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A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ibs-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php)

## SOME ISSUES AND RECENT WRITINGS ON JUDAISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

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In recent decades there has been a noticeable revival of interest in Jewish studies in themselves and in their bearing on the understanding of the New Testament. Together with this there has appeared more than an ordinary interest in the Jesus of history, in the relation of Jesus to the Judaism of his age, and in general in the historicity of the Gospel narrative. These new studies carry with them their own methodologies and critiques of the methods employed by earlier and contemporary scholars in the field. In the present essay I intend to touch however lightly on some of these studies, excusing the lack of depth in the treatment by the firm conviction that the issues raised in this new phase of Jewish and New Testament research will continue to be in the forefront during the decade that lies ahead, if not for a much longer period.

### 1. Paul and Judaism.

In a context such as this one thinks especially of the two major works by E.P. Sanders: Paul and Palestinian Judaism. A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (SCM Press, 1977) and Paul, the Law and the Jewish People (Fortress Press, 1983; SCM Press 1985). The first of these works gave rise to a number of critical reviews and review articles,<sup>1</sup> evidence of the importance attached to Sanders' approach by New Testament scholars. Sanders' works enter into both Pauline theology and the Jewish teaching believed to have a bearing on this. The reviews and critiques bring out the problems involved in methodology and related matters. Since this particular matter is much to large a field to be treated of in a summary fashion, suffice it to note the existence of the question here.

### 2. Judaism and Jesus Research

In 1985 E.P. Sanders published a further work, Jesus and Judaism (SCM Press). In a review article on it, John Riches (himself a specialist in the field, being the author of Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980) said of this work that it "is to be welcomed as a rich, vigorous, waspish and provocative essay in a field

that contains many works of distinction but nothing quite like this". The extent of recent works in this field has been illustrated by James H. Charlesworth, George L. Collord, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Princeton Theological Seminary, in an address to the Irish Biblical Association in 1985 on "Research on the Historical Jesus"<sup>2</sup> "Since 1980", he notes, "no less than thirty books dedicated to Jesus research have appeared". His review covers the years between 1980 and 1984, including the work of John Riches, and containing a reference to Sanders' most recent work although the year of publication fell outside the ambit of his survey. He notes that John Riches perceptively struggles to show how Jesus strived to present new and penetrating theological truths by employing the terms and language of contemporary Judaism. One of the sections of Professor's Charlesworth's essay is devoted to methodology, mainly relating to the use of the New Testament evidence. There is a methodology also required in any use of the Jewish evidence in such a study. In 1973 Geza Vermes published his study, Jesus the Jew. A Historian's Reading of the Gospels (Glasgow: Collins), in the first section of which (he tells us) he inserts "the Jesus of the Gospels into a geographical and historical realities and into the charismatic religious framework of the first-century Judaism, and against this background Jesus the Galilean hasid or holy man begins to take on substance".<sup>3</sup> This volume was planned as part of a trilogy, the second enquiry to be devoted to the reconstruction of Jesus' authentic message. This second volume, The Gospel of Jesus the Jew, appeared in 1981. One of the features of Geza Vermes' work is the extensive use he makes of rabbinic sources, a procedure considered quite unjustified by a number of New Testament scholars who regard these as postdating the New Testament period. This particular point has been a subject of much debate over recent years. E.P. Sanders in his work Paul and Palestinian Judaism has been particularly critical of some scholars for their use of the Jewish Targums in New Testament research, principally because of the problem .

in assigning an early date to them. Yet he himself has not escaped the censures of Jacob Neusner for his use of rabbinic sources, and again by reason principally of dating.<sup>4</sup> It is all a further indication of the need of attending to the methodology used as research into Jesus, the Early Church and Judaism progresses.

### 3. Hernando Guevara, *La resistencia Judia contra Roma en la epoca de Jesus*

Determination of the Jewish literature and tradition which were known in Palestine in the time of Jesus is but one of the elements to be attended to in this field of research. This in itself is no easy matter, since the cultural situation was itself evolving during the first century of our era. A question closely connected with this is the political situation in Palestine during this same period, the situation both in Galilee and Judea, and the attitude of the people (whether of the leaders or of the masses) towards the Roman governors and Roman occupation. An effort must be made to ascertain what the messianic expectations then were and how much the general population was affected by them, both in Judea and Galilee. More concretely, one will need to know whether the Zealots existed and were a force to be reckoned with during the public life of Jesus.

