

## Reading the Bible at Qumran, Alexandria, and Ephesus<sup>1</sup>

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Many communities of faith embrace a rigid notion of the precise wording of Scripture, carefully delineate the boundaries of Scripture, and have a rather well-defined (if hidden to themselves) agenda as they come to Scripture to interpret and apply the Word. A particular translation of the Bible may be embraced, or at least preferred, as "Word of God," without ever considering the larger implications of dealing with the Word of God *in translation* as one's primary vehicle for engaging Scripture. The canon of Scripture is considered a divine given, without ever considering the ways in which texts now considered extra-canonical may have inspired and even functioned as Scripture for the authors of Scripture and the first generations of readers. The kinds of questions that are brought to Scripture are considered self-evident and appropriate, without ever considering how those questions are shaped and limited by the peculiar cultural and religious concerns that we bring to the text.

One of the ways in which we can move past such mental road blocks in our own engagement with Scripture is to consider how the books of the Bible functioned as Scripture in other communities of faith. A recent exhibit displayed at the John S. Knight Center in Akron, Ohio, brought together manuscripts of Biblical and para-biblical texts from Khirbet Qumran, from Egypt, and from centers of early Christianity. This visual display suggested the benefits of considering how three important communities of faith — the Jewish sect at Qumran, the Jewish community in Alexandria, and the early Christian movement (an important center of which was Ephesus) read and engaged their Scriptures.

It is highly informative for us to consider, first, what the "Bible" looked like for each community. This raises the question of the "text" of the Bible for particular communities of faith, producing a rather fluid picture that should help us begin to grasp the complexities of the history of the transmission of the text of the Bible — and help us release overly simplistic views of how the text took the shape in which we now read it. It is also illuminating to consider what books were being read as Scripture in each community. It may surprise us to learn that the greatest innovations in regard to canon were to be found in the early Christian church, as new outpourings of God's inspiration were being recognized as new texts were

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being produced and as slightly older texts were being read anew. Finally, we can begin to see how to recognize and examine our own interpretive agendas as we explore how was the Bible being interpreted, and what were people looking for as they read their Bible, in each community. In short, we will be looking at questions of "text," "canon," and "interpretation." I trust that a fourth question — "So what?" — will be fruitfully addressed throughout this study as well.

### Reading the Bible at Qumran

Visitors to Qumran today can view the ruins of what was the first known monastic community in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The location of the site was always known, but it only came to life when what is believed to have been the library of the community was discovered in eleven nearby caves. Those scrolls tell the story of a group of pious Jews, fed up with the religious leaders in the Jerusalem Temple, convinced that the Law of God was not being properly observed in their nation, who left the inhabited haunts of sinners and made a utopia in the desert where the covenant would be faithfully and perfectly kept — to their glory and to the salvation of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

The community's beginnings are traced back to 175-165 B.C.E, a tumultuous decade the story of which can be found in the first half of 2 Maccabees.<sup>3</sup> The high priests themselves were leading the way to apostasy from the covenant and adoption of Greek manners of life and government. Resistance to these high priests led to the violent suppression of Judaism in Jerusalem and its surrounding towns by order of Antiochus IV, the Greco-Syrian king that supported those high priests' reforms. Many people, including the first settlers at Qumran, sought refuge in the desert, both to avoid the apostasy and the persecution. Eventually, a successful resistance movement led by Judas Maccabaeus brought about an end to the persecution, the restoration of the Temple, and a new dynasty of high priests and kings. In response to this new dynasty of priests, the first of which is remembered as the "Wicked Priest" at Qumran, the mysterious "Teacher of Righteousness" forsook Jerusalem and came to the community and gave it its distinctive shape and order. It is likely that he was a member of the Zadokite priestly family, now denied his rightful office because Jonathan, a younger brother of Judas Maccabaeus, was the new incumbent.

The community continued long after his death, seeking "perfection of way" by fulfilling the Law of Moses as the Teacher of Righteousness had taught them, and looking for the glorious war of the sons of light against the sons of darkness, when God would defeat their enemies and establish them in a purified Temple. The end came in 68 C.E., though not as they expected: the "sons of darkness," the tenth

Roman Legion, killed every resident and destroyed the settlement. It is believed that the precious library of the sect — the books that the sect members discussed at every evening assembly and studied for one-third of every night — was hidden away just prior to the advance of the Roman armies into Judea, to put down the First Jewish Revolt.

In this library are three kinds of literature, grouped according to widening circles of readership. The group of texts written by members of the sect (some coming from the Teacher of Righteousness himself) has drawn the most attention, since these were previously unknown. In this group are the “Rules” for the community, laying out the policies and procedures for admitting people into the community, for ordering daily life in the community, for dealing with transgressions of community law and policy, as well as important insights into the history, purpose, and character of the community. Also in this group are psalms and prayers giving us windows into the worship life of the group, collections of laws and their interpretation that show us how the group thought the Law of Moses needed to be observed, commentaries on Scripture (which we will look at in more detail shortly), and apocalypses that testify to the group's expectation of the “end” and their role in that final battle and beyond.

A second group of texts contains books that were read not only by the people at Qumran but by other Jews as well, but which were not made part of the Hebrew Bible by the rabbinic leaders of the second century. These texts were known prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here we would class fragments of *I Enoch*, an apocalypse that is also explicitly quoted in the Letter of Jude in the New Testament; Tobit, Ben Sira, and Letter of Jeremiah, books that would eventually become part of the Scripture of the early church; and books like *Jubilees* and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, books that represent rewriting and substantial expansions of the biblical story and are a marvelous window into what interests Second Temple Period Jews brought to the Scriptures.

The third group of texts, by far the largest of the three groups, contains manuscripts of books of the Hebrew Bible, books read as Scripture by all (or at least most) Jews by the mid-first century C. E. Although not nearly so sensational, these are the most significant finds at Qumran as far as the shared Scriptures of Jews and Christians are concerned, giving us access to manuscripts or part of manuscripts of every book in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament that predate our formerly earliest manuscripts by five hundred to a thousand years.<sup>4</sup> Some of these texts were found in excellent condition, substantially complete in one large scroll. The majority of texts, however, had to be reconstructed from fragments, some so small that they contained no more than parts of two or three lines. This fact should give

us some sympathy and admiration for the work of the scholars who labored for decades reconstructing these texts for our benefit.

(1) What did the Bible look like at Qumran?

