

## Chapter 3

### *Jewish Hermeneutics*

There are certain hermeneutical rules for interpretation of the biblical text, usually enumerated according to the order established by Rabbi Ishmael, who formulated thirteen principles for interpretation. --Adin Steinsaltz

Chapter 2 reviewed aspects of Christian hermeneutics relevant to the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. It concluded with a summary of those specific hermeneutical presuppositions and principles adopted by me for this task. Here in Chapter 3 Jewish approaches to the interpretation of the Tanakh (Old Testament) are reviewed. The goal is to determine where the system of hermeneutics used in this book coincides with, and where it differs from, the various hermeneutical practices within Judaism. I argue that the exegetical method used by traditional Jewish scholars, past and present, to determine the **פְּשָׁט** (*peshat*)--the literal, grammatical meaning of the text--is essentially the same as that used by conservative Christian scholars, past and present.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Ezra**

Ezra is generally recognized as the first interpreter of the Tanakh, specifically the Torah (Five Books of Moses or Pentateuch), in the sense in which the word *interpreter* is used today. Menachem Elon states,

The process of exegesis began immediately after the law-giving, since in turning to the Written Law [the Torah or Pentateuch] the halakhic scholars necessarily had to have recourse to various modes of interpretation for the purpose of its elucidation and application to the new problems that arose. However, the earliest clear literary references to exegetical activity only date back to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>2</sup>

Adin Steinsaltz gives additional detail:

Ezra, who was a priest and scribe, is the first sage, of all those who studied and interpreted Torah and taught the people, to be identified by name. It was said of him that he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given" (Ezra 7:6), and the task he undertook became the mission of all the teachers who came after him. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach in Israel statutes and judgment" (Ezra 7:10). He was, therefore, the precursor of the age of the anonymous scribes, the period known in Jewish history as the era of the *Knesset Gedolah* (the Great Assembly).<sup>3</sup>

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1 The transliteration of the Hebrew into English in this chapter is not entirely consistent. Different sources cited or used as a reference at times use different conventions for transliteration and are in general printed here as in the original source. **א** and **ב** are sometimes transliterated in the usual way ( ' and ' , respectively) and other times are not transliterated at all (e.g., *Aboth* rather than 'Aboth). **ב** may be rendered as *f* or *ph*, final **ת** as *t* or *th*, and the feminine singular as *-a* or *-ah*.

2 Menachem Elon, "Interpretation," *EncJudaica*, VIII:1416; brackets added.

3 Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, trans. Chaya Galai (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 14; italics original. The

This period corresponds approximately to the period of Persian rule over Judea (ca. 539-332 B.C.). The early scribal periods, beginning with Ezra, are reviewed in the following section.

## The Scribal Periods

### The Sopherim

The *sopherim* (or *soferim*) were "a specific class of scholars," beginning with Ezra.<sup>4</sup> According to a number of scholars:

- There was an era of the *sopherim*
- These *sopherim* founded the Great Assembly
- This body enacted numerous traditions and *halakhoth*.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars disagree: "Though the Talmud does mention regulations by Ezra and by the men of the Great Synagogue, it does not attribute any decrees or *halakhah* to scribes between Ezra and the tannaitic era."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the Mishnah tractate *'Aboth* makes no reference to the *sopherim* or to "generations" of *sopherim*.

Therefore, these scholars conclude that there was no "era" of the *sopherim*. The word *sopher* (singular of *sopherim*) then, would simply be "a general designation for Torah scholars and copyists from various eras."<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, it remains useful to delimit this period between Ezra and the beginning of the next period (the period of the *zugoth*). The limits are generally taken to be from Ezra to Simeon the Just, "who was the last of the

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Great Assembly is also known as the Great Synagogue. A number of Jewish sources link the beginnings of the Great Assembly to the account in Nehemiah 8-10 (for a list of these sources, see Daniel Sperber, "Synagogue, The Great," *EncJudaica*, XV:629).

- 4 Yitzhak Dov Gilat, "Soferim," *EncJudaica*, XV:79-80. *Sopherim* (Heb., סופרים) is the plural of *sopher* (Heb., סופר), meaning *enumerator*, *secretary*, *scribe* (*BDB*, p. 708). It is used in the Tanakh many times (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25; 1 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 22:3; 1 Chron. 18:16; Jer. 26:24; 36:11). From Ezra 7:6, 10, 12, Neh. 8:1-8 the word apparently took on a somewhat different meaning that involved interpreting and teaching the law. According to Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 411, based on the assumption that the Artaxerxes in Ezra 1:7 was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-424 B.C.), then Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem in the seventh year of "the king" (7:8) would be 457 B.C.; Nehemiah arrived in the king's twentieth year, or 445 B.C. (Neh. 2:1).
- 5 Gilat, "Soferim," XV:80. The words *halakhah* (plural, *halakhoth*) and *haggadah* (plural, *haggadoth*) are defined in the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "Types of Rabbinic Literature" later in this chapter.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid. This general sense perhaps represents its usage in the Gospels, translated by the Greek γραμματεὺς; see, e.g., Matt. 2:4; 5:20; 7:29; 9:3.

men of the Great Assembly.<sup>8</sup> Thus the approximate dates, 400 to 200 B.C., are useful to delimit this period.<sup>9</sup>

Although some scholars deny that a "Great Assembly" ever existed,<sup>10</sup> others except it as historical. However, according to Steinsaltz,