The dominant viewpoint, it would appear, is that the Zealots and an active anti-Roman movement did exist in Palestine during this period. It is the position defended in particular by Dr. Martin Hengel, a leading authority in this field.

Recently in a doctoral dissertation for the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, under the direction of Roger Le Deaut, this viewpoint has been challenged by Hernando Guevara: *La resistencia judia contra Roma en la epoca de Jesus* (published privately by Hernando Guevara, D-8901 Meitingen, Postfach 1125, in 1981). In summary the thesis examines one by one the historical sources: first of all and in greatest detail the principal source, Josephus Flavius; then the secondary sources, Philo of Alexandria,

Tacitus, targumic and rabbinic literature, apocalyptic literature, Qumran, the New Testament and the historical setting of the period. The conclusion arrived at is that there was indeed a general revolt in Judea against Rome at the death of Herod 1 (the Great) which was smothered in bloodshed by the governor P. Quintilius Varo. After the division of Judea the only insurrection recorded is that of Judas the Galilean, which Josephus dates to the year A.D.6, but which probably took place much earlier, that is about the year 4 B.C. In the years that followed until A.D.41 the Jewish people were at pains to arrive at an understanding with Rome: there are no traces of revolutionary activity or of groups supporting a holy war against the pagan master. On all the occasions of the inevitable tension the Jewish people, united under its aristocracy, resorted to peaceful means in order to have its law respected, all the while, however, recognising the de facto reality of the Roman authority. It was only later, from the year A.D.44 onwards, that the situation in Judea turned revolutionary. In the introduction to his work Guevara outlines the opinion commonly held today on "zealotism", particularly as found in the six chapters of Martin Hengel's classic 1961 work, Die Zeloten: Untersuchungen zur jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit von Herodes 1. bis 70 n.Chr. -- i.e. 1. Josephus Flavius being our principal source for information on the Zealots; II. The rebels were given the name "bandits", "sicarii", and perhaps "Galileans"; they themselves used the honourable biblical designation "Zealots". III. In A.D.6 Judas the Galilean founded the "zealots" - a strict organization, with dynastic leadership and a clear ideology which was a radicalisation of the first commandment; this party had a decisive influence on the history of the Jewish people during the two following generations and formed the nucleus of the increasing Jewish resistance. IV. Zeal, whose biblical prototype was Phineas, was the characteristic attitude of this group: for the honour of God, for making real his exclusive sovereignty, they were prepared to sacrifice their lives and to wipe out the pagan domination of Rome and of Rome's Jewish collaborators.

V. The ardor of this zeal was sustained by the belief in the definitive salvation of Israel soon to become a reality; the national hope was at the same time a transcendental hope. VI. The prehistory of "Zealotism" is to be sought in the rebellion of Hezekias of Galilee against Herod. At the deposition of Archelaus Judas the Galilean gave definitive organisation to the movement which remained active until the declaration of war against Rome in A.D.66. When the leader Menahem was assassinated the movement divided; its last members fell at Massada, A.D.74. The evidence of Josephus, of secondary sources, and that concerning the historical situation in Judea is examined in detail in the dissertation's three parts, including the texts invoked which would link Jesus and his first disciples in one way or another with the Zealot movement.

The work is a welcome addition to the ongoing in-depth investigation of the Jewish background to the New Testament, and to the life and work of Jesus in particular. Needless to say, this "common" opinion was not the one universally held. Guevara himself notes the divergent view of Morton Smith. Another major study that makes the same points, more or less, as he does appeared slightly too late for his consideration. I refer to Sean Freyne's Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E. A Study of Second Temple Judaism, co-published by Michael Glazier, Inc. and University of Notre Dame Press (1980). The latter writer restricts his examination to Galilee and, apart from stressing that the evidence does not indicate any anti-Roman agitation in Galilee for the period of Jesus' life, makes the further point that before the outbreak of the later revolt against Rome, anti-Roman sentiment and resentment was associated with Judea rather than with Galilee.

