a patristic interpreter, Isidore of Seville, made use of typology to prefigure the bride, bridegroom and best man. Moreover, Theodoret used Ruth 4:7-12 as the prophetic saying that the elders' blessing of Ruth's marriage was prophetic as it looked towards the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.<sup>144</sup>

First, the text deals with the identity of a kinsman. When Ruth entered the land of Israel with her mother-in-law, it was provided on account of the merits of her prayers that she was married to a man of the lineage of Abraham. That man is whom indeed she at first believed to be her closest kinsman. The nearest kinsman said that he could not marry her. When he had withdrawn, Boaz was married to her with the witness of ten elders. Boaz who previously confessed himself unable to marry that same woman was united with her and was blessed by those ten elders.

It was thought that this passage prefigures John the Baptist who himself was seen by the people of Israel to be Christ and was therefore asked who he really was. John the Baptist did not deny who he was but confessed it, saying that he was not the Christ. Those who were sent to him persisted in these inquiries about who he was. John the Baptist answered, "*I am the voice crying in the desert*. He confessed the good news about the Lord, saying, "He showed that he himself was the friend of the groom [the best man], since he added, "*truly the*

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<sup>143</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 190

<sup>144</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 190



*friend of the groom is he who stands and hears him and rejoices on account of the groom's voice.* The local people thought he was Christ because they did not understand that Christ had come on the day of the visitation and that he who was earlier promised by the prophets' voices was the church's bridegroom.

In the text that kinsman indicated to her that he was not her real kinsman. Afterwards Ruth was united with Boaz he real kinsmen. In the same way Christ is the true bridegroom of the church, to whom all the sayings of the prophets showed. He was deemed worthy to claim the church, to present to God the Father an unnumbered amount of people throughout the whole orb of the world, because his kinsman took off the sandals.<sup>145</sup>

Isidore of Seville also identified Christ as the true bridegroom. Traditionally, it was an old custom that if a groom wished to divorce his bride he took off his sandal and this was the sign of the divorce. Consequently, the kinsman was ordered to take off his sandals, lest he approach the church wearing sandals like a bridegroom because this office was reserved for Christ, who is the true bridegroom.

However, the blessing of the ten elders showed that all Gentile peoples were saved and blessed in the name of Christ. The *iota* signifies the number of ten in Greek. This first letter also signified the name of the Lord Jesus in full, showing that all peoples are saved through him and are blessed.

The patristic exegetes indicated the meaning of text from the beginning prefigured by antecedent figures, which were clearly fulfilled in this way through the advent of the Lord. John R. Franke reminded that the antecedent figures were being completed by the accord of all voiced in truth and by all figures of the Holy Scriptures, which God who promised them fulfilled through his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, king, and redeemer and savior, with whom is honor and glory from age to age.<sup>146</sup>

Ambrose commented that it was as if Ruth, though she was foreign-born, had possessed a husband from the Jewish people. Although she was seen and loved by Boaz while still gleaning and maintaining herself and her mother-in-law

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<sup>145</sup> Idem, 189

<sup>146</sup> John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 191

with what she gleaned, she could not become the wife of Boaz before she had first loosed the shoe from him whose wife she ought to have become by law.

However, although the story is a simple one it also has a hidden meaning. Ambrose interpreted that we should find in the words an indication of shame and horror. We should regard these words as intending and conveying the thought of common bodily intercourse. Rather it was the foreshadowing of one who would arise from the Jewish people ---- whence Christ was, after the flesh ---- who should, abided with the seed of heavenly teaching, revive the seed of his dead kinsman, that is to say, the people, and to whom the precepts of the law, in their spiritual significance, assigned the sandal marriage, for the espousals of the church.<sup>147</sup>

Chrysostom commented that those things which happened to Ruth should be seen figuratively. She was an outsider and had fallen into extreme penury. Boaz, seeing her, did not despise her on account of her poverty, nor was he horrified on account of her impiety. Christ received the church, which was both a stranger and laboring, and was in need of good things. Ruth is not joined with her consort before forsaking her parents and her nation and her native land: never was anyone so much ennobled by marriage. Thus the church was not made loveable to her spouse before she had forsaken her prior customs. The prophet says, *“Forget your people.”*<sup>148</sup>

## **(b) Cultural and social background**

Again, the interpretation of marriage was deeply influenced by the social and cultural atmosphere in the early Christian church. First, Jesus’ teaching formed a backbone of teachings on the marriage. Jesus affirms monogamy and the fundamental indissolubility of marriage. Jesus declared that *“the two shall become one flesh...Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate”*<sup>149</sup> He further explains this by condemning a remarriage after divorcee, whether it be a man or woman, calling it adultery.<sup>150</sup> The Matthean version prohibits remarriage indicating it as adultery, which is defined much more inclusively in that Gospel. This divine sanction of marriage and prohibition