The exact nature of the Great Assembly is unclear; it may have been a permanent institution with legislative and executive powers, or merely the generic name for all the scholars of a given period. In fact, with few exceptions, the names of the sages and outstanding personalities of this age are unknown.<sup>11</sup>

Daniel Sperber makes a similar observation:

The institution of the Great Synagogue, or perhaps, more accurately, the Great Assembly, belongs to that period of Jewish history which is still virtually a complete blank, namely the Persian period. Hence, very little is known of it with real certainty.<sup>12</sup>

According to Steinsaltz, much material had accumulated over the centuries, namely, "oral traditions that included interpretations, customs, and legal precedents."<sup>13</sup> The Great Assembly organized this material to facilitate systematic transmission.<sup>14</sup> It also created new ordinances for the Second Temple period (516 B.C. and following). This included regulations governing behavior in many spheres of life.<sup>15</sup>

In regard to the oral traditions and new ordinances, Hermann Strack, although with some reservations about the

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8 Ibid., XV:79-80. The reason for Ezra as the *terminus a quo* of this period is that according to Daniel Sperber, "Synagogue, The Great," XV:629, statements he cites from the Talmud, Midrashim, and Targumim make it appear "that traditionally the idea of the Great Synagogue [Great Assembly] was linked with the narrative in Nehemiah 8-10, where its earliest beginnings are suggested." The reason for Simeon the Just as the *terminus ad quem* is that in the Mishnah tractate *'Aboth*, he is mentioned as "one of the survivors [or remnants] of the Great Assembly" (Uriel Rappaport, "Simeon the Just," *EncJudaica*, XIV:1566). However, there is some uncertainty as to his exact identity. One view, going back at least to Josephus (*Ant.* 12:43), is that Simeon the Just is Simeon I, a high priest 310-291 B.C. (or possibly 300-270 B.C.). Sperber, "Synagogue, The Great," XV:629, argues that the evidence is stronger for Simeon II, 219-199 B.C. It is also possible to extend this period to Antigonus of Sokho, a student of Simeon the Just. Sperber suggests that the statement in *'Aboth* 1:4, that Yose b. Joezer and Yose b. Johanan "received from them" and not "from him," a reference in *'Aboth* 1:3 to Antigonus of Sokho, "possibly means that they still received traditions directly from the 'remnants of the Great Synagogue.'" According to Moshe David Herr, "Antigonus of Sokho," *EncJudaica*, III:67, "Antigonus represents the link in the chain of tradition between Simeon the Just, his teacher, and the *Zugot*."

9 Isidore Epstein, "Talmud," *IDB*, IV:512, takes the close of the period of the Sopherim to be ca. 270 B.C.

10 Sperber, "Synagogue, The Great," XV:629, cites Keunen.

11 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 14. The term "sages" (Heb., סְבִימִים) used in this citation is a general term. Ephraim Urbach, "Sages," *EncJudaica*, XIV:636, writes that the sages were "those men who molded every sphere of life of the Jewish people and influenced their comprehension of their past, their hopes, and their future aims. The sages flourished from the beginning of Second Temple times until the Arabian conquest of the East [A. D. 634 - 750], a period which spanned the days of Hasmonean rule and the sway of Rome and its governors, the Jewish War (66-70/73 C.E.) and the destruction of the Second Temple, the autonomous leadership of the *nesi'im*, in Erez Israel, and the emergence of a powerful Diaspora both in the Greco-Roman world and in the Jewish center in Babylonia. The term sages embraces the men of the Great Synagogue, the scribes (*soferim*), members of the Sanhedrin, *nesi'im*, heads of the academies, Pharisees, *hasidim*, mystics, and haverim."

12 Sperber, "Synagogue, The Great," XV:629.

13 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 15.

14 "They are said to have introduced the classification of the Oral Law into three fields of study, that of Midrash (in the broadest sense of the word), *halakhot*, and *aggadot* (TJ, Shek. 5:1, 48c [Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Shekalim*])" (Sperber, "Synagogue, The Great," XV:630). These three terms are defined in the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "Types of Rabbinic Literature" later in this chapter. For a brief discussion of the Oral Law, see the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "The Oral Torah" later in this chapter.

15 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 15.

Great Assembly, has this comment:

The Law found in the Torah of Moses was the only written law which the Jews possessed after their return from the Bab [Babylonian] exile. This law was neither complete nor sufficient for all times. On account of the ever-changing conditions of life new ordinances became necessary. Who made these we do not know. An authority to do this must have existed; but the claim made by many that after the days of Ezra there existed a college of 120 men called the "Great Synagogue" cannot be proved....

What was added to the Pentateuchal Torah was for a long time handed down orally, as can be plainly seen from Jos [Josephus] and Philo....

A comprehensive collection of traditional laws was made by Rabbi Akiba c 110-35 AD, if not by an earlier scholar. His work formed the basis of that of the Rabbi Mē'ir, and this again was the basis of the ed [edition] of the Mish [Mishnah] by Rabbi Jehūdāh ha-Nāsī'.<sup>16</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this book to argue the issues involved, but the following working hypotheses are accepted.