The New Testament texts considered by Guevara and others in the examination of the possible relationship of Jesus with Zealotism are those on the purification of the Temple (Mark 1:1-11, 15-19 and parallels), the question of tribute to Caesar (Mark 12:13-17 and par.). The sword

carried by Peter (Mark 14:47-48) and par), the logion on the "violent ones" taking the kingdom (Mat.11:12; Luke 16:16), the designation ho Kananaios or ho zelotēs given to Simon (Mat.10:4, Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). All these texts can be explained without postulating the existence of an active Zealot movement in Palestine (whether Judea or Galilee) in Jesus' day. However, the entire exclusion of anti-Roman sentiment or the genuine aspirations for the end of Roman rule may be going too far. J.T. Milik describes the fourth phase of Qumran monasticism, which he gives as beginning in 4 B.C. as "Essenism with Zealot tendencies". Military and Messianic expectations are to be found in the Messianic Rule (1QSa) and the War Rule (1QM), texts composed in the final decades of the first century B.C. or the first decades of the first century A.D. While the New Testament texts already noted can or may be interpreted without presupposing actual Zealot activity, the other NT texts giving evidence of a rather vivid messianic expectation in Jesus' day, from his birth through his public life, can scarcely be ignored. The scribes were teaching that Elijah was to come before the advent of the Messiah (cf. Matt.10:10); the advent of both Elijah and the Messiah, as well as of "the prophet" was expected by priests, scribes and people. Jesus' reluctance to use, or accept the use of, the term "messiah" seems to be evidence both of the expectation and of the emotive content of the very term. And for the vast majority of Jews of the period, whether in Judea or Galilee, the role of the Son of David would surely have primarily been "to restore the kingship to Israel" (cf. Acts 1:6). The last word has scarcely been said on the reality and nature of Messianic expectations in Jesus' day. While the debate goes on, however, it is good to have various aspects of the evidence put forward and discussed in depth.

4. The Current Impasse in the Understanding of Midrash  
There is no doubt but that we have reached something of an impasse at the present moment with regard to the understanding of the term "midrash", and regarding its

presence in New Testament writings. All this has in part arisen from the extension of the use of the term Hebrew or Jewish literature to the New Testament. Traditionally the term "midrash" was associated with rabbinic literature and with this alone, even when authors were not quite at one in the definition or description of the term itself. For one thing, the very word "Midrash" described one of the major divisions of rabbinic literature. A glance at earlier dictionary definitions of the term show that it was so understood in English. Thus, for instance, The Shorter Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles (1944); (revised with Addenda, 1953) tells us that the term comes from the Hebrew, where it means "commentary". It defines the word as: "An ancient Jewish homiletic commentary on some portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, in which allegory and legendary illustration were freely used. Hence "midrashic". The Standard Dictionary of the English Language, International Edition (of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1954) gives the following definition of midrash: "Jewish exegetical treatise on the Old Testament, dating from the 4th to the 12th century, specifically the Haggadah", noting that the word derives from the Hebrew, with meaning "explanation". Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, New Edition 1983, simply defines Midrash as: "the Hebrew exposition of the Old Testament - its two divisions, Haggadah and Halachah". Jewish scholars were no different, when they had occasion to define or describe the term. Thus, for instance, Umberto Cassuto (in Enciclopedia Italiana, 1934) states the first two of the three meanings he ascribes to midrash to be: (1) the exegetical examination of the sacred texts which was carried out by Hebrew teachers from the talmudic period (indicated as the last centuries before Christ and the first five centuries after Christ) and by the teachers that continued their work; (2) the results of this examination. Professor Cassuto continued to give a lengthy and authoritative essay on midrash. More were to follow from other scholars; this, however, need not detain us here. By reason of the influence it was later to exercise, special attention must be given to Renee Bloch's article under the