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<sup>147</sup> P. Schaff et al. ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. 2 series (14 vols. Each) (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature, 1894), 253

<sup>148</sup> Ps 45:10

<sup>149</sup> Mk 10:9

<sup>150</sup> Mark 10:11-12

of divorce and remarriage (or strict regulation of divorce) are certainly distinctive from Greco-Roman practices of divorce and remarriage, which were relatively easy and frequent and even required by the law, in the case of remarriage, though the ideal was still lifelong monogamy.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The patristic exegetes used all kinds of typology to interpret the text for their own purpose in a certain historical environment. The figures were made parallel with the tradition of Old Testament to the gospel of early Christianity. Ruth was for the church. Torah was replaced or made perfect by Christ. Through this parallel, upholding morality and consolidation of *keryma* preaching were the main tasks as the historical and cultural circumstances were diversified and complicated.

Once again patristic exegesis on the book of Ruth was under the influence of social, cultural, political and religious backgrounds. It proves that the pre-set religious system of the exegetes actually dictated how they interpreted their literature. Though the book of Ruth in Old Testament was not regarded as a fundamental book<sup>151</sup>, it undoubtedly reflected the intention of early Christian interpreters. They tended to consolidate the legitimacy and orthodoxy of Christianity as a new-born religion. Moreover, the social and cultural context imposed influence on the exegetical work. There is a vivid and controversial religious and theological debate at that age, from 1<sup>st</sup> century CE to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. It is the duty for patristic interpreters to uphold and renew the Christian thought first to the believers and the second to the pagan world.

Christian exegetes connect the new with the old. It is the task of patristic fathers to build the new relationship of Christian church with the Old Testament's tradition. So, they built the link to uphold and consolidate the Davidic line of dynasty. God is still in control of the world through the setting up of kingship on the world through declaration of gospel. In their interpretation they wanted to emphasize Ruth's connection to Jesus, especially in the actual social and religious situations, which seem unstable and controversial in the early development of Christian church history. It seems to be true to say that Jesus' position was to be built up and strengthened at that stage.

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<sup>151</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, JR. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 23

## Chapter Eight

### The Combined Results of the Comparison

#### 8.1 Introduction

We have gone through two exegetical trends: early Jewish and patristic interpretation. They fall in more or less the same historical, political, cultural and theological periods. They were compared in terms of their interpretation of the book of Ruth. It is appropriate to end the research of these trends with a check list of some results and principle patterns arising from the preceding discussion.

#### 8.2 The same origin, but different views on authority

The two exegetical approaches analyzed are referring to two important religions in the world: Judaism and Christianity. In what regard do they differ from each other? Jacob Neusner provides the answer: with regard to their views on written authority.<sup>1</sup> Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner indicated that Judaism assigns the Torah revealed at Sinai to an oral tradition, ultimately written down by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries of the Common Era. Christianity, in return, includes in its Bible not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

Judaism and Christianity share the same view of authority. Theological thought in both, determining their exegetical approach, insists upon a single criterion of truth. For both rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, a grammar of theological terms, derived from documents valued as authoritative by the faithful, suggests a theological system. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner pointed out that the common documentary foundation for this system is a set of writings that both Judaism and Christianity accept as revealed by God to mankind, in an act of self-manifestation found in the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel.<sup>3</sup> The two religions concur on that fundamental point.

Jacob Neusner indicated the legitimacy of a comparative study of Judaism and

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), xxi

<sup>2</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 7

<sup>3</sup> Idem, 21

Christianity. He pointed out that Christianity, in its orthodox form, and Judaism, as constructed by the rabbinic sages intersect in their use of the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel. They represent comparable but also conflicting responses to the same Scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

This phenomenon made vivid and diversified hermeneutics possible. Knowledge of rabbinic exegesis is important for Christianity, because it provides a context for comparison and contrast. It provides perspective on both religious systems.

Relation of patristic exegesis to early Jewish tradition can be established. Antique Christianity first read apocalyptic and prophetic passages of the Old Testament forward towards the New Testament. It then also read back from the New Testament to the Old, finding the meaning of the ancient Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ. Rabbinic Judaism first read back from the oral tradition to the written, finding validation for the one in the other. It then also read forward from what is called the written Torah to the oral Torah, grounding tradition in Scripture, continuing the story of Israel Scripture told about the holy people. Jacob Neusner commented that Rabbinic Judaism found the meaning of the ancient Scriptures to be realized in Israel's enduring life of sanctification aimed at salvation in the end of days. It insisted that holy Israel, God's people, defined as those who know God and accept his dominion, continue to embody and carry forward the narrative of the Torah.<sup>5</sup>