Jews from the late second century B.C.E. through the first century C.E. often spoke of their Scriptures as containing three kinds of literature. When Ben Sira's grandson translated his grandfather's wisdom into Greek in 132 B.C.E., he spoke of "the Law, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books." At the other end of the intertestamental period, we read in Luke's Gospel about Jesus referring to his fulfillment of everything written in "Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms" (Luke 24:45). Other references to "the Law and the Prophets" accord well with the primary importance of these two bodies of Scripture. It is in fact within the third part, now called the "Writings," but referred to vaguely as "the rest of the books" by Ben Sira's grandson and narrowly as "the Psalms" by Jesus in Luke's Gospel, that we find books whose status as Scripture need to be disputed and confirmed by rabbinic leaders in the late first/early second century C.E. — books like Esther, Ecclesiastes, but, in the end, not Baruch or Ben Sira.<sup>5</sup>

The Jews at Qumran appear to have read all the books that their fellow Jews read as Scripture, for at least partial manuscripts of every book except for Esther have been found in the caves, and the absence of Esther may be a chance occurrence. If number of manuscripts is any indication of the relative importance of each book, the Qumran community found the five books of Moses — the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) — the most important to have available for study by multiple readers. Deuteronomy led this pack with 31 different copies being found among the scrolls. The Psalms outstripped even Deuteronomy, with 39 copies being found, and Isaiah came in ahead of the rest of the books of the Hebrew Bible by a factor of 2 with 22 copies being found.<sup>6</sup> (To judge from the number of quotations and allusions to particular books of the Old Testament in the New Testament, early Christian leaders also found Psalms, Isaiah, and the Torah to be their most useful resources.)

But to say that the Qumran community was reading the Hebrew Bible is not to tell the whole story. One of the interesting discoveries about some of these books is that their contents vary from what *we* read in our Bibles. Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic Bibles all look to the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as their basic text. "Masoretic Text" refers to a particular edition of the Hebrew Bible authorized by rabbinic leaders and executed by scribes in the fifth and sixth centuries C.E. The principal witness to this edition is a codex (a bound book) called Codex Leningradensis, written in 1009 C.E.<sup>7</sup> The Scrolls give us access to

the Hebrew Bible before that process of editing took place, and shows us a somewhat more fluid picture. The most striking examples are Jeremiah and Samuel, which were read at Qumran in both the version in which we basically read them and in a slightly shorter form (in the case of Jeremiah) and a slightly longer form (in the case of 1 Samuel). The Psalms Scroll, moreover, contains about a dozen additional psalms and prayers not found in our book of Psalms. In this case, while the additional psalms could be an indication that the collection of Psalms was still somewhat fluid, they could also be an indication that these scrolls represent the "hymnal" used in the worship life of the community, and do not purport to represent the canonical collection of Psalms.<sup>8</sup>

## (2) What books were being read as Scripture at Qumran?

The mere fact that the books of the Hebrew Bible were found at Qumran does not automatically tell us that all these books — and only these books — were regarded as Scripture by that community. Their status is confirmed by other criteria: these are the books cited as carrying final authority ("as it is written"); these are the books that became the basis for commentary or midrash, thus showing their foundational importance for the community; sometimes, the care used in the production of the manuscript (the kind of script or the kinds of medium used, for example, finely prepared vellum as opposed to coarser or less durable substances) bears secondary witness to the status of the text.

But as we consider the role or authority that texts have in the community, several other books rise to prominence as potential additions to the "canon" at Qumran. We have already encountered the "Community Rule," which exercised rigid control over the life of the sect members daily. Though never considered "Scripture," it had a force more binding than Scripture, and its force was felt consistently throughout one's time with the sect from initiation to death. Beyond this, we should find *Jubilees*, an expansive retelling of Genesis 1 through Exodus 14, and *1 Enoch*, a collection of apocalypses written during the second and first centuries B.C.E. *Jubilees*, in particular, is cited in *Damascus Document* XVI 4-5 as an authoritative resource in support of the sect's observance of a solar calendar of 364 days rather than a lunar calendar of 354 days (with an extra month introduced even three years).<sup>9</sup> Their commitment to a solar calendar meant that the residents of Qumran did not celebrate sabbaths or the cycle of festivals on the same days as every other Jew, with the result that they regarded the latter as gross violators. The ultimate source for this calendar is the "Astronomical Book" nestled within *1 Enoch* (chapters 72-82). Even though *1 Enoch* is not explicitly cited as an authority for this calendar, the fact that twenty copies of the book have been recovered from the

caves attests to its importance to the sect.<sup>10</sup> Even here, though, all we can say securely is that these two books were considered "authoritative," not "Scripture."

(3) How was the Bible being interpreted, and what were the Qumran sectarians looking for as they read their Bible?

First and foremost, the Jews at Qumran were interested in learning how to fulfill the Torah, the Law of Moses, perfectly. The psalm that closes the "Community Rule" is filled with phrases like "walking in perfection of way," "establishing one's steps," receiving "knowledge" of God's ways, attaining "justification" through the right doing of the Law. Indeed, the "mission statement" of the community is telling: "they shall go into the desert to prepare His way, as it is written: 'Prepare the way of the Lord in the desert; make a straight path for our God in the wilderness' [quoting Isaiah 40:3, familiar to us from its use in the Christian church]. The path is the study of the Law that God commanded through Moses" (*IQS VIII.14-17*).

But the community's most distinctive mode of interpretation is found in its treatment of the prophetic literature, a treatment which they extended to the Psalms as well (as would the early church). The community turned to this literature to find its own story, and the story of its leader, the "Teacher of Righteousness," written therein. This is already seen in its application of Isaiah 40:3 to itself — the community *is* the group that prepares for God a highway in the desert. By reading its own story (past, present, and future) in the Scriptures, the community could affirm that they were in fact the focal point of God's redemptive activity in the world.

The community developed a special form of literature, called *pesharim*, or "commentaries," to develop this kind of reading. A portion of Scripture would be quoted, followed by the words "its interpretation is (*peshro*), then some connection is made with the story of the group or its leader. For example, consider the following lines from the *Commentary on Habakkuk*:

"The righteous shall live by faith." Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law, whom God will deliver because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.

"Because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all its inhabitants." Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest [this is the archenemy of the Teacher of Righteousness, probably Jonathan the high priest, younger

brother of Judas Maccabaeus] whom God delivered into the hands of his enemies because of the iniquity committed against the Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>11</sup>

The interpretative key to the Scriptures was found in (1) the way the sect fulfilled the Law of God and (2) the story of the sect's leader, his trials and successes, and the ongoing story of the sect he founded — all the way to its final victory in God's future interventions in history. If this sounds familiar, it should.

(4) So what?