heading "Midrash" which appeared posthumously in French in the Supplement to Dictionnaire de la Bible in 1957. (She herself perished in a flight to Israel in a plane shot down over Bulgaria in 1955). This essay has been translated into English by Mary Howard Calloway and published in Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice, edited by William Scott Green (Brown Judaic Series 1, 1978: published by Scholars Press). Bloch examines the meaning of midrash in the Bible and in rabbinic literature. As essential characteristics of midrash she instances the following: it has its point of departure in the Scriptures; it is of a homiletic nature; it is of two kinds, haggadah and halakah. She has a section on the biblical origins of midrash, seeing the birth of the midrashic process during the exile (Ezek, Isa.40-55), the Persian period, the formation of the Canon. She studies the evolution of the literary genres in question by recalling that the origin of the midrashic genre is inseparable from the formation and the life of the sacred books. The first developments of midrash are to be sought within the Bible itself and in the literature attached to it. She also makes a study of the versions, including the Targums and in particular the Palestinian Targum (of the Pentateuch), which she considers quite likely to have been originally a sort of homiletic midrash, or simply a framework for a sequence of homilies on Scripture made in the synagogue after the public reading of the Torah. It includes, she says, already the entire structure and all the motifs of midrash. She goes on to a consideration of midrash in the New Testament, noting that quite naturally the tendencies she had earlier rapidly described are to be found in the New Testament. This study of the midrashic procedures in the New Testament, she laments, had as then been almost completely unexplored. She lists some of NT texts of interest from this point of view.

This extension of the study of midrash to include the New Testament was taken up by other scholars in the decade that followed. It was but natural that not everyone would accept this new approach. Midrash was taking on too many disparate meanings.

Some precision and closer definition seemed called for. This was attempted by Addison G. Wright in a doctoral dissertation under the title, The literary Genre Midrash, which he published in two essays in The Catholic Biblical Quarterly in 1966 and separately in bookform the following year. In his research A.G. Wright set himself the task of carrying out an investigation into midrash as a literary form for the purpose of delineating its primary characteristics, constructing a definition in terms of them and finding genuine pre-rabbinic examples. In the course of the work he thus describes midrash;

Rabbinic midrash is a literature concerned with the Bible; it is a literature about a literature. It is a work that attempts to make a text of scripture understandable, useful, and relevant for a later generation. It is the text of scripture which is the point of departure, and it is for the sake of the text that the midrash exists. The treatment of any given text may be creative or non-creative, but the literature as a whole is predominantly creative in its handling of the biblical material. The interpretation is accomplished sometimes by rewriting the biblical material, sometimes by commenting upon it. In either case the midrash may go as far afield as it wishes provided that at some stage at least there is to be found some connection, implicit or explicit, between the biblical text and the new midrashic composition. At times this connection with the text may be convincing, at times it may be desperate; it is sufficient merely that a connection be there. Frequently the midrashic literature is characterised by careful analysis of and attention to the biblical text.

With regard to midrash in the NT Wright believes that Mat. 1-2 cannot be regarded as midrash since the biblical citations "seem to be used not to direct attention to the Old Testament material so that it might be explained but to explain the person of Jesus".

This study of Wright occasioned a review essay by Roger Le Déaut in Biblica in 1969, which was later translated into

English and published in Interpretation in July 1971: "Apropos a Definition of Midrash".<sup>7</sup> One of R. Le Déaut's major objections to Wright's approach was the practical reduction of midrash to a literary genre. For Le Déaut midrash is much more. "Midrash," he writes<sup>8</sup>,

"is part of a specific 'mental constellation' in which it is endowed with an emotional and religious charge which, we think, obliges us to reserve to it exclusively its traditional meaning. But it is a very broad meaning which has been adopted by the Jewish and Christian scholars who have dedicated the most important studies to it. Midrash is in effect a whole world which can be discovered only by accepting its complexity at the outset. It is pervasive throughout the whole Jewish approach to the Bible, which could in its entirety be called midrash. Technique and method cannot be separated, even if they lead to different literary genres. Midrash may be described but not defined, for it is also a way of thinking and reasoning which is often disconcerting to us."

With regard to Wright's observation that midrash must always have the Scriptures as its point of departure, Le Déaut notes the "Copernican revolution" in this regard brought about by Christ. "The first (Christian) oral tradition and the Gospels effected a complete reversal of the situation. The radical point of reference is Christ" (citing C. Perrot).