Because both tell the same story of humanity and God's self-revelation to humanity, both religions organize their thoughts in large-scale structures that exhibit traits of congruence.<sup>6</sup> With so much in common, Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner confirmed the legitimacy of a comparison between antique Christianity and early Judaism. They remarked that the fact that each organized much of its theological system within structures that are comparable to each other, make early Judaism and original Christianity ideal candidates for the enterprise of comparison and contrast.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), xxi

<sup>5</sup> Idem, xxii

<sup>6</sup> In brief, both begin their stories with creation and tell the same story of creation. Both speak of those who know God as Israel and affirm the revelation by God to Israel at Sinai. Both see the story of humanity as a tale with a beginning in Eden, and an end with the last judgment and victory over the grave and entry into eternal life.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 21

Right from its beginnings in the first six centuries CE up to the present day rabbinic Judaism defined the normative faith for nearly all practitioners of Judaism. During the development of Judaism there were many diverse heirs and continuators of rabbinic Judaism.<sup>8</sup> All expressions of rabbinic Judaism give preference to the Pentateuch and find the meaning of Torah in a set of related texts.<sup>9</sup> The path of rabbinic exegesis can be seen in the Mishnah, a philosophical law code; its amplifications and commentaries: the Tosefta, the Yerushalmi or Talmud of the Land of Israel, and the Talmud of Babylonia and various compilations of exegesis of the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls, known collectively as Midrash.<sup>10</sup> From these different texts it can be concluded that Judaism experienced a diversified interpretation and manifestation of religious phenomena.

The situation was the same with patristic exegesis. There was no single unified corpus of patristic literature. This means that every patristic father had his own point of view. However, two distinctive groups of exegetical schools were witnessed. They represent a literal (Antiochene) and an allegorical (Alexandrian) interpretation. Among these two trends, the allegorical one dominated and typology was given higher priority of importance.

### 8.3 The nature of Judaism and Christianity

Some may maintain that Judaism has no official theology. By that remark they apparently mean to claim that Judaism did not set forth any dogmatic or systematic theology. It does not possess any list of convictions that one has to ascribe to when one wishes to claim the status of a normative Israelite, that is, to be a practitioner of Judaism. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner criticized this view point that rabbinic Judaism is “merely law, orthopraxy lacking orthodoxy, deed lacking all deliberation and conviction.”<sup>11</sup>

But in fact rabbinic Judaism sets forth a rich corpus of theological formulations of religious truth as was indicated in the previous discussion. That corpus

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter two

<sup>9</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 22

<sup>10</sup> See the section of “early Jewish commentary” of chapter two and the whole chapter three.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

begins with monotheism.<sup>12</sup> It continues with the dogma that God revealed the Torah at Sinai, both written and oral. It culminates in the conviction that all Israel has a portion in the world to come with the exception of those who deny the Torah and the world to come. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner concluded that these propositions surely comprise not only religious statements but a cogent theological structure and system.<sup>13</sup>

For Judaism, Mishnah stated that “all Israel, with few exception has a portion in the world to come,”<sup>14</sup> which is to say, all Israelites will rise from the dead, stand in judgment, and pass on to eternal life in Eden. Therefore, rabbinic Judaism set forth an abundant corpus of theological convictions.

Taking in mind that rabbinic Judaism provided several forms of prayer for a liturgy that celebrates God as creator of the world, revealer of the Torah, and redeemer and savior of humanity at the end of days, we have no difficulty in outlining the theological dogmas of Judaism. Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner concluded that the proclamation of God’s unity in the liturgy as “Hear, O Israel” formed a fundamental theological statement. This was the theology of rabbinic Judaism.<sup>15</sup> Given the range of diverse, even conflicting opinions in the rabbinic literature cited in the previous discussions, we may see the influence of historical and cultural variations on the Jewish commentators.<sup>16</sup>

Referring to early Christian exegesis, Christian faith understands itself to be based on the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s communication of the divine self in all its richness. Access to the Holy Spirit is possible because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, became human. The Incarnation is what provides the possibility of the divine Spirit’s becoming accessible to the human spirit.

Speaking from the perspective of Christian faith then, there is a single source of theology: the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son. Because God’s very nature is love itself, this procession is to all those who are created and blessed with the capacity to know the Spirit in this sense.<sup>17</sup> The Old

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Four of the section “Monotheism”

<sup>13</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

<sup>14</sup> m. Sanhedrin 10:1

<sup>15</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

<sup>16</sup> See chapter four

<sup>17</sup> Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 28

Testament is classic for Christians, because it represents the ways in which God's Spirit might be known. At the same time, the New Testament is normative: it sets out how we actually appropriate the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of Christ. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner again confirmed the importance of the Holy Spirit. They stated "that is why the Bible as a whole is accorded a place of absolute privilege in the Christian tradition: it is the literary source from which we know both how the Spirit of God has been known and how we can appropriate it."<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the patristic exegetes were to uphold their agreed principles. After the Roman Empire itself embraced Christianity in the fourth century CE, the church was in a position formally to articulate its understanding of the faith by means of common standards. Orthodoxy emerged. During this period correct norms of worship, baptism, creeds, biblical texts, and doctrines were established. From Augustine in the West to Gregory of Nyssa in the East, Christianity for the first time in its history approached true ecumenicity.