First, the Qumran community's Bible has given new life to scholarly reconstruction of the text of the Old Testament, the discipline called textual criticism. These manuscripts, taking us back to the turn of the era, have confirmed the accuracy of the Masoretic text again and again. But they have also given us cause to emend the text of the Old Testament. For example, when one compares 1 Samuel 10:27-11:1 in the RSV with the NRSV, one finds an additional paragraph:

But some worthless fellows said, "How can Saul save us?" And they despised him, and brought him no present. But he held his peace. Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead.... (1 Sam 10:27-11:1 RSV)

But some worthless fellows said, "How can Saul save us?" They despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace. *Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead. About a month later, Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead....* (1 Sam 10:27-11:1 NRSV)

This change is based on a determination made by textual critics that the version of 1 Samuel found at Qumran was actually the correct one.<sup>12</sup> The omission of the paragraph can be explained as an accidental oversight (as a scribe jumped from one line that began with the same string of characters to another line somewhat further

down the page beginning with the same string of characters) at some point in the history of copying 1 Samuel.

A more significant example comes from Jeremiah 10:2-10. English Bibles, following the Masoretic Text, read:

Thus says the LORD: Do not learn the way of the nations, or be dismayed at the signs of the heavens; for the nations are dismayed at them. (3) For the customs of the peoples are false: a tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an ax by the hands of an artisan; (4) people deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. (5) Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good. (6) *There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might.* (7) *Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For that is your due; among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is no one like you.* (8) *They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction given by idols is no better than wood!* (9) Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the artisan and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is blue and purple; they are all the product of skilled workers. (10) *But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.*

A manuscript of Jeremiah at Qumran, however, provides a much shorter version of this passage, with verse nine in a different place:

Thus says the LORD: Do not learn the way of the nations, or be dismayed at the signs of the heavens; for the nations are dismayed at them. (3) For the customs of the peoples are false: a tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an ax by the hands of an artisan; (4) people deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. (9) Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the artisan and of the hands of the



goldsmith; their clothing is blue and purple; they are all the product of skilled workers. (5) Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good.

Prior to the discovery of this manuscript, the Greek version of Jeremiah was the only witness to the shorter text, and so the longer text was preferred.<sup>13</sup> Now both a turn-of-the-era Hebrew manuscript and the early Greek translation of Jeremiah attest to this reading, which so eminent a scholar as Emanuel Tov believes to be the original reading.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it is easy to see how a scribe would have been moved to expand the passage by interspersing the praises of the One, True God as a contrast to these foolish no-gods worshiped by other nations. I would not be surprised to see future English translations of the Bible taking account of this in some way as well.

Second, the distinctive way the prophets and psalms were read at Qumran provides an illuminating background for the early church's interpretation of the same, now applied to a different Teacher of Righteousness and the ongoing story of a different sect within Judaism — one that would not be cut short by the Roman suppression of the Jewish Revolt.

Third, the way the Bible was read at Qumran illustrates both the diversity within early Judaism — a Judaism in which there were numerous ways of thinking about Scripture and about the covenant — and bears witness to the central points of unity: an interest in fulfilling Torah correctly; an interest in falling in line with the rhythms of God by correct observance of the Sabbath and the festivals that remembered God's acts on behalf of Israel; and essential agreement on the core tradition (the Law, the Prophets, and at least several of the Writings).

### **Reading the Bible in Alexandria**

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been rightly called the most significant discovery of the twentieth century, giving us direct access to the state of the Hebrew Bible at the turn of the era and more direct access to this peculiar sect than to any other Jewish group in the first century C.E. But *far* more significant for the study of early Judaism and early Christianity are the fragments of the Greek Bible, commonly referred to as the Septuagint. The Septuagint was never "lost,"<sup>15</sup> and so there was no sensational "discovery" to compare with finding the Dead Sea Scrolls, something the media could use to bring the texts to popular attention. As a result, those who have heard about the discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls through the media find that the more important personal "discovery" of the Septuagint yet awaits them.

(1) What did the Bible look like in Alexandria?

The Hebrew Bible takes on a surprising shape in Alexandria in the three centuries before the turn of the era: it shows up in Greek instead of Hebrew. Jews had lived in Egypt since the sixth century B.C.E.; many more had swelled the Jewish communities in Egypt's cities by the third century B.C.E. Unable to keep their native language alive in a foreign land, many Jews in Alexandria were much more fluent in Greek than Hebrew and Aramaic. As a result, they needed access to their Scriptures in their new language. The Torah was translated into Greek by about 250 B.C.E. The Prophets and more important Writings (like Psalms and Proverbs) were translated by the early second century B.C.E. At the same time, other books written in Hebrew were being made available in Greek (for example, the Wisdom of Ben Sira, translated into Greek by his grandson). The Jews in Egypt — and soon thereafter the Jews in Asia Minor, Syria, Greece, and Italy — found themselves in a position not unlike most Jews and Christians in America. A translation of Scripture became their only Scripture.

Now, there were some problems with these translations. The Torah had been translated rather tightly, but not exactly. Moreover, the Prophets and Writings could show significant degrees of looseness in translation. The grandson of Yeshua Ben Sira, apologizing for the defects in his own translation of Ben Sira's book into Greek, observes concerning the Greek Bible that "what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not exactly have the same sense when translated into another language.... Even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original" (prologue to Ben Sira).

These differences made the users somewhat uneasy, with the result that legends grew up around the translation of the Torah into Greek attempting to legitimate the new translation as authoritative Scripture. The *Letter of Aristeas* claims that the translation had been undertaken by seventy of the most intelligent and careful Judean scribes, sent to Alexandria by the high priest Eleazar with authorized copies of the Hebrew Torah. (It is from this legend of seventy translators that the *Septuagint*, from the Greek word for seventy, gets its name.) There they demonstrated their impeccable wisdom in a seven-day banquet with the king, and then produced a translation that, when read to the population of Alexandrian Jews, was acclaimed by them as "in every respect accurate," with a curse being pronounced on anyone who changed the new text either on purpose or by accident (*Ep. Aristeas* 310-311).<sup>16</sup> Philo's version is even more extravagant: each of the seventy translators worked independently and, when their results were compared, were all found to have produced exactly the same translation, acclaimed

by Philo as a miracle of prophetic inspiration (*Life of Moses* 2.37-40)! The legends, however, did not erase the notable differences in wording, which would also lead rabbinic leaders and scribes in the early second century C.E. to initiate several revisions designed to bring the Greek Bible in use among Jews in the Western Diaspora closer in line with the Hebrew text used in Palestine.