The use of the category midrash in NT studies continued during the decade that followed, and so too did attempts to clarify the concept itself. The vagueness of the term as now being used continued to cause problems. Of them more recent attempts to clarify the situation I may instance the essay of Gary Porton and Philip Alexander. Gary Porton published his first approach to the subject in "Midrash: Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period" in Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (vol.19.1) and again in a revised form under the title "Toward a Definition of Midrash" in Ancient Judaism (ed. J. Neusner, New York, Ktav, 1981, 55-92). Porton begins

his study with the words: "The scholarly study of midrash is only in its infancy". He notes some of the attempts that have been made to define midrash and the variety of distinctions and subdistinctions made. He instances the Jewish scholar Meir Gertner's distinction between covert midrash in which neither the scripture text, the midrashic idea nor the midrashic technique is defined or mentioned, and overt midrash in which the verse, idea and most often the technique are explicitly stated. He also notes J. Sanders' similar opinion and various other views on what midrash is or is not, commenting that it is difficult to bring these various comments made on midrash into relationship with one another. His own definition of midrash is as follows:

"In brief I would define midrash as a type of literature, oral or written, which stands in direct relationship to a fixed canonical text, considered to be authoritative and the revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, and in which this canonical text is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to."

Before he comes to discuss the different midrashic collections, as he sees them, Porton makes the point that the Torah was not the sole source of religious authority before 70 C.E. During the intertestamental period there were two possible sources of authority, two parallel but possibly conflicting paths to God: the priesthood/Priestly traditions and the Torah. Until the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. it is likely that the former were more important. Before 70 there was some limited midrashic activity in Palestine, and we have little to suggest that the creation of midrash was of central importance for Palestinian Jews before the first century of our era. Going on his own understanding of midrash, he takes it that post-biblical midrash includes more than rabbinical collections, three more classes in fact, i.e. biblical translation (with targums as an example), the rewriting of the biblical text (the most important example being the Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum) and the Qumran pesharim.

In his 1983 work Midrash in Context. Exegesis in Formative Judaism (Fortress Press) Jacob Neusner notes Porton's work and cites his definition of midrash given earlier, with the comment:<sup>10</sup>

That definition encompasses a vast range of Judaic and early Christian literature - as Porton says, "a broad area of activity....". The definition is, in his words, "broad enough to include a large variety of treatment of the canonical texts and traditions, and yet narrow enough to distinguish this activity from other literary activities."

Since Neusner professes that he find these statements accurate, in the body of his work (despite the title!) he cannot use the word midrash at all, since he addresses the genre of writing and thinking known as midrash in only one context, namely that of rabbinic Judaism. In another part of his work Neusner notes that "the range of definitions of the word midrash, of the modes of exegesis encompassed within that word (as well as those excluded by it, if there are any), of the sort of books that constitute midrash (and those that do not) - these are so vast as to make the word by itself, more of a hindrance than a help in saying what we mean".<sup>11</sup>

Thus has it come about in half a century that a term so typical of rabbinic Judaism as midrash is avoided because it has come to mean so many things. In recent years some Christian scholars have tended to deny the existence of midrash in the New Testament, in part it would appear for the reason that the term had connotations of the unhistorical.

In 1982 Philip S. Alexander read a paper on "Midrash and the Gospels" at the Gospel Conference, Ampleforth, York, the first part of which was published under the title "Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament" in 1983.<sup>12</sup> This was originally intended as a preamble to the body of his study and is concerned to identify and define in a general way some of the weaknesses still in evidence in many New Testament scholars' handling of rabbinic literature, for

instance the state of the Jewish text being used, the understanding of the texts, the problems of dating the texts, the accuracy of the attributions of sayings to a given rabbi, the "massive and sustained anachronism" on the part of many New Testament scholars in their use of rabbinic sources, who time and again quote texts from the 3rd, 4th or 5th centuries A.D., or even later, to illustrate Jewish teaching of the 1st century, and finally parallelomania.