## **8.4 The Combined Results of the comparison between early Jewish and Christian interpretation**

The following issues were identified in the preceding investigation:

### **8.4.1 Torah and Gospel**

Referring to Judaism, the Torah was the foundation of Judaism that determined Israelite behavior and its standards.<sup>19</sup> Religious responsibilities lead to consequences. One who follows the rules of Torah will face punishment if violating them and will receive reward if he is obedient to the law. Therefore, Torah is determining Israel's behavior. According to Jewish interpretation Ruth's conversion was heavily based on the guidelines of the Torah.<sup>20</sup>

Torah's importance is closely related to the eschatological and messianic emphasis of the early Judaism. It provided the demand for heightened obedience to Torah and even to its perfection. Andrew Chester added that the continuity and intensification of Torah in relation to the final or messianic age is

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<sup>18</sup> Idem, 29

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion of "Torah" under chapter four.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter four



a theme that is evident in various strands of Judaism and Jewish tradition.<sup>21</sup>

As for early Christianity, the gospel is the main foundation of Christian doctrine. *Kerygma* is the preaching of the Christian gospel.<sup>22</sup> Since Christianity has been a new religion, it faced many challenges and influences from its surrounding religious thoughts and philosophical trends. Therefore, it was the main task of exegetes to defend Christianity against the challenge of heretics.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, this background of theological challenge imposed much influence on the patristic exegesis of Ruth in the early Christian Church.

The relationship of Torah to the gospel is the meeting of the old with the new. The debate between these two was visible already in the origins of Christianity, being a form of Judaism, when those who would come to call themselves Christians redefined their relationship with Jewish law and the traditions of ancient Israel, and advocated new truths based on Jesus' teachings.<sup>24</sup> Mark Humphries reminded that just as Christianity splintered away from other forms of Judaism, there was a risk that Christianity itself might fragment into various forms, as different groups or individuals came to regard different versions or aspects of Jesus' message as more significant.<sup>25</sup>

With the Christian interpretation of the book of Ruth, we may witness how the gospel was influenced by the traditional view of the Torah. It can be seen in the motif of "gospel included gentiles."<sup>26</sup> This motif was of tremendous importance for patristic exegesis. Those who were rejected before were now accepted. Those who were formerly under divine punishment now received grace. In patristic exegesis, the Christian gospel "fulfilled" the Torah. It can be seen in Jesus' quotation in the book of Gospel that refers to the fulfillment of the Torah in Jesus' teachings.<sup>27</sup> Jesus came not to reject the Torah but make it complete. Traditionally, the exegetical relationship between Torah and gospel was close. This directness was due to the different perspectives of the exegetes' historical and cultural background. In some extreme cases the early Christian church represented a deliberate rejection of the Torah, totally replaced by Jesus'

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Chester, *Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition*, 335-6

<sup>22</sup> See chapter seven.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Five under the section of "the influence of Gnosticism".

<sup>24</sup> See chapter seven

<sup>25</sup> Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 159

<sup>26</sup> See chapter seven.

<sup>27</sup> Mt. 5:17-18

gospel. Moreover, the main controversy between early Christians and Jewish sages was on the topic of Christ Jesus as savior. The latter rejected Jesus so that the position of the gospel did not play any significant role in their exegesis and they remained committed to the Torah only.

#### 8.4.2 The coming of the “Messiah” in a chaotic social environment

Both Jewish and Christian exegetical schools advocated the coming of the “Messiah” as savior or king to give eternal hope to Israel<sup>28</sup> and to Christians.<sup>29</sup> Surely, the concept of the Messiah was differently interpreted among different commentators. However, all interpretations were deeply rooted in a specific historical and social background. The early Jewish interpretation of the Messiah was based on the tradition of Hebrew cultures. “There is no king” in the book of Judges caused some social chaotic problems such as famine interpreted as divine punishment.<sup>30</sup> The unlawfulness indicated the urge for kingship according to the Davidic line of Dynasty. Andrew Chester believed that Jewish evidence as a whole and the rabbinic in particular, points to the expectation of the abrogation of the Mosaic Torah and the bringing in of the messianic Torah in the messianic or final age.<sup>31</sup>

