# 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.[1] 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.

[1] Steven D. Fraade, *Rabbinic Midrash and Ancient Jewish Biblical Interpretation*, 102

## 3.2 The meaning and definition of Midrash

### 3.2.1Meaning

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,[2] 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.[3] It should be noted, however that even the narrative expansions in the midrash always contain some interpretation of the biblical text at hand.[4]

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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[2] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of "The Wooing of Rebekah (Gen. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004)

[3] 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*)

[4] 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."*[5]

Renee Bloch defines midrash as literary genre that began and was first developed in the Hebrew Bible.[6] 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.[7] 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.[8] In Jewish Studies, the term "rabbinic literature" refers to those works that were produced by the rabbinic authorities, also called "Sages".[9] Rabbinic literature includes the Mishnah, the Tosephta, the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmudim, the Targumim and several Midrashim.[10] 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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[5] Robert Alter, *Guide to the Bible*, 505
[6] R. Bloch, "Midrash," in W. S Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism I*, 29-50
[7] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 143
[8] L. Teugels, *Midrash in the Bible or Midrash on the Bible?*, 43-63
[9] 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.
[10] See Stemberger, *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 Gnere" 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.[11] 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.[12] He states that "first is the sense of Midrash as the explanation, by Judaic interpreters, of the meaning of individual verses of Scripture."[13] 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.[14] 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.[15]

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[11] Gary G. Porton, "Rabbinic Midrash" in *Judaism in Late Antiquity* Vol. 1 Edited by Jacob Neusner, 217

[12] Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 41

[13] Idem.

[14] 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

[15] 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.[16] 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.[17] 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[18]:

(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.

[16] 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

[17] 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.

[18] 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.[19]

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[20] 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.[21] 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."[22] He uses "midrash" and "exegesis" synonymously.

He also pointed out that the public recitation of Scripture, which was part of the

[19] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 141
[20] 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
[21] The earliest relevant material appears in the Deuteronomic 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)
[22] 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.[23]

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."[24] 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 entirely were important for subsequent scholars of midrash.[25]

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.[26] 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."[27] 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.[28]

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.[29]

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[23] Idem, 201
[24] Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 28
[25] 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
[26] 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*.
[27] Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 104
[28] Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 30.
[29] Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 105

In the Hebrew Bible, the noun "midrash" occurs twice only in the book of Chronicles.[30] However, Lieve M. Teugels pointed out that, the meaning in Chronicles is unclear and disputed among scholars.[31] 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.[32]

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.[33]

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.[34] 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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30 2 Chr 13:22 and 24:27
31 Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 153
32 Idem, 162
33 Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 31
34 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.[35]

**(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."[36] 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).[37]

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.[38]

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.[39]

**(d) Other literature**

Craig Evans found that the word *midrash*, as well as its Greek equivalent *ereunan*[40], was associated with biblical interpretation in the first century BCE. Philo, the Greek-speaking Jew of Alexandria, urges his readers to join him in

[35] Idem, 31
[36] Idem, 153
[37] Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992) 116
[38] 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."
[39] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 162
[40] It means "to search"

searching (*ereunan*) Scripture.[41] In the New Testament, John 5:39 reads: "You search the scriptures". Moreover, John 7:52 also uses the Greek equivalent *ereunan*.[42]

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.[43] 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

[41] 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

[42] Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 116

[43] 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 middoth 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 eisigesis 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.[44] 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.[45] 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.[46]

Geza Vermes elaborated these two exegetical trends in different terms.[47] 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.[48] "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.[49] 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.[50]

Exegesis was required to adapt and complete scripture so that it might on the

[44] 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.
[45] 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
[46] Idem, 7-8
[47] Geza Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* edi. P.R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 203-31
[48] Alternatively, one may want to call these two aspects of midrash "exegetical" and "eisegetical."
[49] Geza Vermes, *Bible and Midrash*, 220
[50] 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.[51] 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[52] 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").[53] 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.[54] Julio Trebolle Barrera introduced and

[51] Idem, 221
[52] Idem
[53] Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Vasity Press, 1996), 58
[54] See Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: Inter Vasity 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* edi. 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.[55]

(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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*Wooing of Rebekah (Gen. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 165

[55] 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. Ishmal and R. Aqiba

In the 2nd century CE, Jewish hermeneutics flourished greatly. The schools of R. Ishmael and R. Aqiba represent two opposed movement.