- The oral "traditions"<sup>17</sup> originated for the most part in the period beginning with Ezra.<sup>18</sup>
- These traditions were observed and promoted by the Pharisees<sup>19</sup> and were in the New Testament called the "tradition of the elders."<sup>20</sup>
- They were passed on and likely grew in the pharisaical schools of Hillel and Shammai.
- They were finally codified by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (ca. A. D. 200) to form the Mishnah.<sup>21</sup>

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16 Hermann L. Strack, "Talmud," *Old ISBE*, V:2905; brackets added. Strack writes in his *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1931), p. 9, "We need not, of course, accept the Jewish traditional opinion that there existed in those early days [from Ezra onward] a body of 120 men called the 'Great Synagogue,' since it is held by modern scholars quite plausibly that the notion is a pure invention resting on the account in Neh. 8-10." Concerning the date for Rabbi Meir, it is known that Rabbi Akiba (b. ca. 50) was executed by the Romans at the conclusion of the disastrous Bar Kokhba revolt, which took place from A. D. 132-135. One estimate for Rabbi Meir is ca. 110 - ca. 175.

17 The Hebrew noun for *tradition* is מְסֻרָה (*masoret*). It is used only once in the Tanakh, Ezek. 20:37, meaning *bond*, in the phrase "bond of the covenant" (*BDB*, p. 64). According to Leon Yagod, "Tradition," *EncJudaica*, XV:1309, "In the talmudic literature, the term *masoret* is used to include all forms of tradition, both those which relate to the Bible and those which concern custom, law, historical events, folkways, and other subjects." Legal, binding tradition is given the special name *halakhah*, and the traditions related to the vocalization (vowel points) and punctuation of the Hebrew text is called *masorah*. *Halakhah* and *haggadah* are defined in the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "Types of Rabbinic Literature" later in this chapter.

18 See the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "The Oral Torah" later in this chapter.

19 The Pharisees were probably the successors of the Hasidim ("pious ones") (see Robert Wyatt, "Pharisees," *ISBE*, III:826; Matthew Black, "Pharisees," *IDB*, III:776; Harold W. Hoehner, "Hasideans," *ISBE*, II:621). The Hasidim played a major supportive role in the Maccabean revolt (168-165 B.C.) and are mentioned in 1 Maccabees (e.g., 2:42; 7:10-18). The earliest point in history where the Pharisees appear is during the reign of John Hyrcanus I (135-104 B.C.) taking part in an event referred to by Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XIII.10.5. See J. E. H. Thomson, "Pharisees," *Old ISBE*, IV:2362; Black, "Pharisees," III:779; Wyatt, "Pharisees," III:826; Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 92.

20 See Mark 7:5. The word translated "tradition" in this text is the Greek word παράδοσις (*paradosis*). Josephus, *Ant.* XIII.10.6, describes the Pharasaic ordinances in similar language: "What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers."

21 The Mishnah is discussed in more detail in the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "The Rabbinic Literary Works" later in this chapter. For a brief argument that "the tradition of the elders" promoted by the Pharisees became the basis

## The Zugoth

The *zugoth*<sup>22</sup> were five great pairs of legal scholars and teachers during the period from Antigonus of Sokho to Johanan ben Zakkai.<sup>23</sup> The first four pairs are as follows.<sup>24</sup>

- (1) Yose ben Joezer and Yose ben Johanan (during the time of Antiochus IV, also called Antiochus Epiphanes, 174-164 B.C.)
- (2) Joshua ben Perahyah and Nittai the Arbelite
- (3) Judah ben Tabbar and Simeon ben Shetah (during the time of Alexander Yannai (103 B.C. - 76 B.C.) and his queen Salome Alexandra)
- (4) Shemaiah and Abtalyon (during the time of Herod the Great; 74/73 B.C. - 4 B.C.)

The fifth and probably greatest pair of teachers was Hillel<sup>25</sup> (ca. 60 B.C. to ca. A. D. 20) and Shammai (ca. 50 B.C. to ca. A. D. 30), both Pharisees.<sup>26</sup> The approximate dates for the period of the *zugoth* would then be 200 B.C. to A. D. 10.

## The Tannaim

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of the *halakhah* codified in the Mishnah, see my book, *Upon this Rock: A New Look* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012), pp. 226-30. See also the section "Rabbinic Literature," subsection "The Oral Torah" later in this chapter. What is beyond dispute is that "after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, it was the Pharisees who were able to survive and to rebuild Judaism, because almost by definition their faith was relevant to any situation; for years they had been studying Torah in such a way that it did not depend on a particular place. It could survive without the Temple. Pharisaism flowed directly into Rabbinic Judaism, and the rabbis (the scholars and teachers) were the direct successors of the Pharisees" (John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture* [Cambridge: University Press, 1969], p. 42).

- 22 The Hebrew noun זוגות (*zugoth*) is the plural of זוג (*zug*) meaning *pair*. Thus, the *zugoth* are five successive pairs of scholars.
- 23 This period description is based on Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, "Zugot," *EncJudaica*, XVI:1232. He adds, "According to a mishnaic tradition [Hag. 2:2], the first of each *zug* was the *nasi* ('elected head of the Sanhedrin'), the second the *av bet din* ('elected second to the *nasi*')...None of the extant sources helps to classify the exact significance of these titles or of the functions associated with them" (p. 1233). The words themselves, *nasi* means "prince," and *av bet din* means "father of the law court." Concerning Johanan ben Zakkai, *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, in an entry reproduced as "Johanan ben Zakkai" in *EncJudaica*, X:148-54, updated by the editorial staff, refers to Johanan as a "*tanna* and leading sage at the end of the Second Temple period and the years following the destruction of the Temple [A. D. 70]" (X:148). Thus he probably became active shortly after the deaths of Hillel and Shammai, whose deaths ended the period of the *zugoth*. "Johanan's chief activity was directed to spreading the knowledge of the Torah (RH 18a; Yev. 105a); but while regarding its study the aim of man's life, he warned that this did not justify claiming any credit for oneself: 'If you have learnt much Torah, do not ascribe any merit to yourself, since it was for this that you were created' (Avot 2:8)" (X:150). It is interesting to compare this statement with that of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 3:27-4:5: "Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law....What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." The article in *EncJudaica* relates another point of interest about Johanan: "There is clear evidence that Johanan was the first sage to engage in mysticism" (X:151).
- 24 Urbach, "Zugot," XVI:1232-33.
- 25 It is still debated whether Hillel was the grandfather of Gamaliel I, the teacher of Paul (Acts 5:34; 22:3); see Robert Wyatt, "Hillel," *ISBE*, II:716.
- 26 Wyatt, "Pharisees," III:826. A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1949), p. xxii, writes that "Hillel exemplified the Pharisaic standpoint at its best."