The body of his paper, "Midrash and the Gospels" appeared in 1984.<sup>13</sup> He notes the confusion concerning the definition and states the principles that "the correct procedure in the definition of midrash should be to isolate a core of midrashic texts; to examine these texts in order to discover their characteristics, and then to consider the question of whether there are texts outside the corpus which possess the same features". In establishing a corpus of midrash on which to base our investigation, he notes, priority should be given to early rabbinic literature, since midrash as a technique term in modern scholarship was borrowed from rabbinics, having been first applied to rabbinic literature. He believes it is necessary to make a distinction between midrashic form and midrashic method. Texts such as Bereshit Rabba are in midrashic form and exemplify midrashic method, wher as the Targum, for example, could be described as midrashic in method, but with regard to form must be classed as translation.

Dr. Alexander goes on to speak of the darshan, i.e. the Jewish teacher involved in the midrashic explanation of Scripture and of the means used to achieve the aims of midrash. The darshanim had a whole array of techniques: word-play, etymology, numerical value of words. He notes the middot (hermeneutical rules) of Hillel, Ishmael, and Eliezer ben Yose Ha-Gelili, remarking that if these were intended as actual rules for midrash of Scripture, they bear little relationship to the actual exercise of midrash as that is known to us from the texts.

He highlights four general characteristics of early rabbinic Bible exegesis, showing little sympathy for the

"crypto-midrash" of certain New Testament scholars, i.e. an interpretation of some unquoted text of Scripture. In this section he notes that the darshanim felt that they were working within a definite, on-going, tradition of scholarship. They seemed to regard themselves primarily as transmitters of the tradition.

After his definition or description of midrash he asks whether in the light of it, it is possible to identify midrash outside rabbinic literature. He is inclined to say, No: midrash is best confined to early rabbinic Bible exegesis. The differences he perceives between the rabbinic and the non-rabbinic texts are more important than the similarities. To call these other, non-rabbinic, interpretations of the Bible midrash is, in his mind, highly tendentious. The only effect of a lack of discrimination between Bible exposition in such texts as Chronicles, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Enoch, Jubilees, Philo, Josephus the LXX and Targumim, the Qumran Pesharim, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, is to evacuate midrash of any real meaning: midrash becomes simply a fancy word for "Bible Interpretation". If midrash means no more than this, then it would be advisable to drop the term. Dr. Alexander finishes his section on midrash proper by noting that the way forward lies in trying to define these distinctive styles of Bible interpretation, rather than in treating them as an undifferentiated mass.

While we can but admire Dr. Alexander's efforts to show up the problems involved and attempt to bring some clarity to bear on the issues, I find it difficult to agree with a number of his statements and positions. We could probably agree that it is best, for the moment at least, to cease to use the term midrash except when rabbinic midrash is concerned. But we have seen that Dr. Neusner will not use it even for rabbinic literature, given the prevailing imprecision of the term. But if we refrain from using the term in contexts other than rabbinic tradition, I believe this will have to be from expediency rather than principle. However we define midrash, it must be a definition deriving

from the nature of the reality and not by reason of race or religion. Should, for instance, a rabbi Saul produce midrash as a Jew, he should be able to do likewise as a Christian apostle Paul. Similarly with individual midrash items, midrashic technique. Even if in origin these are or were Jewish, "rabbinic" (if the term can be used for first-century Judaism), the first converts to Christianity were converts from Judaism: from Pharisaism, possibly even from rabbinism if this can be accepted as already existing. It would be hard to deny that such converts would not have continued to think and approach the Bible in the former "midrashic" frame of mind. And apart from these questions of principle, it is a fact (or appears to many as a fact) that certain sections of the New Testament are extremely similar to, or are identical with, features of Jewish literature ordinarily described as midrash. Whatever of the terminology, we must continue to find a solution for such phenomena. And briefly with regard to "covert midrash" or "crypto-midrash" - whatever our attitude to the terms, we cannot ignore the NT evidence. We have, for instance, in the NT a text saying that Jesus arose or was raised from the dead on the third day "in accordance with the Scriptures". We also have in rabbinic literature a series of texts which interpret biblical occurrences of the expression "the third day" as salvific, and include in their treatment Hos. 6:2 in this and as referring to the resurrection from the dead. Belief in a resurrection after three days might then be the crystallisation of much midrashic activity over a long period of reflection, even though no single Biblical text is cited with regard to it. The important matter is whether there are such phenomena in the Bible, in the New Testament in particular. How we designate them, whether as "covert midrash", "crypto-midrash" or in some other way, is a different issue.