What was the impact of translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek on the way in which the Bible was read? The simple act of finding Greek equivalents to the great Hebrew words like *zedek* (righteousness), *emeth* (reliability), and *hesed* (covenant loyalty) was already significant in several ways. When these words became *dikaioisune* (justice), *pistis* (faith/belief/faithfulness), and *eleos* (mercy, compassion), they were put into conversation not only with Jewish conversations about "righteousness" (*zedek*) but with the larger conversations happening among Greek and Roman philosophers and ethicists about "justice" (*dikaioisune*) as well. Suddenly, the Hebrew Bible resonated with the thought world of Greco-Roman ethics and philosophy, and dynamic interactions occurred as Hellenistic Jews begin to interpret their Scriptures as bringing something important to the Greco-Roman conversation — and begin to listen to Greco-Roman philosophers for insights into their own Scriptures.

Something else happens, though, when *hesed* (covenant loyalty), for example, is translated as *eleos* (mercy, compassion). The nuances of these two words are not the same. The Hebrew word is loaded with the sense of reciprocal obligation, and because of its common usage will often be heard in the sense of reciprocal obligations as defined by the Law of Moses — whether obligations Jews have toward each other or obligations between the Jewish people and God. The Greek word, however, lacks this particular set of cultural associations, pointing merely to acts of kindness and charity toward people in need. If this is too subtle, consider a famous passage in which God says:

"I desire  $\delta\varsigma, \chi,$  (*hesed*), and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6)

"I desire ἔλεος (*eleos*), and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6)

In the Hebrew text tradition, God is calling for loyalty to the covenant and to the obligations it places on the various parties. Fulfilling our obligations toward one another is better than trying to make up for failure or neglect with sacrifices. These obligations include not just loving our neighbor, but observing the Sabbath, avoiding certain foods, maintaining ritual purity, and other ways by which Jews distinguished themselves from non-Jews as God's people. In the Greek text tradition, however, God might be seen calling simply for ethical action, and specifically acts of charity and kindness toward those in need, as preferable to offering sacrifices in the Temple, elevating ethical action above ritual practice. This

new emphasis is certainly reflected in Alexandrian Jewish Bible interpretation, and is the sort of difference that would certainly play into early Christian readings of Scripture as they sought to universalize the application of God's Law to a community where the distinction between Jew and Gentile no longer held value.

Some differences are the result of a new social and cultural location, and of the translator's attempt to make meaningful and culturally sensitive translational decisions. For example, the image of God as a "Rock" is a wonderful way to express God's reliability, or the strength God gives the worshiper, or the way God gives the worshiper something hard and real to hold onto. But when you move from Israel to Alexandria, you find yourself surrounded by rocks — carved stone images of many gods, whom their worshipers pronounce "blessed," and from whom these worshipers seek safety, protection, and the like. So "Blessed be my Rock" becomes "Blessed be my God" (Ps 18:46) to avoid making any connection with the worship of rocks and stones happening everywhere around the Jewish community.<sup>17</sup>

These are all very subtle differences, however. The Septuagint is full of far less subtle variations from the Hebrew text as well, which we will explore briefly a little later. Consider one for now, from Amos 9:11-12.

"On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnants of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name" (NRSV, based on Masoretic Text).

"On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its fallen parts, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as the days of the age, in order that the rest of humankind and all the nations, over whom my name is invoked, may seek it out" (NRSV adapted to Septuagint Text).

The restoration of Israel has two entirely different purposes: in the Hebrew Text, God restores Israel to position her for domination over her neighbors; in the Greek text, God restores Israel to draw all humankind to her, probably in keeping with the hope of Isaiah and the Psalms that all nations would come to seek and worship the One God as a result of Israel's restoration. We do not always know how to account for these differences. In some cases, the differences will result from the Greek translator working from a Hebrew text different from the Masoretic text; in other cases, the differences will result from the translator's own deliberate changes to the

text; in other cases, the differences are an accident of the transmission process after the translation was produced (e.g., through intentional or unintentional changes introduced by copyists). And, of course, some combination of these factors may come into play in any single instance.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, with all these new nuances and different readings, *this* became the Bible of Greek-speaking Jews throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and was even used in Israel, which remained part of the Greek and the Hellenized Roman world. This is not so difficult to understand when one considers how many Greek-speaking Jews came to Jerusalem for the religious festivals, and even returned to live in their native land (without, however, leaving behind Greek as their primary language). Remarkably, fragments of Greek Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were even found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, a testimony to how far the Greek Bible penetrated the homeland of Israel.

## (2) What books were being read as Scripture?

The major witnesses to the Septuagint are bound volumes, called codices, copied by Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries. Examining the Old Testament in these volumes, you would find them to contain not only the books of the Hebrew Bible, but also the books of the Apocrypha. This raised the question whether or not Alexandrian Jews had already adopted a wider canon than their fellow Jews in Palestine, reading the Apocrypha as part of their Scriptures.

This theory, which still shows up in the writings particularly of Greek Orthodox authors, has been thoroughly and properly debunked.<sup>19</sup> If it were the case that Jews in Alexandria read books like Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, or Judith as *Scripture*, we should expect to find their status reflected somehow in the writings of these Jews. But we do not. Philo of Alexandria, who flourished in the first half of the first century C.E., left us an enormous collection of his writings. Nowhere does he refer to a book from the Apocrypha, let alone cite one as Scripture. Instead, his focus is wholly on the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and its interpretation, introducing quotations from the prophets and the writings as he finds them helpful.

If we turn to a book called *4 Maccabees*, sometimes located in Alexandria but much better located nearer to Syrian Antioch,<sup>20</sup> another large center of Diaspora Judaism, we find a similar picture of "canon." In this book, the focus remains on the Torah and its interpretation as the path to grow into every virtue. The stories in the Pentateuch, the writings of the Prophets, Proverbs, Psalms, and Daniel are all presented as resources for discerning the path to right living and finding the necessary encouragement to take that path (see especially 4 Macc 1:31-3:18; 16:16-

23; 18:10-19). This is not to say that Jews in Alexandria or Antioch were *only* reading Scripture. Far from it. Philo also quotes Greek drama and philosophy, showing points of connection with what he finds in the Law of Moses. The author of *4 Maccabees* has read *2 Maccabees*, a book the author considers sufficiently edifying to make its stories of the Jewish martyrs under Antiochus IV the basis for his sermon on the benefits of keeping the Law of Moses. They are taking the work of their fellow Jews and even of Gentile authors seriously, being informed by them, but the picture of the "Bible" takes us still to the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

(3) How was the Bible being interpreted, and what were the interests of Jews coming to the Bible, in Alexandria?