The *tannaim*<sup>27</sup> were the Rabbinic<sup>28</sup> sages from Hillel to the compilation of the Mishnah by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi,<sup>29</sup> thus spanning the approximate dates A. D. 20 to 200.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the schools of Hillel and Shammai, both pharisaic schools, represent the beginning of the *tannaim*.

According to Steinsaltz, "It was in this period of individualization that the title of rabbi was created for those scholars who received official appointments, while others who did not receive *semikhah* (ordination) continued to be known by their names alone."<sup>31</sup> He also notes that Hillel and Shammai, the last of the *zugoth*,

were responsible for a new phenomenon in Jewish life--the evolvement of the two schools that bore their names (*Bet [house of] Hillel* and *Bet Shammai*). Despite all the controversies that raged between them, both schools fell within the traditionally accepted framework of Judaism. The halakhic disputes between them continued for many generations until the House of Hillel finally prevailed.<sup>32</sup>

However, "the debates between the schools of Hillel and Shammai set in motion new debating processes among the rabbinic teachers of first- and second-century Palestine, the *tannaim*."<sup>33</sup>

The greatest accomplishment of the tannaitic period is the compilation of the Mishnah by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, "a work second in importance and sanctity only to the Torah."<sup>34</sup> The Mishnah was the first work of Rabbinic

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27 The Aramaic noun תַּנַּיִם (*tannaim*) is the plural of תַּנַּי (*tanna*), which in turn is from the Aramaic verb *teni* meaning *to hand down orally, to study, to teach* (Daniel Sperber, "Tanna, Tannaim," *EncJudaica*, XV:798), "a variant of the Hebrew verb, שָׁנָה " (*shanah*; Epstein, Talmud, IV:512), meaning *to repeat, to do again* (BDB, p. 1040). In this chapter, the word *tannaim* is used to refer to those scholars who lived from the end of the period of the *zugoth* up to the compilation of the Mishnah. However, the word was actually used in two senses: the *historical* and *functional*. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 49, n. 5, writes, "In the historical sense it applied to those scholars who lived before the publication of the Mishnah and to that period in general; in the functional sense it is applied to the skill and to the action of reciting oral material, and to the professional 'reciter'. In some cases a *tanna* in the latter sense also became a *tanna* in the former, but there remained a distinct group of professional 'reciters'."

28 *Rabbi* is derived from the biblical Hebrew noun, רַב (*rab*), meaning *chief* (BDB, p. 913), although it is not used as a title in the Tanakh. In mishnaic Hebrew it is used in the sense of *master* as opposed to *slave*. It was first used for the title of the sages in the generation after Hillel, thus putting its origin at the beginning of the tannaitic period. Thus, the title literally means *my master*. The passage in Matt. 23:6-7 where the Scribes and Pharisees are criticized because they "love...being called Rabbi by men" might imply its recent introduction. See "Rabbi, Rabbinat," *EncJudaica*, XIII:1445, an article written by the editorial staff.

29 "Judah the Prince." In biblical Hebrew the noun נָשִׂיא (*nasi*) means *one lifted up, a chief or a prince* (BDB, p. 672). In post-biblical Hebrew it came to be used for the position that today might be called "president" of the Sanhedrin. In modern Hebrew it means *president* as the term "president" is used in English today. For a review of the history of the title *ha-Nasi*, see Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 56, n. 3. Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi was one of the most revered rabbis in Jewish history. *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, in an entry reproduced as "Judah ha-Nasi" in *EncJudaica*, X:366-72, refers to him as "patriarch of Judea and redactor of the Mishnah" (X:366). Continuing (X:366-67), "He is referred to also as 'rabbenu ha-kadosh' ('our holy teacher') or simply as 'Rabbi.' Judah was the son of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel and the seventh (or sixth?) generation descended from Hillel, having been born, according to an aggadic tradition, 'on the day that R. Akiva died' [A.D. 135] during the Hadrianic persecutions (Kid. 72b). Both his contemporaries and later generations held him in veneration, and regarded him as the savior of Israel, as much as Simeon the Just, Mattathias the Hasmonean, and Mordicai and Esther (Meg. 11a)...His mastery of the vast volume of tradition, his great application to his studies (Ket. 104a), his humility (Sot. 9:15), coupled with self-confidence, sound judgment, and a rule that was based on a strict discipline (Ket. 103b), combined to give authority to his leadership and an undisputed status to the patriarchate." Interestingly, he also gave precedence to Hebrew over Aramaic, as indicated in his remark, 'What has the Syrian tongue to do with Eretz Israel? Speak either Hebrew or Greek' (BK 82b-83a)" (X:370).