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 Macaebean 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.[56] The *middot* of Hillel and Ishmael are rules of logic and literary criticism demanding an analogical inference, confrontation of the general statue 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.[57] Most medieval Jewish scholars such as Nachmanides (Ramban) used “midrash” and “aggadah” interchangeably.[58]

However, Teugels admitted that, rabbinic scholars usually distinguish between “aggadah” and “midrash”.[59] Aggadah is defined as those parts of rabbinic literature that are not “halakah” and denotes the narratives 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.[60] 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

[56] Cf. H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud ad Midrash* (Philadelphia, 1945), 93-8
[57] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 151
[58] 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*.
[59] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 152
[60] See G. Stemberger, 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."[61] One part is the Written Torah, or "written law," (*Miqra*) more generally called simply *Torah*.[62] 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.[63] Rabbinic tradition holds that the Oral Torah contained a revelation of all possible interpretations of the written Torah to Moses.[64]

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[65]. 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.[66]

Howard Schwartz believed that the ancient rabbis drew on the oral tradition

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[61] 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

[62] Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

[63] Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism*, 6

[64] Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121

[65] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (Michigan: Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 497

[66] 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.[67]

God said to Moses: "Write these things, for it is by means of these things that I have made a covenant with Israel"[68]. 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)[69]

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.[70] 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[71]. 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.[72] 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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[67] Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xi
[68] Exod 34:27
[69] Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 121
[70] 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
[71] Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 49
[72] 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.[73] 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.[74]

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."[75] 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.[76]

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.[77] 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.[78]

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

[73] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 468
[74] Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 126
[75] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*, 1; Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33; Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41
[76] Howard Schwartz, Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis, xi
[77] Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers*, 41
[78] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 468

unanswered questions. Legal rulings were not to be derived from aggadic interpretation.[79]

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.[80]

### 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.[81] 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.[82] 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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[79] Craig A Evans, *Non-canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, 118
[80] Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 33
[81] 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
[82] 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.[83]

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.[84] 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.[85]

## 3.5 Assumptions behind the method

Philip Alexander introduced some guidelines of Jewish thinking.[86] 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

[83] Idem, 11
[84] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 496
[85] Idem
[86] 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.[87] 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.[88]

## 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.[89] 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.[90] 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

[87] Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 109
[88] Idem,110
[89] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 42
[90] Idem, 184

in the details or the gaps. Midrash actually served, and serves, as the intermediary between the biblical text and the reader.[91]

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.[92] 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."[93]

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."* [94]

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[91] 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)

[92] M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186-229.

[93] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, 41. Henceforth, the word "gap" refers to all these kinds of textual inequalities.

[94] 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.[95]

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 Scherma 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.[96]

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 dead of Joshua and extended until King Saul who introduced monarchy to Eretz Yisrael ---- a period of roughly 350 years.[97] The time gap is very wide and obvious. No sage is telling us when the story of Ruth took place.[98] 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

[95] Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23
[96] Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxi
[97] 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
[98] 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.[99] 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.[100]

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[101] 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.[102] "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.[103] 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.[104] 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*

[99] Idem
[100] Idem, xxi
[101] The edition of Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*
[102] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 114
[103] Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 296
[104] 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."*[105]

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,[106] 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.[107]

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[108] --- 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.[109] 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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[105] 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
[106] Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 114
[107] Idem, 115
[108] Idem, 116
[109] Leila Leah Bronner, 63

her to Judah.[110] 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.[111] 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).[112] "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.[113] 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.[114]

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.[115] 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.[116] As a whole, Ruth's conversion is applied for the interpretation in Jewish interest of the community.