Let us look at the issue of the “messianic Torah”, which provided the background for the use and developments of this theme in the New Testament during the first century CE. Davies is suitably modest about the results of his work, and admits that the evidence is sparse and scanty, even though he still wants to hold on to it to produce some form of this “doctrine” of a messianic Torah.<sup>32</sup>

The most famous passage for the discussion of the Messiah is Jeremiah 31:31-4. It is important here that the Torah be internalized and perfectly obeyed within the context of the new covenant God will make. However, Andrew Chester pointed out that this text offers considerable scope for a developed understanding and interpretation concerning the covenant, the law and the final

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<sup>28</sup> See chapter four

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter seven

<sup>30</sup> See chapter four.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Chester, “Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition” in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 319

<sup>32</sup> W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (Philadelphia, 1952), 85-94

age.<sup>33</sup> The new covenant will contain the law and knowledge of God along with God's forgiveness of their sin. The same basic theme, the contrast between sin and keeping the law or covenant, is found in Isaiah 55:3-8 and 56:1-8. There a strong eschatological emphasis is found in connection with the Torah. The fulfillment of the law of the kingdom guaranteed the right to belong to the messianic kingdom, while failure to fulfill it brings eschatological judgment on the offender. Andrew Chester mentioned that the idea is clearly that of a Torah of the messianic age or kingdom that has eschatological effect.<sup>34</sup>

The patristic exegesis of the famine referred to in Ruth, resembles early Jewish interpretation. Human sinfulness urges for the coming of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Christianity in origin is a Jewish messianic movement.<sup>36</sup> Jewish messianic expectations and movements provide one particular context within which the early Christian movement can be understood.<sup>37</sup> Andrew Chester pointed out that one issue of potential significance for early Christianity as a messianic movement is that of a concern with and traditions about Torah and related issues.<sup>38</sup> An obvious point of view was the idea that Torah has its true fulfillment in Christ. The fulfillment theme represents one main line of interpretation. Christ is specifically identified in the exegesis of the book of Ruth with the law using typology to link Boaz to Christ.<sup>39</sup> Christ brings a new law. Christ represented the continuity and fulfillment of Torah since it was he who brought the true, perfect and final Torah.

This shows the commonality of early Jewish interpretation and patristic exegesis on the matter of the coming of the "Messiah". The political and cultural backgrounds induced by two exegetical trends overlap here and run parallel as they were both in a chaotic situation, which urged the exegetes to interpret the text for an enduring kingship that was expected to restore order and law. On the

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew Chester, *Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition*, 319

<sup>34</sup> Idem, 323

<sup>35</sup> See chapter seven

<sup>36</sup> It is important to note the concept of "messiah" in Second Temple Judaism. See chapter two. Cf. J. Neusner, W. S. Green and E. S. Frerichs, *Judaism and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, 1987), 1-13; Andrew Chester, "Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures and Pauline Christology", in *Paulus und das antile Judentum* Martin Hengel and U. Heckel eds. (Tubingen, 1991), 17-89.

<sup>37</sup> For discussion of various importance themes in Jewish and Christian messianism, such as temple, land, kingdom, new heaven and new earth, cf. R. L. Wilcken, "Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism, and the Idea of the Holy Land" *HTR* 1986, 79:98-107; W. Horbury, "Messianism among Jews and Christians in the Second Century" *Augustinianum* 1988, 28:71-88

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Chester, "Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 318

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter seven

other hand these two exegetical trends acted differently in their identification of the Messiah. Jewish sages pointed out that the Torah was the manifestation of the Messiah through the upholding of the Davidic kingship. This showed some kind of continuity and even reinforcement of the traditional value system. In turn, Christian interpreters replaced the Torah by Christ. This was a new innovation and even broke the continuity of tradition. This accounted for the new-born religion, Christianity. This contrasting difference was again due to different pre-set value of the exegetes' background.

#### **8.4.3 Ruth's and Boaz's virtue and morality in the pagan world**

Both early Jewish and Christian exegetes put much emphasis on the morality of the characters they interpreted for different purposes in their different cultural and theological contexts. Referring to early Jewish interpretation, Ruth's position in the royal dynasty was upheld by her *hesed* to Naomi. Ruth's virtue was again important in the continuation of the Davidic Dynasty despite her foreign nationality.<sup>40</sup> Early Christian exegetes also placed the emphasis on the characters' morality. Ruth's and Boaz's virtue were strongly protected and maintained. As a newly-formed religion, the Christian exegetes were inclined to do so, as Christianity was to build up its own morality in the challenge presented by some pagan cults and philosophy. Morality is the answer to the setting up of orthodoxy and legitimacy.