30 This period description is based on Sperber, "Tanna, Tannaim," XV:798.

31 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 25.

32 Ibid. (italics original; brackets added).

33 Louis Jacobs, "Halakhah," *EncJudaica*, VII:1163, section "Development of Halakhah."

34 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 32. Similarly, Jacobs, "Halakhah," VII:1163, section "Development of Halakhah":

Judaism and represents its basic halakhic document, "in which were summarized all the legal debates and decisions of the *tannaim*."<sup>35</sup>

The view taken in this chapter is that the *tannaim*, in addition to forming many decisions of their own, inherited the body of *halakhah* that had been developing since the time of Ezra.<sup>36</sup> If this view is accepted, then the Mishnah is a collection of the *halakhoth* developed since roughly the time of Ezra and edited into a final form by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi.

### The Amoraim

The *amoraim*<sup>37</sup> were scholars active from the compilation of the Mishnah until the completion of both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud, thus spanning the approximate dates A. D. 200 to 500.<sup>38</sup> Their activities centered on the interpretation of the Mishnah, and their halakhic decisions were considered of equal authority to those of the *tannaim*.<sup>39</sup>

The title, *Gemara*, is applied to the body of discussions and elaborations by the *amoraim*. The Mishnah and Gemara together comprise the *Talmud*.<sup>40</sup>

## Introduction to Jewish Hermeneutics

According to Richard Longenecker, there were four presuppositions shared by all Jewish interpreters in the first century.<sup>41</sup> He writes,

Jewish interpreters, no matter how different their exegetical methods, were agreed on four basic points....These are matters that were axiomatic to all Jewish exegetes no matter what other allegiances they may have espoused or whatever interpretive procedures they may have employed...<sup>42</sup>

These presuppositions are summarized by Longenecker as follows:<sup>43</sup>

1. Jewish interpreters "held in common a belief in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. This meant for them that the words of the Bible had their origin in God and were in fact the very words of God."<sup>44</sup>

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"Once the Mishnah had been compiled it became a sacred text second only to the Bible."

35 Jacobs, "Halakhah," VII:1163, section "Development of Halakhah."

36 See the conclusion of the subsection "The *Sopherim*" in the section "The Scribal Periods" earlier in this chapter.

37 The Aramaic noun אַמּוֹרָאִים (*amoraim*) is the plural of אַמּוֹרָא (*amora*) meaning *sayer* or *speaker*. *Amora* was "used originally for the 'interpreter,' who communicated audibly to the assembled pupils the lessons of the rabbinic teacher. It was later applied as the generic term for the rabbis of the post-mishnaic period...Even in that period the *amora* as teacher continued to employ *amoraim* as his spokesmen. The *amora* stood by the teacher when he lectured. It was primarily to him that the rabbi spoke and he, in turn, conveyed those words to the audience" (Shmuel Safrai, "Amora," *EncJudaica*, II:863).

38 This period description is based on Shmuel Safrai, "Amoraim," *EncJudaica*, II:865.

39 *Ibid.*, II:867.

40 The Gemara and Talmud are discussed in more detail in the section, "The Rabbinic Literary Works," later in this chapter.

41 Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975). There is always a certain danger in citing a Christian theologian to give a summary of some aspect of Judaism. However, Longenecker is a scholar of the highest order, and this summary of presuppositions is given in his opening chapter, "Jewish Hermeneutics in the First Century." That chapter is well researched and in a real sense forms the basis of his entire book. Therefore, the accuracy of this citation has a high degree of confidence.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

43 *Ibid.*

44 In addition to Longenecker's assessment, Rimon Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1988), p. 548, offers a similar affirmation. First, in the common title for Scripture, *Kitvei ha-Kodesh* (e.g., *M. Shabbat* 16:1; *M. Yadayim* 3:2; *T. Yadayim* 2:19; 14:6), some scholars take

2. "They were convinced that the Torah (whether the Written Torah alone or both Written and Oral) contained the entire truth of God for the guidance of man. The transmitted texts, therefore, for the Jew of the first century, were extremely rich in content and pregnant with many meanings."<sup>45</sup>
3. "Because of the many possibilities of meaning in the texts, Jewish interpreters viewed their task as one of dealing with both the plain or obvious meanings and the implied or deduced meanings."
4. "They considered the purpose of all biblical interpretation to be the translating into life of the instruction of God--that is, to make the words of God meaningful and relevant to the people in their present situations."

In Chapter 2 on Christian hermeneutics, the possibility of multiple meanings of a given text was rejected. The question addressed in this chapter, however, is what hermeneutical principles and practices were used by Jewish scholars to determine the **פְּשָׁט**, the "plain or obvious meaning" of a text.

## Literature Exhibiting Jewish Methods of Exegesis

Longenecker lists the following literary sources that display the various exegetical or hermeneutical methods used in the first century for interpreting the biblical text.<sup>46</sup> However, one source, Rabbinic literature, is so large a topic that it is given its own section after the following list.