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[110] Andre LaCocque, *"Ruth: A Continental Commentary"* K. C. Hanson trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3
[111] Idem
[112] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to* twr *The Book of Ruth*, 119
[113] Leila Leah Bronner, 65
[114] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to* twr *The Book of Ruth*, 119
[115] Leila Leah Bronner, 64
[116] 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.[117] 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.[118]

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.[119] 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.[120] 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

[117] Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 31
[118] Idem, 31
[119] Philip R. Davies, *Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 157
[120] Idem

religious way of life contained in the biblical text.[121] 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.[122]

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.[123] 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, departation, 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.[124] 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.[125] 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).[126] 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.[127]

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.[128] His two sons also sinned still more grievously in that they took Moabite wives in 1:4. Only after

[121] Renee Bloch, *Midrash*, 32
[122] Idem
[123] Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18
[124] Idem
[125] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* translated by Jacob Neusner, (Atlanta, 1989), 197
[126] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), preface
[127] Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 18
[128] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr 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*).[129] 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[130] they were given these names, "Mahlon, in that they were blotted out from the world, and Chilion, in that they perished from the world."[131] 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).[132]

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".[133]

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.[134] 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."[135] 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.[136] This

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129 Idem
130 The edition of Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*
131 Idem
132 Idem, 116
133 Idem, 115
134 Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth,* 18
135 Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 116
136 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.[137]

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.[138] 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,[139] 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

[137] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 497
[138] Howard Schwartz, *Re-imagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis*, 5
[139] 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 16th 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[140] 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:[141]

*"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."*[142]

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.[143] We may conclude that the adaptation to the present situation is one of midrashic purposes.

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[140] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 167
[141] So also Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 126-127 about the ideology and even the experiences, of martyrdom as formed by reading of the Song of Songs.
[142] Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination on Jewish Thought and Theology* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4
[143] 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 lead 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.[144] 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.[145]

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.[146]

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

[144] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 57
[145] 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
[146] 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.[147] 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.[148] So, Jewish theology is never crystallized into dogmas.[149] 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.[150] 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.[151] 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.[152]

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[147] Leila Leah Bronner, *The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal*, 80

[148] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 496

[149] 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.

[150] 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 begin anew (111). See Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 110-111

[151] Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 111

[152] 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.[153] 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.[154]

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.[155] 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.[156] 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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153 Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 114
154 Idem, 114-5
155 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
156 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."[157] 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 covert to Judaism as she concluded.[158] 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.[159]

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 levirately married to kinsman in Judah. Etan Levine concluded that the targum's understanding of *hesed* reflected the biblical, rather than the

[157] 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.
[158] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth,* 52
[159] Idem, 53

rabbinic understanding of the term.[160]

### 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.

[160] 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."[1] 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."[2] 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."[3] The

[1] *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

[2] 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

[3] 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.[4] 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.[5] They were produced for an internal audience. His concluding remark is that "they are of rabbis, by rabbis, and for rabbis."[6] 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.[7]

### 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.[8] 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

[4] William Scott Green, *History Fabricated: The Social Uses of Narratives in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 145

[5] Idem

[6] Idem, 153

[7] Idem

[8] 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.[9] 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.[10] 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$^{th}$ 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.[11] 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

[9] *Pss. Sol*. 17
[10] Kenneth Pomykaka, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 268
[11] Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, preface

commentary hoped that it would have a life extending well beyond its own time and space.[12]

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.[13] 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."[14] 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.[15] 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*[16], which paraphrases the biblical text, whether as story or as law. James

[12] Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 18
[13] Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 18
[14] James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 15
[15] Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 1-2
[16] 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.[17] 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.[18]

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.[19] 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.[20] 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.[21]

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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[17] 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*.
[18] See note 124 and 125 at Chapter Two
[19] Geza Vermes, *Scripture and the Tradition in Judaism*, 99
[20] Idem, 117
[21] 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.[22]

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.[23]

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.[24] 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[25]

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

[22] Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 2
[23] Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 9
[24] See Steven D. Fraade's notes on p. 172-3
[25] 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.[26] 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.[27] 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.[28] 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.”[29] 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[30] 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.[31] 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