We can probably agree with Gary Porton that the scholarly study of midrash is only in its infancy. One way forward may be to take the phenomena as one of the manners in which a religious, reflective, people continued to articulate for itself the implications of its belief in a



living God, to be more deeply understood as its religious beliefs were becoming more refined. This, however, means studying the phenomena involved in midrash within a theological rather than a literary context.

##### 5. Jacob Neusner's Midrash in Context

We have already spoken of this work in which the term midrash appears in the title but is of set purpose omitted in the text. It is but one of the numerous works of Professor Neusner, whose views of rabbinic Judaism must be taken into account in any attempted use of its material in New Testament studies. The work itself is part of a trilogy on The Foundations of Judaism: Method, Teleology, Doctrine. This first volume is on Method. Volume two on teleology is entitled, Messiah in Context; volume three on doctrine to be entitled Torah: From Scroll to Symbol in Formative Judaism. The volume Midrash in Context treats first of the Mishnah, completed about 200 C.E. and its position with regard to the Scriptures. The author writes: "...the framers and philosophers of the tradition of the Mishnah came to Scripture when they had reason to. That is to say, they brought to Scripture a programme of questions and inquiries framed essentially among themselves. So they were highly selective" (p.27). The other classical works of rabbinic Judaism are seen as being determined by the Mishnah. "...three different kinds of literature flow from the Mishnah and refer to it. One, Tosefta, supplements to the Mishnah, is a wholly dependent, secondary, and exegetical form, in which the Mishnah provides the whole frame of organisation and redaction for all materials, and in which citation and secondary expansion of the statements of the Mishnah define the bulk, but not the whole of the work. The next, Sifra, exegeses of Leviticus, focuses not upon the Mishnah but upon Scripture and proposes to provide a bridge between the two. Sifra, and to a lesser degree, Sifre on Numbers and Sifre on Deuteronomy, fall into this second category". The two talmuds, of course, comment on the Mishnah and in chapter 4 Professor Neusner compares the structure of Genesis Rabbah ("the document universally regarded as

the first compilation of exegeses accomplished within the rabbinical circles in particular with the treatment of Mishnah in the Palestinian Talmud. The final chapter is on "Revelation, Canon and Scriptural Authority" in Judaism. Here special emphasis is given to the position of the rabbi or sage. "The issues of the status of the exegeses of Scripture collected in the documents at hand, the relationship of the collections themselves to the 'established canon' the issue of revelation after Scripture - these are to be resolved only when we know the status, in Heaven and on earth, and the standing, in the context of Torah, of the sage" (p.128). "In the authority of the rabbi we should uncover warrant for the inclusion of the compilations of exegeses of Scripture into the Torah's canon. In the supernatural standing of the rabbi, we should perceive grounds for regarding the exegeses themselves as torah, revelation, within the Torah" (ibid). "The sages of the Talmud recognized no distinction in authority or standing - hence, in status as revelation - between what the Mishnah said and what the written Torah said. They also used the same processes of validation to demonstrate that what they themselves declared enjoyed the same standing and authority as what they found in the written Torah. So their intent always was to show there in fact were no gradations in revelation". (p.135). The final section of the work, before the Appendix, is entitled: "The Rabbi as Word Made Flesh". The author writes: "Scripture and the Mishnah govern what the rabbi knows. But it is the rabbi [emphasis in original] who authoritatively speaks about them. The simple fact is that what rabbis were willing to do to the Mishnah is precisely what they were prepared to do to Scripture - impose upon it their own judgment of its meaning. This fact is the upshot of the inquiry now completed. It also is the sole fact we have in hand for the identification of the context midrash in formative Judaism...It is the source of the authority of the rabbi himself that turns the figure of the rabbi. The rabbi speaks with authority about the Mishnah and the Scripture. He therefore has authority deriving from revelation. He himself may participate in the processes of revelation (there is no material difference). Since that is

so, the rabbi's books, whether Talmud to the Mishnah or midrash to Scripture, is torah, that is, revealed by God. It also forms part of the Torah, a fully 'canonical' document. The reason, then is that the rabbi is like Moses, 'our rabbi', who received torah and wrote the Torah.....So in the rabbi, the word of God was made flesh..." (pp.136-137).