### The Septuagint

The Septuagint (LXX)<sup>47</sup> is the first translation of the Scriptures into another language (Greek) and dates from the third and second centuries B.C.<sup>48</sup> Despite what the *Letter of Aristeas*<sup>49</sup> claims about the origin of the LXX, modern scholars agree that it "arose from the liturgical and educational needs of the large Jewish community in Alexandria, many of whom had forgotten their Hebrew or let it grow rusty and spoke only the common Greek of the Mediterranean world."<sup>50</sup>

The LXX is listed here because all translations involve interpretation to some degree. In the case of the LXX and Targumim, however, the intent was rather deliberate. Since Ezra, "the emphasis in translation was on understanding, [and] there was a tendency right from the start to express meaning rather than be scrupulously literal."<sup>51</sup> Thus the LXX frequently "explained" Hebrew words or phrases. For example, at Exodus 28:30 (Heb., 28:26), "Urim" and "Thummim" are translated *δήλωσης* (*dēlōsis*, *illumination*) and *ἀλήθεια* (*alētheia*, *truth*), respectively. In Psalm 8:5 (Heb., 8:6), *ἄγγελοι* (*aggelous*, *angels*) is used for **אֱלֹהִים** (*elohim*, *gods*). "The most

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*Kodesh* to be a name of God, making the phrase mean "the writings of God," while other scholars take it to mean *holy*, making the phrase mean "sanctified or sacred writings." Either way, the Scriptures are associated with God and distinguished from all other writings. Kasher also notes that "the books of the Bible were considered [by the Sages] as dictated, written, and edited with divine inspiration."

45 For example, in B. Sanh. 34a it is stated, "In R. Ishmael's School it was taught: And like in hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces: i.e., just as [the rock] is split into many splinters, so also may one Biblical verse convey many teachings." The reference is to Jer. 23:29. This tractate was translated by Jacob Shachter under general editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein; taken from [come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin](http://come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin).

46 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 20-28.

47 The Greek translation of the Tanakh, probably completed by the end of the second century B.C. (John W. Wevers, "Septuagint," *IDB*, IV:276).

48 Bruce M. Metzger, "Important Early Translations of the Bible," *BSac* 150 (January-March 1993):36-37.

49 A letter, date unknown, that claims to be written by a certain Aristeas, an official in the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) who has personal knowledge of the origin of the LXX.

50 Metzger, "Important Early Translations of the Bible," pp. 37-38.

51 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 5; brackets added.

common changes were to avoid anthropomorphisms, as might be expected,<sup>52</sup> but [the] LXX was also prepared to make alterations to avoid difficulties and in the interests of doctrine."<sup>53</sup> However, the LXX is not of much use in determining the actual exegetical methods used in first-century Judaism.

### The Targumim

The *Targumim*, plural of *Targum*,<sup>54</sup> are Aramaic interpretive translations of the Tanakh and exist for every biblical book except for Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel.<sup>55</sup> According to Bernard Grossfeld,

The Jewish diaspora in Babylonia must have exchanged Hebrew for Aramaic as its vernacular in only a few generations. In Palestine the process was much more gradual, but Aramaic was probably the language of the majority of Jews there before the end of the Persian period. During the period of Persian domination (539-333 B.C.E.), Aramaic was the language of the Persian administration and the lingua franca of southwestern Asia....The custom of interpreting the synagogue reading of the Bible text with the Targum after each verse (or after each three verses) in the presence of the congregation, so as to permit a translator to repeat it in Aramaic, is attested in the Mishnah.<sup>56</sup>

Concerning the nature of the translation, Grossfeld continues,

The Targums as a whole are not always primarily literal translations of the corresponding Hebrew text; they are often intermingled with various paraphrases and aggadic supplements such as one meets in exegetical or homiletic works like the Talmud and Midrash. They also contain explanations and alterations adapted to secure the sense of the masoretic text current among the rabbinical authorities, offering it to the people in an intelligible form. In this period the main feature of Jewish criticism and exegesis was the anxiety to remove or tone down all references to God that could lead to misunderstanding in the popular mind. The Targum thus contains various devices to obviate the appearance of a very distinct anthropomorphic character of God.<sup>57</sup>

### The Targumim

followed the Hebrew text verse by verse, but they incorporated in their representation of the text a great deal of explanation and interpretation....The Targums, therefore, lie half-way between the LXX (which incorporated interpretation but remained relatively close to the Hebrew text) and those works which set out to retell the biblical narrative in their own words...[such as] Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, or Pseudo-Philo....The Targums lie half-way between those two extremes: they make an attempt to represent the text verse by verse but at the same time they introduce into it extensive and often far-ranging interpretations. The reason for that half-way position is simple: the origin of the Targums is closely connected with the synagogue.<sup>58</sup>

The use of the Targumim in the synagogue services did not imply that the Hebrew text was being altered or changed. The Hebrew text had already been read, and the purpose of the Targum was "to make the text

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52 For example, "and they saw the God of Israel" in Exod. 24:10 was paraphrased as "and they saw the place where the God of Israel had stood."

53 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 5; brackets added.

54 The Hebrew noun תַּרְגּוּם (*targum*) and its plural, תַּרְגּוּמִים (*targumim*), come from the verb תַּרְגַּם, meaning *to interpret, to translate* and used as a passive participle, מְתַרְגָּם, in Ezra 4:7 (*BDB*, p. 1076). Thus *Targum* means *translation*. Neither the singular nor plural nouns are used in biblical Hebrew, and the verb is used only in Ezra 4:7.

55 Bruce M. Metzger, "Versions, Ancient," *IDB*, IV:750. Note that Ezra and Daniel already contain large sections written in Aramaic (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Dan. 2:4b-7:28). The only other Aramaic in the Tanakh consists of two words in Gen. 31:47 and the verse Jer. 10:11.