If the Qumran community came to their Hebrew Bible with a desire to work out the minutiae of keeping Torah perfectly and to discover the role of their sect in the unfolding drama of God's plan for the world, the Jews at Alexandria came to their Greek Bible with a desire to discover the moral and ethical truths hidden in the Law of Moses and, to a lesser extent, the prophets and writings. These readers were interested in discovering how their God had provided reliable answers — indeed, superior answers — to the questions that drove the ethical conversations of the Greek ethicists around them: What is "justice" in every human and divine relationship? What is true "freedom," and what is the true state of "slavery"? How do we rise above the power of "desire" or our "cravings" so as to live a life of virtue? Recall that translating the Bible into Greek had also helped move the Scriptural revelation more directly into those conversations, suggesting that it had something to contribute. And, of course, if Jews in Alexandria were to remain faithful to their Jewish way of life, they needed to be sure that their way of life gave them the same if not greater access to achieving a noble and praiseworthy way of life as Greco-Roman philosophy did for their neighbors.

So in Alexandria and other centers of the Jewish Diaspora we find a moral and allegorical interpretation being applied to Scripture, to discover the practical implications of the text for cultivating a virtuous life and liberating one from the power of vice. Jews were in fact criticized by their neighbors for having barbaric laws — laws that kept them from enjoying all the good things of nature, like pork and lobster, and laws that kept them from acting justly and showing solidarity with their fellow non-Jewish Alexandrians. Against such criticisms, Jews found that, on the contrary, they had a marvelous and divine Law, in which was hidden much wisdom for those who had eyes to see.

These same dietary laws, far from being superstitious and barbaric, were given by God to exercise the Jewish people in the virtue of self control. According

to Philo, Moses, the wise lawgiver, sought to eliminate from the diet of the Jews all those foods that were the most succulent or delicate, like pork and lobster, teaching them to use food to serve their bodily needs rather than satisfy their tastes. This would, in turn, make it easier for them to do the same in other arenas of life, so that they could moderate their desires and seek what was sufficient, rather than become slaves to pleasure (*On the special laws* 4.100-102). The laws also revealed hidden wisdom, for those with eyes to read correctly. Moses defined "clean" animals as those who have cloven hooves and ruminate. This was to teach that the people of God, who are also "clean" and feed only on "clean" animals, were to distinguish carefully between right and wrong (the fork of the hoof), and to set their foot only on the path of virtue. It was also to teach them to continually mull over the God's teachings until their lessons, little by little, are fully digested and imprinted upon the soul (*On the special laws* 4.105-108). Similarly, in the *Letter of Aristeas*, we find that in being commanded to avoid eating the meat of carrion birds, the Jews are taught to avoid preying on the weak, the sick, and the dying like those birds do.

Circumcision, mocked by Greeks as a barbaric mutilation of the human form, represented the cutting away of excess pleasure and excess desire, inscribing on the Jewish male his commitment to tame the passions and live a temperate and just life. Reading Philo, *4 Maccabees*, and the *Letter of Aristeas*, one finds that other stipulations of the Jewish Law trained a Jew in generosity, courage, just dealings with other people, and helped the Jew rise above anger, greed, lust, and the like. It is important to remember that the allegorical and moral reading in no way rendered the literal keeping of the commandments superfluous. Rather, it gave a deeper meaning to the fulfilling of the whole Law. The stories of the Bible were also read as moral examples. Binding all these readings together was a conviction that the Scriptures were a testimony to God's faithfulness to God's special people, and a summons to faithfulness toward God in return.

#### (4) So what?

Our brief tour of the text, canon, and interpretation of the Bible in Alexandria alerts us to how translation alters the essence of the Bible. It opens up new possibilities for interpretation, and stimulates conversation between the Scripture and the cultural world of the new language — but it also eliminates meanings and changes how we will encounter the text. This is particularly important for us to keep in mind, who may read the Bible only in a translation like English.

The translation of the Scriptures into Greek, and the particular mode of interpretation at Alexandria, both pave the way for the spread of the worship of the

One God to all people, now including those Gentiles who, knowing Greek, can read the Jewish Bible and, knowing that there are ways of reading the Jewish Law beyond their literal fulfillment, can adopt these as the Word of the God of the Universe to them — no longer ignoring them as the irrelevant words of a local, tribal God to the Jews only. The “so what” question here leads directly into the final phase of this tour, the Bible in the early church.

### **Reading the Bible in Ephesus (and other centers of the early church)**

(1) What Bible were early Christians reading in Ephesus (and beyond)?

Every standard English Bible from the KJV to the NRSV uses the Hebrew Masoretic Text as the basis for its Old Testament. This is also the text type underlying the Jewish Bible, whether printed in Hebrew or translated into English. This phenomenon would lead us to expect that the early Christians -- especially those leaders who wrote the books that would become the New Testament -- looked to the Masoretic Text (or at least one of its Hebrew ancestors) for its Old Testament as well. But readers of the New Testament frequently notice that a quotation of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament -- a verse from Isaiah, or the Psalms, or Amos in the Gospel of Matthew or Book of Acts -- does not match the translation of the same verse when it is compared with the wording in Isaiah, or Psalms, or Amos as it appears in the Old Testament/Jewish Bible.

We can account for this in one of three ways. The New Testament author may be quoting from memory, perhaps not overly concerned about recovering the precise wording, perhaps even shaping the quotation in a way that will better support his point. A second possibility is that the New Testament author is quoting the Scripture verbatim, but from a Hebrew text that differs from the Masoretic Text. A third possibility is that the New Testament author is quoting from the Greek Old Testament -- the Septuagint -- rather than from a Hebrew text, and the Septuagint often departs from the Masoretic Text, and thus from our printed Old Testament, in significant ways.

If we look just at the writings of Paul, we find that of almost 100 citations of Old Testament passages, the wording in Paul, the Masoretic Text, and the Septuagint agree in about 40 cases; Paul agrees with the Masoretic Text but not the Septuagint in about 7 cases; Paul agrees with the Septuagint against the Masoretic Text in about 16 cases; and Paul does his own thing agreeing with neither the Masoretic Text nor the Septuagint in 31 cases.<sup>21</sup> The upshot of this is that Paul follows the LXX more often than he follows the MT, and this trend will increase as one moves to books like Hebrews, 1 Peter, and into the second century Apostolic



Fathers.<sup>22</sup> The early Christians, most of whom claimed Greek as their first language (whether Jews or Gentiles by birth), and their leaders (whether Jews born in Judea like James, Jews born in the Diaspora like Paul, or Gentile-born authors like Luke) adopted the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible as their Scripture, with all its variations from the Hebrew Text. (This continues, by the way, in the Greek Orthodox churches to the present day.)