[26] Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 16
[27] See note 213 and 214 in Chapter Two.
[28] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), Xi
[29] Idem
[30] 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)
[31] 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.[32] Tryggve Kronholm rightly concluded that Ruth Rabbah is "therefore not a fabrication of fantasizing scribes but the result of learned rabbinical exegesis."[33]

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."[34] 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".[35]

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.[36]

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).[37]

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[32] Idem, 19
[33] Tryggve 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.
[34] 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
[35] Idem
[36] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 1
[37] 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.[38] 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.[39]

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.[40] 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"[41] 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

[38] John H. Hayes, ed., *Hebrew Bible: History of Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) The Former Prophets: Ruth by D.R.G. Beattie, 427
[39] Idem
[40] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), preface.
[41] Refer to Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:8. See Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 68

Johnathan.[42] 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.” [43] 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.[44]

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.”[45]

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.[46] 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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[42] Mishael Maswari Caspi & Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road*, 79
[43] Neh. 8:8
[44] Mishael Maswari Caspi & Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road*, 79
[45] Etan Levine, “The Aramaic Version of Ruth” (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) 2
[46] 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.[47]

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.[48]

## 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*.[49] 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.[50] Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck made the major application of midrashic hermeneutic rules,

[47] 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.

[48] Etan Levine, "The Aramaic Version of Ruth" (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973)

[49] 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 Vasity Press, 1996) 58 and see also the Seven Rules of Hillel.

[50] 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.[51]

The so-called Seven Rules of Hillel are based upon Hellenistic models. The Seven Rules of Hillel certainly existed before Hillel the Elder (2nd 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.[52]

(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.

[51] Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 268
[52] 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, T*he 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.[53]

### 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.[54]

## 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

[53] Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 497
[54] 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[55], where the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widow are allowed such a right.[56] 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."[57] 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.[58] 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.*[59]

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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[55] See Deut. 24:19
[56] Also see Lev. 19:9; 23:22
[57] Cf. ANET, 164 and see also Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth*, 54
[58] 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
[59] 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.*[60]

Religious responsibilities lead to consequences. One who follows the rules of Torah will faces 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.[61]

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.*[62]

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."[63] 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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[60] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 80
[61] See chapter two for the discussion of that "the rabbis make him (Ezra) a restorer of the Torah".
[62] A doorpost marker contains verses of Scripture. Cf. Deut. 6:6-9
[63] 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), 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.*[64]

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.[65] 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 it itself. Moreover, R. Aqiba held that study was most important, since it produced action.[66] 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 absentee of political centripetal focus. The loss of political independence and of the Temple since 70 CE[67], 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.[68] This situation urged a certain degree of uniformity from the diversity of pre-70 Judaism.[69] 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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[64] 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

[65] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 66-7

[66] Idem, 67

[67] 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

[68] 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

[69] 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.[70] 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.[71] 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[72] are relatively consistent in the use of “monotheism” for a religion that believes in the existence of only one god.[73] 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.[74] Jewish exegesis bore this trend of theology. Ruth Rabbah underlined this monothestic principle. Ruth Rabbah: Petihta One declared that:

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[70] 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.
[71] 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
[72] 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
[73] An opposite terminology, “polytheism” is for one that believes in and worships a variety of deities.
[74] 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."*[75]

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.[76] 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 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].*[77]

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

[75] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 24
[76] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 3
[77] 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.[78]

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).*[79]

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.[80] He further adds that Israel is commanded not only to be ruled but also to glorify God.[81]

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."*[82]

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

[78] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 46
[79] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 112
[80] Refer to the introduction of this section.
[81] 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
[82] 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."[83]

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."*[84]

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.[85]

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.[86] 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."[87]

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."*[88]

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[83] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) , 52
[84] 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
[85] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 71-2
[86] 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
[87] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 69
[88] 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.[89]

### 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.[90] 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.[91] Rabbi Rosenberg believes that the word occurs twice in this verse, suggesting two misfortunes.[92] 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.[93] 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.[94]

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

[89] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 83

[90] See note 98 at chapter three.

[91] This discussion is also included at the footnote 100 of Chapter three to illustrate the concept of “filling gap”.