56 Bernard Grossfeld, "Bible, Translations, Ancient Versions," *EncJudaica*, IV:841.

57 *Ibid.*, IV:842.

58 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 8-9; brackets added.

meaningful and to bring home its significance to the congregation."<sup>59</sup>

Concerning their date of composition, none of the Targumim, according to Longenecker, "can with certainty be dated to pre-Christian or Christian times" and all of them "evidence varying textual traditions both between them and within them."<sup>60</sup> Jewish tradition has it that the Targumim were transmitted orally since the time of Ezra, but there is no evidence that any were actually committed to writing before around A.D. 200.<sup>61</sup> However, Longenecker expresses caution regarding the origin and date of the Targumim, while he also stresses their importance for biblical studies:

A great deal of work remains to be done in dating, collating and interpreting Targumic materials....Nonetheless, informed opinion believes that the Targumic traditions that have been codified into our existing written Targums represent Palestinian and Babylonian Jewish hermeneutics of a very early time, possibly coming from various pre-Christian synagogues. As such, they are of great significance to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis.<sup>62</sup>

The Targumim are important to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis precisely because they are not mere translations but rather paraphrases that involve interpretation to bring out the meaning of the text for those who listened to them in the synagogues. As Bowker points out, however,

It cannot simply be assumed that the surviving written Targums are identical with the earliest targums as actually rendered in synagogues throughout the Jewish world, or that there was one standard targum, rendered everywhere in the same form. In fact what seems probable is that attempts *were* made to standardize the Aramaic rendering, but that these attempts belong to the second or third centuries onward. There seems no doubt at all that these attempts to move toward a standard rendering drew on existing and far older traditions, but at present the evidence is lacking through which a *direct* connection might be established...between the existing written Targums and the targum as it might have been rendered in synagogue in the earliest days.<sup>63</sup>

The best known Targumim are Targum Onkelos<sup>64</sup> on the Torah and Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel on the prophets (the Former Prophets, Joshua to Kings, and the Latter Prophets, Isaiah to Malachi). Both are referred to in the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>65</sup> According to Gleason Archer, Targum Onkelos was codified by Jewish scholars in Babylon in the third century A.D. and Targum Jonathan in the fourth century A.D., again in Babylon,<sup>66</sup> but this is far from certain.<sup>67</sup> Most scholars, however, seem to agree that Onkelos

is the most literal translation of the Pentateuch. The text from which it was prepared was in all essentials

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59 Ibid., p. 13.

60 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 22.

61 Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 49. This statement by Archer is limited to the extant paraphrastic Palestinian Targumim originating in the synagogues and preserved through Rabbinic effort, for on p. 38 he earlier had referred to a Targum of Job found in cave 11 at Qumran (11QtgJob), which obviously predates A.D. 200 by at least two centuries. Consistent with this distinction, Bradford H. Young argues that "one must take care *not* to identify the Targums surviving today with those of antiquity [from Qumran]" ("Targum," *ISBE*, IV:729; emphasis original and brackets added). He further argues that the Qumran Targumim probably originated in Mesopotamia in the 2nd or 3rd centuries B.C.

62 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 22.

63 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 14.

64 According to Metzger, "Important Early Translations of the Bible," p. 40, n. 8, "Though the name Onkelos corresponds to Aquila, there is no reason to ascribe this Targum to the Aquila who made a literalistic Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in the second century." However, according to Harry Freedman, with the editorial staff, "Akiva," *EncJudaica*, II:490, Aquila, one of the students of Rabbi Akiba, translated the Bible into Greek in the spirit of Akiba's teachings, and that "the standard Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch, Targum Onkelos, invariably reflects Akiva's halakhic rulings."

65 Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 3a (Grossfeld, "Bible, Translations, Ancient Versions," IV:842, 847).

66 Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 49-50. Metzger, "Important Early Translations of the Bible," p. 40, suggests that they were both "in use in the third century of the Christian era."

67 See, e.g., the discussion by Bernard Grossfeld, "Bible, Translations, Ancient Versions," IV:842-44, 846-47, and Young, "Targum," IV:729-30, 732.

the masoretic one. The principal objective was to conform the Targum as closely as possible to the original text, and the grammatical structure of the Hebrew was thus followed closely.<sup>68</sup>

Targum Jonathan is more paraphrastic than Targum Onkelos.<sup>69</sup>

Its style is very similar to that of Targum Onkelos, especially in the Former Prophets--the historical narratives....Poetic passages are drastically paraphrased (e.g., Judg. 5; I Sam. 2:1-10). The same holds true for difficult passages, where paraphrasis is specially employed in an attempt to explain the Hebrew text (cf. I Sam. 15:23; 17:8; II Sam. 14:11; 20:18). The rendering in the Latter Prophets is more paraphrastic on the whole than the Former Prophets, which is to be expected in view of their more exalted and rhapsodic style (cf. Targum Jonathan's amplification of the Heb. text of Isa. 29:1 and Jer. 10:11; for instances of *aggadah* in this Targum see Isa. 12:3; 33:22; 62:10; Micah 6:4).<sup>70</sup>

Though the Targumim were translations of Scripture with explanatory paraphrases, they occasionally engaged in what is called *converse translation*, in which the Aramaic text contradicts the Hebrew text.<sup>71</sup> However, since this phenomenon is not illustrative of Jewish methods of interpretation, further discussion of converse translation is not relevant to this chapter.