Why was this significant for the early church's engagement with the Bible? Recall how we compared Hosea 6:6 in the Hebrew Bible against the Greek Old Testament:

"I desire  $\delta\varsigma, \chi$ , (*hesed*, covenant loyalty), and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6)

"I desire  $\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  (*eleos*, mercy/compassion), and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6)

The Greek version of Hosea emphasizes God's desire for acts of human kindness rather than loyalty to a covenant that includes not only humane concern but also dietary restrictions, sabbath observance, and circumcision, which would all have been heard as part of *hesed*. Reading Hosea in Greek rather than in Hebrew helped support the early church's focus on living out the command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" or to "love one another" as the way in which to please God and fulfill the essence of God's Law — specifically over against circumcision, dietary laws, and observance of the Jewish liturgical calendar.

We may also recall also the difference between the Hebrew text of Amos 9:11 and the Septuagint version:

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnants of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name (NRSV, based on Masoretic Text).

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its fallen parts, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as the days of the age, in order that the rest of humankind and all the nations, over whom my name is invoked, may seek it out (NRSV adapted to Septuagint Text).

The author of Acts quotes the Septuagint version at a focal point in the narrative, namely the Jerusalem Council at which James, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and the rest of the church leaders decided that Gentiles could join the church on the basis of trusting Jesus, being baptized, and receiving the Holy Spirit — without the

requirement to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The Greek version of Amos 9:11 helps legitimate the direction that the early church is taking, as it moves from a Jewish Christian movement growing in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (the means by which the "booth of David" is restored) to a movement that is drawing in Gentiles in large numbers (the "rest of the nations" seeking out God via the restored tent of David).<sup>23</sup> The Hebrew text, which speaks of the restoration of the house of David for the purpose of political conquest, does not lend itself to such a reading.

As one more example of how the Septuagint provided early Christians with opportunities that the Hebrew text did not, we can consider the Letter to the Hebrews, 10:4-10. As the climax of an essay exploring how Jesus has offered the supremely effective sacrifice that cleanses human beings from sin and consecrates them to enter into the very presence of God, the author quotes Psalm 40:6-8. In the Masoretic text, this reads:

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear (literally, "ears you have dug for me"). Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (Ps 40:6-8, after the MT)

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me; you did not ask for whole-burnt offerings or sin offerings. Then I said, "Behold, I am here; in the scroll of the book it is written about me: I desired to do your will, O my God, according to your law in the midst of my belly." (Ps 40:6-8, after the LXX)

Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." (Ps 40:6-8, as quoted in Hebrews 10:5-7)

The author of Hebrews has drawn on the Septuagint text, and the critical difference is seen in the fact that the Greek translator abandoned the homely image of God digging out our ears so that we could hear the Law to do it, replacing it with the image of God preparing for the psalmist a "body." Clearly, the Septuagint translator

intended the same meaning as the original Hebrew — God wants us to live out the Torah by hearing and obeying (“ears you have dug out for me,” as in the Hebrew text) or by embodying the law (“a body you have prepared for you,” as in the Septuagint text). But the Septuagint translator opened up for the author of Hebrews a different reading when the latter applied the Psalm to Jesus: God prepared for *Jesus* a body that could be offered up as a superior sacrifice to those burnt offerings and sacrifices that the psalm says God rejected.<sup>24</sup> Psalm 40 becomes, in his hands, an Old Testament warrant for one particular human sacrifice quite different from any sacrifice prescribed by the Law of Moses.<sup>25</sup>

(2) What books were being read as Scripture in the early church?

The early Christians were reading the books of the Hebrew Bible — although mostly in a Greek translation — as their Scriptures. As at Qumran, Psalms, Isaiah, and the five books of the Law were the most frequently used and quoted. But it is also clear that the authors of the New Testament were deriving their inspiration from other sources as well, books that would not be included in the Hebrew Bible.

The Wisdom of Ben Sira, the collected sayings of a sage who taught in Jerusalem 200 years before Jesus began his public ministry, was so influential in Judea that it left its mark on scores of passages in rabbinic texts. It is clear that it left its stamp on the teaching of Jesus and the early church as well.<sup>26</sup> Both Yeshua Ben Sira and Yeshua Ben Joseph urge giving to the one who asks (Sir 4:4; cf. Mt 5:42) and claim that mirroring God’s generosity makes one like “a child of the Most High” (Sir 4:10; cf. Mt 5:45). Both warn against “vain repetition” in prayer (Sir 7:14; cf. Mt 6:7); both address God as “Father” in prayer (Sir 23:1, 4; cf. Mt 6:9; Jas 3:9). One development in Ben Sira is especially arresting. The words “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” are familiar enough from Jesus’ prayer. But Ben Sira had already taught that those who hope for forgiveness from God must not harbor unforgiveness against mortals like themselves.

Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done,  
and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.  
Does a man harbor anger against another,  
and yet seek for healing from the Lord?  
Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself,  
and yet pray for his own sins? (Sir 28:2-4)

Those with no knowledge of Ben Sira think Jesus was the first to teach people that

"unless you forgive people their sins against you, neither will my Father in heaven forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-15). But Jesus was incorporating far more of the wisdom of the Judaism of his day, and thus speaking more within than against Judaism, than people who stop reading his Jewish resources at Malachi realize.

But early Christian leaders did not look to these texts only for moral instruction. They also built their doctrines upon them as well. For example, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews read the depiction of the figure of "Lady Wisdom" in Wisdom of Solomon and found there a resource that could spur on the church's reflection about the relationship of Jesus, the Son, to God, and provide revelation about the Son's activity prior to the incarnation:

*Wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.... [Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty.... She is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God's goodness.... She is an initiate in the knowledge of God and an associate in God's works. (Wisd 7:22, 25-26; 8:4)*

In these last days, God has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, *through whom he also created the world, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of God's nature*, upholding the universe by his word of power. (Heb 1:2-3)

The relationship of Wisdom to God as effulgence to light source or image to reality becomes an indication of the Son's relationship to the Father, and Wisdom's role in Creation is now taken over by the Son.<sup>27</sup>