[92] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 114

[93] See also section (IV) “Assumptions behind the Method” at chapter three.

[94] Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 296

1:1.

*"…there was a*[95] *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).*[96]

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.*[97]

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,

[95] Targum to Ruth states that there is a severe famine.
[96] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 45-6
[97] 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.[98] 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."[99] 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".[100] Moreover, the Jewish sages also echoed the view that "God therefore starved them of the Holy Spirit"[101] 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*[102]

The Talmud also echoes the moral meaning of famine. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz advocated that as the Talmud interprets, it

[98] 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 page18.
[99] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 44
[100] I Sam.3:1
[101] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 27
[102] Idem, 28

indicates that the people judged, criticized, and flouted their judges. Under such conditions, authority breaks down.[103] 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.*[104]

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*

[103] Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxii
[104] 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."*[105]

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"[106] 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.[107] Moab was "the nearest place concerning which they had heard that there was no famine."[108] 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."*[109]

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.[110]

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.[111] Though it is not clear how

[105] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 33-4
[106] Jacob Neusner, T*he Mother of the Messiah in Judaism: The Book of Ruth* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1993),12
[107] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 45
[108] Idem, ad I,1.
[109] 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
[110] Commentary of Japhet Ben Eli ad Ruth 1,3
[111] 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.[112]

With the above description of social insecurity, Israel was a country without hope in a disastrous environment. The 6th 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.[113] In the 6th century there were three major waves of Black Plague in the Mediterranean basin in 542, 558 and 573.[114] 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.

[112] Geoffrey E. Wood, "Ruth, Lamentations" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 605

[113] 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

[114] 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."*[115]

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."*[116]

Ruth Rabbah emphasized God's mercy on Israel. Ruth Rabbah: Parashah Two used the case of Job[117] to illustrate God's aim for the sinner's repentance. The sequence of divine destruction is first the property and then lastly human beings.[118] 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.*[119]

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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[115] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 30
[116] Idem
[117] 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
[118] Refer to Job 1:14 and 19 and also see Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:5
[119] 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 affict 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 Almightly 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).*[120]

Once again God inflicts punishment in this world, but rewards the righteous in the world to come.[121] 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.[122] 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.[123] 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.[124] When Israel worships idols, God deprives them of the Holy Spirit. When they do not repent, they suffer the consequences.[125]

**(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.[126] 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.[127] 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

[120] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 95
[121] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 18
[122] Ruth Rabbah Parashah Two: Ps. 78:48; Ps. 105:33; Ps. 105:36
[123] 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
[124] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 14
[125] Idem,47
[126] See from note 95 to 98 at Chapter Three.
[127] 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"*[128] and included in it what was necessary for us to know".[129] 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.[130] 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.[131] 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."]*[132]

Moreover, Ruth Rabbahh 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,*

[128] See Gen. 5:1
[129] Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxi
[130] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 114
[131] See the section of famine in previous discussion at page 16-22
[132] 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).*[133]

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 (*OhrYohel*)."[134] 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."*[135]

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[133] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 43
[134] 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
[135] 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."*[136]

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.[137] 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.[138] 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*).[139] 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."[140] 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

[136] 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

[137] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 49

[138] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 115; See also Ruth Rabbah III: ii.1

[139] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 115

[140] 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*."[141] They described them as timeless and eternal truths.[142] Ruth is of a piece with those other illustrations of what can happen when there is no vested authority in Israel.[143] 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.[144] 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.[145] The judicial system known as the Sanhedrin had, been abolished around this time too.[146] 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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[141] At the end of the book of Judges 21:25
[142] Rabbis Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, *A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, xxi
[143] Idem, xxii
[144] Refer to the conclusion of messianic expectation during Second Temple Period at chapter two, especially Kenneth Pomykaka's dissertation.
[145] t. Sota 14:1
[146] E. E. Urbach, *Hahalakha: Its Sources and Development* (Givataim: Yad Latalmud, 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." [147] Strack and Gunter Stemberger concluded that Jews in Babylonia and in Palestine were thus without any strong leadership.[148] 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.[149] The foundation and legitimacy of the conversion of Ruth is still the implementation of Torah.[150] Torah again played a crucial role in the Jewish exegesis on the conversion of Ruth. Ruth as an outsider becomes the Messiah[151] 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.*[152]