Morality is the most important constituent of religion. Theology is defined narrowly as the systematization of doctrines or the systematization of communal beliefs about the nature of God. Christianity rests on faith that makes one a Christian, a faith that theology appropriately defines and refines. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum pointed out the appropriate criteria for this phenomenon. What most centrally define Judaism are not beliefs but actually behavior. This is elaborated through *halakhah*, Jewish law. The energy that Christianity has poured into theology, Judaism has poured into elaborating a legal system that encompasses every aspect of life.<sup>41</sup> Ancient Jewish ethics in the broadest sense cannot properly be understood without reference to its concept of *halakah*. There are significant Graeco-Roman philosophical influences on the form and presentation especially of Diaspora ethical texts. L. H. Feldman commented that Jewish Hellenistic virtue and vice lists do owe a

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter four

<sup>41</sup> Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum, "Introduction" In *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (Michigan: Yale University, 1994), 63

great deal to Stoicism and to the shape of popular Graeco-Roman philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

The New Testament, coming from the period of Christianity's first beginnings, is concerned with the way converts to the movement of Christianity ought to behave. These documents are addressed not to individuals, but to communities. They have among their primary aims the maintenance and growth of those communities. The documents also reflected the very formation of a Christian moral order and a set of Christian moral practices. As a result, a distinctive community was taking shape. Wayne Meeks commented that defining morals means making a community.<sup>43</sup> It is an appropriate strategy to strength morality to unite all believers in a communal setting.

The enhancement of Christian morality was based on a counter challenge from surrounding cultures and philosophies. Ethnography<sup>44</sup> stated that Christians are obviously not a natural ethnos like Babylonians, Egyptians or Jews. As a matter of fact, opponents of the new movement early on began to ridicule it as a "third race", that is neither Greek nor barbarian but something outside the usual categories. Adolf Von Harnack commented that Christian apologists took up the taunt and gave it a positive sense: outside the usual division and therefore something special.<sup>45</sup> There is something about the way early Christians understood themselves that can be expressed, at least sometimes in defensive situations, in terms of their being a distinctive community, separate from all others. The apologists stated that "Christians are distinguished from other people in neither land nor speech nor customs."<sup>46</sup> Wayne Meeks concluded that tension between the sense of sharing the culture around them and the sense of standing opposed to it runs strongly through the history of early Christianity.<sup>47</sup>

The basic rationale of Christian ethics is generally assumed to be both

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<sup>42</sup> L. H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, 1993), 201-31

<sup>43</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 5

<sup>44</sup> Ethnography is the description and study of a particular society or culture, produced by someone who has spent some time living in the society, or a book containing this description.

<sup>45</sup> The earliest Christian writing to use the motif is the "Preaching of Peter" quoted by Clement of Alexandria: *Jews, Greeks and Christians* (*Strom.* 6.5.41) See Abraham Malherbe, "The Apologetic Theology of the Preaching of Peter" *Restoration Quarterly* 1970, 13:220-21. For the broader developments, see Adolf Von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1972), 240-78.

<sup>46</sup> *Letter to Diognetus* 5:1

<sup>47</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 9-10

straightforward and manifestly distinctive. In particular, the New Testament authors share a highly theological approach to ethics and often explicitly ground their appeals on Christology, pneumatology and eschatology. Markus Bockmuehl pointed out that their view of Jewish law as a source of moral authority comes across as highly ambivalent. Paul and the Gospels frequently appear to criticize aspects either of the Torah itself or of Torah observance.<sup>48</sup>

The patristic exegesis focuses on Christ by using typology for the characters in the book of Ruth<sup>49</sup>, assuming a straightforward shift from Torah to Christ. Markus Bockmuehl commented that it is widely assumed that the Torah no longer has any normative place in the canonical writings of the New Testament.<sup>50</sup> However, the substantive peculiarity of the New Testament approach to law and morality must be accounted for. It is true that the teaching and example of Christ serve as a significant ethical motif.<sup>51</sup>

Early Jewish and patristic exegetes shared the same emphasis on the interpretation of biblical figures in moral terms. The political, social and cultural environments led to this result. Early Jewish interpreters faced an unstable and even chaotic social environment. As holder of Torah, morality should be maintained in Jewish exegesis. On the other hand, patristic interpreters were under the threat of hostile cultural heresies and philosophies. Morality could safeguard a newly-born religion, like Christianity, to be appropriate, standing in dialogue with them and having a place in the traditional value system of human kind. Moreover, both exegetical trends paid much importance to morality. It was undeniable that Judaism and Christianity could exert great influence during this stage of world history. They might be moral so as to provide a standard and criteria for human beings. Moreover, to be moral, means to be logical. Judaism and Christianity were two important religions in the world. They were not secret cults. They should be logical in their applying of the principle of faith so as to have any impact whatsoever on the world's affairs.