The New Testament authors never introduce the material learned from these books as Scripture (i.e., with words like "as it is written" or "as the Spirit says"), and indeed never explicitly draw attention to the fact that they are quoting this material from another book. However, the next generation of Christian leaders (Clement of Rome, the authors of the Didache and the Letter of Barnabas) recognized the influence of the Apocryphal books on the letters of Paul, James, Hebrews, and so on, and began to quote them as Scripture. Their logic appears to have been, if Paul and his apostolic colleagues found these books worthy of use and reflection, and derived important doctrines from them, they must be divinely inspired as well and worthy of our use as Scripture. This position would be challenged from time to time, but it became the majority opinion in Christendom

and remains so to this day in Catholic and Orthodox churches. Protestants should also remember that the official position of the Reformers was that the Apocryphal books were worthy to be read for instruction in piety and in ethics, and for that reason Luther's German Bible and even the first edition of the KJV (which you can see on exhibit here) retained the Apocrypha.<sup>28</sup>

And, of course, the early church was beginning to collect another body of texts to read alongside the Jewish Scriptures and these other useful, inspiring texts. It is appropriate to mention Colossians here, since Col 4:16 provides the first evidence that Paul intended for his writings to be shared by the recipients with a broader audience, instruction the Colossian Christians to share his letter to them with the church in neighboring Laodicea, and also to read themselves the letter Paul sent to the Laodiceans. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, closely related to Colossians in content and wording, was probably written by Paul as a circular letter to a number of churches in Western Asia Minor. It is a short step from here to the statement in 2 Peter, perhaps a single generation later, referring to widespread reading of a collection of Paul's letters in the churches (2 Pet 3:15-16) that would be familiar to his readers and also available for other communities of faith to misread. Paul's letters, letters from other apostolic voices, and Gospels would all shortly become a second body of texts read as Scripture.

(3) How was the Bible being interpreted in the early church, and to address what interests?

The early church resembled the community at Qumran in several respects in regard to reading and engaging Scripture. First, it shared with Qumran the conviction that a single, authoritative Teacher brought the decisive word about how God's Law was to be fulfilled, reading all of God's Law through the lens of that Teacher's instruction, and reading that Teacher's instruction with all the authority of God's Law. Second, it shared with Qumran the conviction that their leader and their group stood at the apex of God's redemptive history, and at the center of God's end-time interventions on behalf of the faithful. Thus, the prophetic elements of Scripture (which included not only the Prophets but also the Psalms in both groups) *really* spoke about the life and times of the group's leader and about the ongoing story of the community formed by that leader. Thus in the early church we find a Christ-centered interpretation of the prophets and psalms, sometimes reading the texts as speaking *about* Jesus, sometimes reading them as addressed *to* Jesus, sometimes even seeking out their meaning by placing them on the lips *of* Jesus. Like the Qumran group, they are particularly interested in explaining the opposition encountered by their leader and ongoingly by the group by finding this opposition

prophesied in Scripture. The Teacher's rejection and the group's marginalization was all part of God's plan from the beginning, and so should not be disconcerting and disconfirming.

But the early church went considerably further than the Qumran sect in this regard. The death of their leader, Jesus, was pregnant with meaning and with new life for the members of the sect, and so a particular interest arose in determining from the Old Testament what that meaning was. Ransom, redemption, bearing the sins of many — all these meanings applied to the cross were anchored in readings of the Old Testament. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all" (Isaiah 53). They also sought out the "full story" of Jesus — the parts they could not see like his pre-incarnate life with the Father, his ascension, his taking a seat at God's right hand, his heavenly priesthood — in the Old Testament. "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Psalm 110:1). "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). And we have already seen in Amos 9:11 an example of how the Scriptures were mined to interpret what was happening in the early church a decade or two after Jesus' crucifixion.

On the other hand, the church learned from Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of the Scriptures — never forgetting that it also basically inherited *those* Greek versions of the Scriptures — the keen interest in the moral and ethical interpretation of the Law of Moses. But again, the early church went beyond what Alexandrian Jews like Philo would do: keeping the moral essence of the Law, they abandoned the practice of the Law in many of its particular requirements like observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, and distinguishing between clean and unclean foods. This was in keeping with its decision that Gentiles would be accepted on the basis of faith and the reception of the Holy Spirit, and its decision that there would be one church of Jews and Gentiles regulated by the teachings of Jesus, the apostles, and the Spirit — not by the Law of Moses. The only major distinguishing mark that remained of a non-ethical nature was a complete abhorrence of idolatry, which would continue to differentiate Christians from their neighbors (whereas Jews also had circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws to differentiate themselves from their neighbors).

(4) So what?

What can we take away from this tour of how communities of faith engaged their Scriptures, so as to enrich our own — and simply grow more aware of the complexities that we tend to assume do not exist?

First, every time we translate a text from one language to another, we change the range of meanings available in a text. This is crystal clear when we look at the Septuagint side by side with the Hebrew Bible. But if it's clear to us as we gaze into the past, let it be clear to us also as we engage the present. Almost all of us will only read the Bible in translation, in English rather than the original Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. To paraphrase Ben Sira's grandson once again, what was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek does not have exactly the same meaning when translated into English. In some cases, the very act of bringing the words into English makes them resonate with our cultural and social realities (like the Septuagint did for the Hebrew Bible, bringing it into close dialogue with Greco-Roman philosophy and ethics), while also forfeiting their capacity to take us back into the cultural and social world in which the Bible originated. An awareness of this could lead us to read more about that cultural and social world, and work at hearing the Bible more in terms of how it resonated with its native world. This can both provide a check on, and enrich, the way we engage the Bible in our context, and provides a first remedy for approaching the Bible in an overly-literalistic manner.

Second, even though translation changes the text and meaning of Scripture, it is equally clear that the translation can continue to function meaningfully as Scripture. This was certainly the case of the Septuagint. When confronted with the fact of its divergences from the original Hebrew text, Alexandrian Jews responded not by revising their Bible, but by talking about the pedigree of the translation and its affirmation both by the Jewish community and by God himself. Moreover, we learn from Qumran, Alexandria, and the early church that these believers could accept, use, and integrate into their view of Scripture the fact that a book like Jeremiah could exist in different forms (one shorter, one longer) or a book like Isaiah could have clearly different senses in Hebrew and Greek. The believer could move between them, seeing both as Word of God to him or her in different contexts or answering different questions. We are confronted with a similar situation — multiple English translations, Bibles in multiple languages, the availability of the reconstructed Hebrew and Greek texts — all functioning as Word of God for readers (sometimes the same reader) in different contexts and for different questions. Realizing this is the second remedy against an overly-literalistic approach to the Bible.