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147 Refer to the historical and political section after second Jewish revolt at chapter two.
148 Idem
149 Leila Leah Bronner, 63
150 Torah is also the foundation of Jewish interpretation, discussed in the previous section.
151 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.
152 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."*[153]

Jacob Neusner commented that proselytes are precious to God. Once they decide to convert, they are equivalent to Israelites.[154] 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.[155]

The conversion of Ruth is confirmed by the interpretation of Ruth Rabbah to Ruth 1:16[156]with the addition of the following quotations.

*This refers to the penalties and admonitions against sinning.*

*"… and your God my God:"*[157]

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.[158]

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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[153] Idem, 91
[154] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 17
[155] Idem, xxxi
[156] This verse is also used for the interpretation of the Torah as the foundation of Jewish exegesis in the previous section.
[157] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 80
[158] 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[159] 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.[160] 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.[161] 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,*

[159] 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

[160] Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery Peck, *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 297

[161] 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."*[162]

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.[163]

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.[164]

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*

[162] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 82
[163] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 16
[164] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr 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]."*[165]

Jacob Neusner believed that the covert to Israel is washed of the filth of idolatry. The critieria of conversion also refers to the one who is anointed in the religious deeds and acts of righteousness, which are required of an Israelite.[166]

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.[167]

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.*[168]

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.[169] 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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[165] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), Jacob Neusner, "Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation" (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 141
[166] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 27
[167] 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
[168] Idem, 23
[169] 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*[170]*, 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.*[171]

Again, the conversion means the abolishment of idolatry and commitment to the Torah. Etan Levine believed that the added words: "water" and "perfume" all faminlar symbols in the midrash. Ruth's washing symbolizes the shedding of idolatry. "Perfume" alludes to good deeds and "garments" refers to Sabbath garments.[172]

**(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 Moabitess 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.*[173]

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

[170] In MT tradition of Hebrew bible, it is "your garment" (Kethibh) or "garments" (Qere).
[171] 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
[172] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 86
[173] 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 Moabitess" allowed Ruth to be accepted.[174] 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."[175] She is interpetaed 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":*

[174] Leila Leah Bronner, 64
[175] Andre LaCocque, *The Feminine unconventional: Four subversive figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneaopolis: 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.*[176]

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.[177] Ruth stands in the royal line of David, Solomon, and the Messiah.[178] Jacob Neusner summarized that Ruth married a great sage and through her descendants produced the Messiah-sage, David.[179]

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.[180] 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. [181] 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.[182] 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*

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[176] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An analytical translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 101

[177] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 20

[178] This concept of Messiah is not developed in Jewish thought, but rather expanded and consolidated in Christian exegesis.

[179] 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

[180] Andre LaCocque, *"Ruth: A Continental Commentary"* K. C. Hanson trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3

[181] 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

[182] 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."*[183]

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.[184] Sectarians 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

[183] 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

[184] 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.[185]

The targum to Ruth 1:22 also witnessed the controversial difference between Pharisee and Sadducces. 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.*[186]

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."[187]

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

[185] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 60-1
[186] 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
[187] 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.[188]

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[189] 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*

[188] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 57

[189] 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, 21st 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)."*[190]

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.[191] Jacob Neusner confirmed that converting to Judaism is to take shelter under the wings of God's presence.[192] 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*."[193] 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."[194]

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*

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[190] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 121
[191] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 24
[192] Idem
[193] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 57
[194] 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 anoited" (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…*[195]

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.[196]

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.[197]

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

[195] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 124-7
[196] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 26-7
[197] 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.[198]