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<sup>48</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, "Jewish and Christian public ethics in the early Roman Empire" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 344

<sup>49</sup> See chapter seven

<sup>50</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, "Jewish and Christian public ethics in the early Roman Empire" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 344

<sup>51</sup> Messianism itself can arguably function as a catalyst in the development of a sectarian outlook. See Albert Baumgarten, "The pursuit of the millennium in early Judaism" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); See also chapter seven.

#### 8.4.4 Morality as the cause of divine reward and punishment

Morality was commanded by God's will through the application of the Torah by early Jewish commentators. Those who practiced righteousness received rewards, but also punishment when rejecting the commands of God. In early Jewish exegesis, morality is the way to divine reward. The importance of morality was illustrated by Ruth's virtue, her *hesed*.<sup>52</sup> Despite the fact that she was a foreigner she was also accepted. However, in the Christian point of view, we can not be made righteous unless we believe in Christ. In this way, patristic exegesis reduced the role of human morality in the salvation. In turn, the acceptance of Christ, not human morality, is the only way to achieve the standards of God.

The controversial debate between early Jewish and Christian interpretation was found in the issue of work and faith. The former emphasized morality (work) while the latter mentioned the urgency of faith. This is also the reflection of the differences of doctrine between Judaism and Christianity. The former advocates the righteousness by work (morality). As said before, Judaism was a religion of morality. Torah, the standard of behavior, governed the core belief of Judaism. On the other hand, Christianity advocated righteousness by faith and grace.<sup>53</sup> Human morality has no place in salvation in the Christian point of view. The declined importance of morality in the role of salvation gradually increased as early Christian exegetes paid much emphasis on human sinfulness. In Christian doctrine, all human being were in a sinful state. They could not save themselves, but only through the salvation of Jesus Christ.<sup>54</sup> The patristic fathers advocated the grace of God and human faith as the way to the restoration of the human-God relationship.

#### 8.4.5 Monotheism as an uncompromised doctrine

Both early Jewish and Christian interpreters advocated the doctrine of Monotheism being the central doctrine of both Israelite and Christian theology.<sup>55</sup> They were relatively consistent in the use of monotheism, reflecting a religion that believes in the existence of only one god, when they interpreted

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<sup>52</sup> See Chapter Four on the section of "Theme of *hesed* as indication of the morality of Ruth" at page 51.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter seven on the section of "*The Gospels include gentiles*" at page 13.

<sup>54</sup> See chapter seven on the section of "*Human sinfulness urges for the coming of a saving king*"

<sup>55</sup> See chapter four on the section of *monotheism* at page 16 and chapter seven at page 6

the book of Ruth.

Referring to early Jewish interpretation, Morton Smith portrayed an essentially polytheistic Israel until the emergence of a “Yahweh-alone” movement in the ninth century BCE and afterward, which eventually gave rise to an expression of Yahweh as the only God during the postexilic period. Jewish exegesis bore this trend of theology.<sup>56</sup> In early Christian exegesis, the gospel was the main foundation of Christian doctrine. *Kerygma* was the preaching of the Christian gospel, in which the principle of monotheism was upheld.<sup>57</sup>

Beside the existence of only one god, monotheism indicated his sovereignty. In Judaism, God is God of all the nations and has sovereignty over all nations. The concept of Monotheism was demonstrated through God’s connection to other nations and Israel. God can punish when the nations sin against Him and give rewards when they act according to His will. As a whole, the principle of monotheism was the core belief of Jewish exegetes. The Israelite has no other gods but God. This idea agreed with the traditional view found in the Bible.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, since Christianity had been a new born religion, it faced many challenges and influences from surrounding religious thoughts and philosophical trends. Therefore, it was the main task of exegetes to defend Christianity as orthodox against the challenge of heretics.<sup>59</sup>

Most important of all, early Jewish interpreters commented that this core belief of monotheism is uncompromised. They pointed out that Israel should uphold this doctrine through the rejection of other gods. When interpreting Ruth’s conversion on the book of Ruth, rejection of idolatry could itself be regarded as conversion to Judaism. In other words, the sage pointed out that “The rejection of idolatry is the acknowledgment of the entire Torah.”<sup>60</sup> In turn, Christianity faced the challenge of heresies. Karl Rahner stated that:

*The history of Christianity is also a history of heresies and consequently of the attitudes adopted by Christianity and the Church towards heresy, and so involves a history of the concept of heresy itself. In all religions that possess any kind of definite doctrine...there are differences of opinion about that doctrine and as a consequence quarrels and conflict about it and about the*

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<sup>56</sup> See chapter four

<sup>57</sup> See chapter seven

<sup>58</sup> Idem

<sup>59</sup> Idem

<sup>60</sup> See chapter four



*socially organized forms in which the different religious views find expression.*<sup>61</sup>

It again showed that early Christian exegetes upheld the principle of monotheism, which was not given up despite the challenge and attack of surrounding philosophies and academic thoughts. However, Christian exegetes differed with Jewish sages in the form of monotheism. The former modified the doctrine in a way of trinity. God is one in essence but also three in form. This controversial debate was rooted in the inquiry of Jesus as a saving Messiah.<sup>62</sup> Again, the identity and position of Jesus mainly lies on the main discrepancy between Judaism and Christianity.