6. Eskil Franck, Revelation Taught. The Paraclete in the Gospel of John

There is one final work, with a bearing on our subject, which I would like to present here. It is a doctoral dissertation, with the title as given above, presented to the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala in 1985, published in the Coniectanea Biblica. The New Testament Series 14, Lund, 1985, and distributed by Liber, S-205 10 Malmo, Sweden. The work is thus summarised in an abstract circulated with the work itself:

"The subject of this dissertation is the concept of the Paraclete and the saying about it in the Gospel of John. The purpose is to avoid a one sided approach which is dominant in much previous research, i.e. the location of the Paraclete's background in one specific area from which its function and meaning is determined. Instead, a multidimensional model is presented where proper proportions are assigned to the forensic aspect, the aspect regarding the farewell-situation, and the didactic aspect, the didactic aspect taken as the dominant with regard to the content."

The validity of this model is then investigated by examining the various functions ascribed to the Paraclete. The presupposition for this examination is that the Paraclete is what he does, i.e. that his function not origin, is of primary importance. Having confirmed the validity of this model, the investigation goes on to show that there is a 'triad' involved in didactic authority in the Gospel of John, i.e. an interrelation between Jesus, the Paraclete and the Beloved Disciple. The absent Jesus is represented by the Paraclete, who, in turn, is embodied in the Beloved

Disciple and legitimates him. The Gospel of John itself, as the result of the Beloved Disciple's activity, is seen in this context as the initial work of the Paraclete. The next question taken up is that of a possible background and model for such a didactic activity. Scriptural interpretation and exposition in the service of the synagogue is focused upon and the relevance of its 'Midrashic attitude' is emphasized. This context suggests a particular official, Methurgeman, as phenomenologically possible concrete background for the concrete and personal presentation of the Paraclete. The viability of this proposal follows as the result of the investigation and is not a presupposition for it.

Franck has given us a work that merits careful study. It is also interesting in that he has not been deterred in his researches by the doubts cast on the use of such categories as midrash and Methurgeman (which would be regarded as "post-NT period" by some) in his effort to find a possible background and model for what the Gospel of John has to say on the activity of the Paraclete.

## 7. Conclusion.

The foregoing analysis of certain trends and books illustrate, I trust, that the Jewish studies as background to the New Testament have entered a new and more serious phase. We can confidently expect that many more studies on the same lines will follow in the years ahead.

## Notes:

1. Major reviews of this work by: J.B. Caird in *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978), 538-43; Jerome Murphy O'Connor, in *Revue Biblique* 85 (1978), 122-26; J. Dunn in *The Bulletin of the John Ryland's Library* (1983), 95ff. The second work received a review article by Tom Perdun in *Heythrop Journal* 17 (1986), 43-52.

Notes (contd)

2. Published in Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association (1985), 19-35.
3. G. Vermes, *op.cit.*, p.9.
4. Jacob Neusner, "Sanders Paul and the Jewish People" JQR 74, (1983-84) 416-423.
5. See especially chapter six: 'How revolutionary was Galilee'; *op.cit.*, pp.208-255.
6. *Op.cit.*, p.74; cited by Le Déaut who adds the italics.
7. Interpretation 25 (1971), 259-282.
8. Art. cit., (Interpretation), 268f.
9. Art. cit., (1981), p.62.
10. Neusner, *op.cit.*, p.XVII.
11. *Op.cit.*, p.XVI
12. 'Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament', *ZAW* 74 (1983), 237-246.
13. 'Midrash and the Gospels', in C.M. Tuckett, ed., *Synoptic Studies (The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983)*, Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1984, pp.1-18.