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.[199] 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.[200] An example of this demeaning of status and importance can be seen in the sheer fact that some Rabbis in the 2nd century made general allegation against all Jewish women, blaming them of practicing witchcraft (b. Berakhot 53b).[201] 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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[198] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth,* 53
[199] See Deut. 29:10; 31:12; Ezra 10:1
[200] 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)
[201] 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*[202] 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.[203] 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.[204] 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."*[205]

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 portaitee figures, rather than of the narrator's solicitude from the*

[202] See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Bible and Women's Studies" In *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (Michigan: Yale University, 1994), 247-56
[203] Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of The Wooing of Rebekah (Gn. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004)
[204] Idem, 35
[205] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59

*outset.*"[206]

The rabbis when interpreting the characters also follow the same procedure.[207] 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.[208] Kirsten Nielsen indicates that the most interesting aspect of the Biblical book of Ruth for the *Midrash to Ruth* is its characterization.[209]

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.[210]

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."[211]

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.[212] Rashi also declared that, "he was a very wealthy man and the leader of the generation."[213]

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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[206] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of BiblicalNarratives: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading"* (Bloomington: Indiana university Press, 1987), 326
[207] See "Gap-fillling in Bible and Midrash" from page 20 at Chapter Three.
[208] 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* 2nd ed. (Tel. Aviv: Yavneh Publishing, 1963) 49-58〔in Hebrew〕
[209] Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth,* 18
[210] See the page 18 of this chapter.
[211] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 115
[212] Idem,114
[213] 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.[214] 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]*[215]

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." [216] 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.[217] 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)*[218]*. She gathers only from grain that has already been left behind."*

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[214] See the discussion of "Upholding of the position of Ruth" at page 31
[215] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 60
[216] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to* twr *The Book of Ruth*, 116
[217] Idem
[218] 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 shole. 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."*[219]

Jacob Neusner commented that the Moabite women who could be the ancestress of David, exhibited exceptional modesty and discretion.[220] Ruth is, however, beautifully drawn. She may not be free of unchaste thoughts but compared to the other gleaning women "she is a paragon."[221] 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.[222] The morality of Ruth is the main discussion of *hesed*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

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[219] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 108-9

[220] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 21

[221] Kirsten Nielsen, *The Old Testament Library: Ruth,* 18

[222] 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.*[223]

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.*[224]

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."[225] 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.'*[226]

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 declard that:

*Another explanation of the phrase, "And when Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was*

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[223] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 101
[224] 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
[225] Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Midrashic Approach to twr The Book of Ruth*, 131
[226] 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 ahd his heart was merry":*

*He was seeking a wife: "Who finds a wife finds a good thing" (Pro. 18:22).*[227]

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.*[228]

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.[229]

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."*[230]

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.[231] This meant that Boaz was really a moral man

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[227] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 147

[228] 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

[229] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth,* 88

[230] 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

[231] 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.[232] 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.[233] 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":*

[232] 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
[233] 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]."*[234]

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.[235]

Regarding Ruth, the second meaning is used. Ruth's narrative actually resembles the older narratives in language, content and style.[236] 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.[237] 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*.[238]

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

[234] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 68
[235] 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
[236] See Gen. 24:12-14; Ruth 3:3-9
[237] 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
[238] 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.[239] 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."*[240]

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.[241] 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 levirately married to kinsman in Judah.[242] 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.

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[239] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 92
[240] 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
[241] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 51
[242] 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.*[243]

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.[244]

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."*[245]

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[243] 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

[244] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 74-5

[245] 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.[246] 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.[247]

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."[248]

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.[249] 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

[246] 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

[247] Idem, 78

[248] Idem, 84

[249] 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.[250] 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)."*[251]

Jacob Neusner illustrated that the six messianic figures being given verses that endow each with six virtuous traits.[252]

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

[250] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 32
[251] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 168-9
[252] 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.[253] 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 5-4th 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.[254] 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.[255] 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[256]. The scribes began to gain importance in society.