#### **8.4.6 Interpretative method as a cultural product**

The above patterns and principles were derived from the application of two interpretative methods: midrash<sup>63</sup> from early Jewish interpretation and typology<sup>64</sup> from early Christianity. We can notice a pattern in interpretative approach and trend. Both early Jewish and Christian interpretations are viewed as a product of cultural and social background. All interpretation methods and trends are continuous and do not stand alone. Therefore, the diversified backgrounds led to the formation of a specific exegetical approach. We can witness the historical-social influence on the formation of these two interpretative method and trends.

Both methodologies were applicable and social relevant. They maintained the interest of community and fulfilled the need of their generation. Referring to early Jewish exegesis, the interpretations upheld the position of Ruth<sup>65</sup> as a heir of the Davidic dynasty. They advocated the importance of Boaz's and Ruth's virtue as a good illustration of morality in Judaism.<sup>66</sup> Early Christian exegetes were also interested in the basic values of the social community. They maintained the important social value of marriage as an example of the emphasis on virtue.<sup>67</sup> They also paid much emphasis on teaching morality.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See chapter seven

<sup>62</sup> See the previous discussion of "The coming of the Messiah in a chaotic social environment" this chapter.

<sup>63</sup> See chapter three

<sup>64</sup> See chapter six.

<sup>65</sup> See page chapter four on the discussion of "Upholding of the position of Ruth".

<sup>66</sup> See page chapter four on the section of "Ruth's *hesed* and modesty as fitting an ancestress of David and also as an ideal of feminine behavior".

<sup>67</sup> See chapter seven.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter seven on the section "*Teaching Morality and Modeling as the task of patristic*

Concerning the doctrine and value of Judaism, the sage upheld the principle of monotheism<sup>69</sup> and the legitimacy of Davidic dynasty.<sup>70</sup> In turn, patristic fathers urged for the introduction of the gospel through the salvation of Jesus Christ in the process of interpretation.<sup>71</sup>

## 8.5 Conclusion

What does an exegete do? From our investigation, we can formulate the thesis that both early Jewish and Christian exegetes did not explain the text for its inherent meaning, but rather used the text for their own purposes. Normally, the main task and mission of an exegete should be to find the meaning inherent in the text. We clearly indicated that both exegetical schools of interpreters did not find meaning in the text of the book of Ruth, but rather read in some agendas and issues into the text from outside, from the exegetes themselves and their surrounding backgrounds. They tend to meet the requirement of the social and political expectations of their reader community. Interpretation was used as a tool for this purpose. They conducted an application rather than explanation. This thesis can be explained by the fact that the meaning of a text depends on the value and pre-set agenda of the exegete who interprets it. Both the text and its interpreters are part of a specific historical, political, social and cultural environment, which imposed influence on them.

This descriptive observation for the two exegetical trends does not implicate severe criticism. Undeniably, the exegetical process indeed included both explanation and application. Both early Jewish and patristic commentators act correct by applying the text to their contemporary generation and community. The text should be socially relevant and applicable, since it is not a secret code given on another planet. However, the thesis does not pinpoint the inadequacy of the explanation of the text. It rather points out the order of the interpretation and the consciousness of the Jewish and patristic interpreters.

The problem, however, is that exegetes from both trends paid attention to the application of the text first. It is easy to read the thought, value system and pre-set ideas of the reader into the text. In this process the order of

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*commentators*"

<sup>69</sup> See the section of monotheism on chapter four

<sup>70</sup> See the section "*Ruth's righteous proselyte (conversion) relates to the Davidic line of dynasty*" on chapter four

<sup>71</sup> See chapter seven

interpretation is severely reversed so that a rational and more objective way of finding any inherent meaning becomes a far off goal. Moreover, the thesis shows the lack of control of the interpreters' consciousness. They are tempted to use the text and put some social issues of their age into it.

Although these trends indicated and analyzed in the thesis reflect the methods and views of their time, it can be expected that a responsible exegete, having knowledge of self-awareness and the influence of his existing background, should be aware of the possibility that this approach may become a determinant issue when evaluating the inherent meaning of a text during the process of interpretation. What an exegete should do is to try hard to merge the horizon of the text with the horizon of the exegete in a self-disciplined manner and control of self-thought. It is very important, especially for the absence of the "original authors" that exegetes act as a medium between the text and the reader. The lack of this kind of knowledge and consciousness do alarm us to provoke a more disciplined and conscious work of the interpretation nowadays.

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