Third, we have observed a certain fluidity to the scope of the canon of Scriptures, or at least of books functioning with the authority of Scripture. At Qumran, *Jubilees* and the *Community Rule* were as normative for the life of the community as any book of the Hebrew Bible. In Alexandria, even though the canon

might have included the same books as the Hebrew Bible, it assuredly contained longer forms of some of these books — Greek Esther, with six additions making the Hebrew version, in fact, far more religious, and Greek Daniel, with two additional stories and two additional prayers. Moreover, books were now being written by Diaspora Jews looking to Intertestamental stories like the Maccabean martyrs as the basis for exhortations to the life of piety. In the early church, this trend continues, with New Testament authors drawing on books like Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, and Tobit, and with the early church collecting a New Testament and expanding their Old Testament to include these additional books which their leaders found so inspiring and helpful. In the Reformation period, when the cry of *sola Scriptura* — “Scripture only” — was raised to counter the power of Catholic tradition, it became important to determine the boundaries of those Scriptures like never before. Nevertheless, the Apocrypha had been so important for the development of the church’s faith and practice, that the Reformers kept translating and printing them as part of their Bibles. Because of this, I always urge my own students to adopt the practice of the printers of the first King James Bible and keep an Apocrypha close at hand — a priceless window into Jewish faith and practice, and the most important gateway into the Jewish environment of the early church.

Finally, even more important than the text type we engage as our Scripture (Hebrew Bible, Greek Old Testament, Greek New Testament, English Bible) or the scope of what we include as our Scripture are the interests and convictions we bring to the text. Their convictions about their Teacher of Righteousness and their own importance in God’s plan determined how the Qumran sectarians would read the Prophets and the Psalms: they did not learn this from the Scriptures, but brought it to the Scriptures and, predictably, found it confirmed in the Scriptures. The Alexandrian Jews’ conviction that Scripture sought to answer the same questions and lead to the same ethical goals as those posed by Greek philosophers determined their reading of the Scriptures. The early Christians’ experience of the Spirit through their trust in Jesus, and their convictions about Jesus’ role in bringing them to God, opened up a wholly new and unprecedented reading the Scriptures to them. Now the pattern of a suffering, dying Messiah who takes away the sins of the world and rises again jumped off every page — for the first time in the reading of the Jewish Scriptures. As we come to the Scriptures, we hope to allow it to criticize our faults, confirm our faith, and comfort our hearts,<sup>29</sup> but we also are challenged by our tour to become aware of how our convictions and interests determine what we will see, and what we will not see, in the text, and thus how we limit our own reading of the Bible.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a public lecture given on April 4, 2004, for the exhibit, *From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Forbidden Book* (John S. Knight Center, Akron, Ohio).

<sup>2</sup> See further Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin and Allen Lane, 49-66; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 65-95.

<sup>3</sup> See also D. A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 48-55 and the literature cited there.

<sup>4</sup> The most important of these manuscripts have been carefully collated and made accessible in English translation in Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller discussion of the question of "canon" in early Judaism, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 174-195; deSilva, *Apocrypha*, 30-34.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are taken from Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 163.

<sup>7</sup> Aron Dotan (ed.), *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), ix.

<sup>8</sup> This would be the position of Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 169.

<sup>9</sup> *Jubilees* is also cited as authoritative support for the community's decision not to allow men over the age of sixty to hold community offices (*CD X 5-12*, citing *Jub.* 23.11).

<sup>10</sup> Abegg, *et al.*, *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, 480-481; see also the more nuanced tally in John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 18..

<sup>11</sup> From Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (4<sup>th</sup> ed; New York: Penguin, 1995), 344-345.

<sup>12</sup> See Abegg, *et al.*, *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, 213-214, 224-225, who point out that Josephus, writing in the late first century CE, knew a text of 1 Samuel that included this

paragraph as well (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 6.5.1).

<sup>13</sup> See Abegg, *et al.*, *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, 382, 388.

<sup>14</sup> See Karen Jobes and Moises Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 173-176; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 321.

<sup>15</sup> This is not to deny that stunning discoveries of individual Septuagint manuscripts have been made, although the most important of these also happened prior to the turn of the twentieth century and so news of their discovery failed to penetrate the popular mind through the media.

<sup>16</sup> For a critical assessment of the historicity of *Letter of Aristeas*, see Jobes and Silva, *Septuagint*, 33-36.

<sup>17</sup> Jobes and Silva, *Septuagint*, 95; Staffan Olofsson, *God Is My Rock: A Study of Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis in the Septuagint* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Jobes and Silva, *Septuagint*, 149-150.

<sup>19</sup> It is surprising to find it still promoted so recently, for example, in E. Oikonomos, "The Significance of the Deuterocanonical Writings in the Orthodox Church," pp. 16-32 in S. Meurer (ed.), *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 17, and in Demetrius Constantelos, "The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: An Orthodox View," pp. xxvii-xxx in John R. Kohlenberger III (ed.), *he Parallel Apocrypha* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xxvii. See the discussion to the contrary in deSilva, *Apocrypha*, 29, and the fuller treatments of the subject in A. C. Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1964); R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> See the discussion of the provenance of *4 Maccabees* in D. A. deSilva, *4 Maccabees* (Sheffield Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 18-21 and the literature therein cited, especially J. W. van Henten, "A Jewish Epitaph in a Literary Text: 4 Macc 17.8-10," pp. 44-69 in J. W. van Henten and P. W. van der Horst (eds.), *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Figures from Moises Silva, "Old Testament in Paul," pp. 630-642 in G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 631.

<sup>22</sup> See also the supporting figures gathered in Jobes and Silva, *Septuagint*, 189-190, and the studies cited there.

<sup>23</sup> See, further, D. A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 356-57, 362-67.

<sup>24</sup> See further the discussion in H. W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 273-275; William Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 262-263; D. A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 320-322.

<sup>25</sup> We can also see the freedom with which the New Testament author shaped the quotation: he conveniently omitted the last nine Greek words of Psalm 40:8 with their reference to doing God's will according to the Torah, shaping the end of the quotation to be more congenial to the incarnation of Jesus:

"I have come; I desired to do your will, O my God, according to your law" (Ps 40:8 LXX)

"I have come to do your will, O God" (Ps 40:8 as quoted in Hebrews 10:7).

<sup>26</sup> See deSilva, *Apocrypha*, 22-24, 192-197.

<sup>27</sup> See, further, deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 86-90.

<sup>28</sup> See the fuller discussion of the role of the Apocrypha in the Christian churches in deSilva, *Apocrypha*, 26-41 and the literature cited there.

<sup>29</sup> To borrow language from a "prayer for illumination" from Horton Davies, *Prayers and Other Resources for Public Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).