Moreover the scribes had their own priorities in society, based not on ancestry

[253] Leila Leah Bronner, *The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal*, 80
[254] A thorough discussion is included in chapter two, especially referring to Martin Hengel's and Louis Ginzberg's point of view.
[255] 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
[256] m. Negaim 3:1

but rather on excellence in knowledge of the Torah.[257] During the time that the new stratification was built and sustained, a new phenomenon was also on the rise: sectarianism.[258] 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[259], enrich and uphold the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures.[260] Bruce Norman believed that Jewish commentary involved a never ending process[261] 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.[262]

Indeed, the role of scribes is mainly to teach. Bruce Norman[263] concluded the work of Fishbane[264]. 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.[265] Nationalization happens by means of synecdoche (for example, a single legal

[257] m. Horayot 3:8
[258] 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.
[259] 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.
[260] 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.
[261] 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
[262] Cf. the apt description offered by A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory* (Notre dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd eds, 1984), 112
[263] 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
[264] See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)
[265] Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 426

offense represents the nations' sins) and personification (for example, the entire people depicted as a single historical figure). The *traditio*[266] 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.[267]

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.*[268]

Lester L. Grabbe added one more point that those who were scribes by profession had special training in traditional laws as well.[269] 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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[266] 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

[267] Idem, 426

[268] 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).

[269] 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."*[270]

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.*[271]

The above passage using masculine forms underlined the point that there was

[270] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 163
[271] Idem, 168-9

no sexuality between the two.[272] 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.*[273] *Then Boaz went to the town.*[274]

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.[275]

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.[276] 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

[272] Idem, 169
[273] 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.
[274] 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
[275] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 96
[276] 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.[277] 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.[278]

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.[279]

### 4.4.6 Levirate marriage

The levirate laws of the Bible[280] specify that it is the brother(s) of the deceased who must levirately marry a childless widow "to perpetuate the name of the dead" In Ruth, a fixed sequence and legal procedure is involved[281], indicating that the responsibility involved the entire clan. Furthermore, the use of the

[277] 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
[278] Idem, 156
[279] Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 51
[280] See Dt. 25:5-10
[281] Cf. Rt. 2:20; 3:12

formula "to perpetuate the name of the dead"[282] and the consideration of the child as the son of the deceased[283] 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.[284]

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.*[285]

The targum's halakic position is that the widows were obligated and entitled to levirate marriage in Judah.[286] 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?*[287]

This verse is cited both by Rabbanites and sectarians in support of their position about levirate marriage.[288] 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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[282] Rt. 4:5, 10; cf.2:10
[283] Rt. 4:6; cf. 4:17
[284] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 100
[285] 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
[286] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 51
[287] 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
[288] 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.]"*[289]

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*[290] *and required to act as her brother-in-law and to marry her*[291] *in order to raise up the name of the deceased upon his inheritance."*[292]

We may conclude that the targum plays an active role in the interpretation of

[289] Jacob Neusner, *Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 178
[290] MT: "I have acquired" (Kethibh) or "you have acquired" (Qere).
[291] 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.
[292] 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.*[293]

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[294] applied to women even after conversion.

Tagum to Ruth 1:5 again confirmed the prohibition of intermarriage. Etain 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.[295] For having married "unclean" women, they were punished by sleeping in "unclean" soil. The targum stresses the sinfulness of intermarriage.[296]

Since their husbands neither proselytized nor immersed them ritually, they remained spiritual Moabitesses.[297] 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.[298]

The Targum to Ruth 1:13 declared that:

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[293] 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
[294] Dt. 23:4
[295] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 49
[296] Idem
[297] 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."
[298] 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."*[299]

That an unborn brother or half-brother, i.e., a mother's son is a potential levir violates rabbinic law.[300] 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.[301]

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[302] but manifestly opposed to rabbinic tradition.[303]

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*

[299] 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
[300] See commentaries of Rashi for juridicial summation.
[301] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 55
[302] 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)
[303] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 100-01

*them, whether poor ir rich.*[304]

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.[305]

### 4.5 Conclusion

The above illustration of Jewish exegesis on the book of Ruth in term 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 the 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 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 2nd century BCE to 5th 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

[304] 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
[305] Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, 90

strengthened at that stage. This will be discussed in chapter five: patristic literature.