### The Apocalyptic Writings

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are two types of literary works dating from the period of the Second Temple (516 B.C. to A.D. 70).<sup>72</sup>

The Talmud includes both Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha under the name *Sefarim Hizonim* ("extraneous books"). The Apocrypha, for the most part, are anonymous historical and ethical works, and the Pseudepigrapha, visionary books attributed to the ancients, characterized by a stringent asceticism and dealing with the mysteries of creation and the working out of good and evil from a gnostic standpoint.<sup>73</sup>

Of special interest are the apocalyptic books, which are part of the Pseudepigrapha. Longenecker comments,

The apocalyptic writings of Judaism...have some bearing on the question of early Jewish exegesis, for in their interpretive retelling of the biblical stories and their extensions of the biblical teachings they reflect some of the nonconformist exegetical principles of the day.<sup>74</sup>

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68 Grossfeld, "Bible, Translations, Ancient Versions," IV:844. For a dissenting opinion, see Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 23, though he does agree that Onkelos "is much closer to being a straightforward translation than the other recensions of the Palestinian Targum, staying as it does much closer to the Hebrew text..." (p. 24).

69 Young, "Targum," IV:732.

70 Grossfeld, "Bible, Translations, Ancient Versions," IV:847.

71 Metzger, "Important Early Translations of the Bible," p. 42, gives an example from Targum Onkelos. The correct translation of what Cain says in Gen. 4:14 is this: "Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden" (NASB). The Targum changes it to this: Behold, you have driven me this day from upon the land, but it is not possible to be hidden from you."

72 Yehoshua M. Grintz, "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," *EncJudaica*, III:181. The classic work on this literature is R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913); it contains introductions and translations of many of these works. The Greek plural adjective *apocrypha* means *hidden* or *concealed* and refers to non-canonical religious writings in the Jewish and Protestant canons of Scripture. 1 Esdras and 1 Maccabees are well-known examples. In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church canonized some of the apocryphal books at the Council of Trent in 1546. The Greek plural noun *pseudepigrapha* means *false writings* and refers to writings whose authorship is falsely ascribed to figures from the past; the name *pseudepigrapha* does not have reference to the content of the writings. The book of 1 Enoch is a well-known example and is even cited in Jude 14-15. It is also of interest that this book "contains some eschatology on the subject of the preexistent Messiah" (Grintz, III:183).

73 Grintz, "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," III:181-82.

74 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 26.

However, since the type of exegesis represented here lies outside the standard practices of Rabbinic Judaism, this issue is not further discussed.

### The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Sect<sup>75</sup> was a separatist Jewish community who considered itself a divinely elected group living in the final generation before the Messianic age and also who considered various prophecies of the Tanakh to speak directly of them. Although the community lived in a number of different locations, it is identified with the area of Qumran near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. It was in the nearby caves that most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between the years 1947 and 1956. The sect probably began in the early part of the first century B.C. and was likely destroyed by the Romans shortly before or shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70.<sup>76</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of about 600 identifiable manuscripts. Roughly one-fourth of the manuscripts are biblical texts, with every canonical book represented except Esther, making the discovery at Qumran extremely important for textual criticism.<sup>77</sup> However, more important for the study of early Jewish hermeneutics is the discovering of a number of biblical commentaries. The most important is the commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHb), but commentaries were also found on Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Psalm 37.

F. F. Bruce gives the following brief definition of the method of biblical interpretation practiced in the Qumran sect. It is called *peshet*<sup>78</sup> and "in the usage of the Qumran texts [it is] an inspired application of biblical prophecies to the circumstances of the end of days."<sup>79</sup> Again according to Bruce, *raz*<sup>80</sup> and *peshet* are common terms in the Qumran literature. Perhaps their use was based on a similar pattern in the Aramaic portions of the Book of Daniel.<sup>81</sup> Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a *raz*, a divine mystery or secret (Dan. 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30), and Daniel was given the *peshet*, the interpretation, by God (2:26, 30, 36, 45). In an analogous way, those of the Qumran sect considered a biblical prophecy to be a divine *raz* which could be interpreted correctly only by a divine *peshet* given to the Teacher of Righteousness, the organizer of the Qumran community.<sup>82</sup> "Not until the

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75 This summary is based on the article by Jacob Licht, "Dead Sea Sect," *EncJudaica*, V:1408. According to Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 26, the "vast majority of scholars" take the Dead Sea Sect to be a segment of the Essenes, and Licht agrees that this is the "preferred" view among scholars.

76 According to William LaSor, "Dead Sea Scrolls," *ISBE*, I:895, the dates are approximately 140 B.C. to A.D. 68.

77 The famous Isaiah Scroll (1QIs<sup>a</sup>) contains all sixty-six chapters of Isaiah. All the other biblical MSS are partial manuscripts. These texts represent copies of the Hebrew Bible about 1000 years older than the oldest copy previously known (A.D. 980). Regarding the Isaiah Scroll, Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 38, "This important text belongs to the same manuscript family as the Masoretic Text (MT). Only occasionally does it favor a Septuagint (LXX) reading, and most of its deviations from the MT are the result of obvious scribal lapses..." He concludes (p. 41), "Nothing in the new discoveries from the Qumran caves endangers the essential reliability and authority of our standard Hebrew Bible text, as represented for example in the Kittel editions of *Biblia Hebraica*."

78 The Hebrew noun פִּשְׁתִּי (*peshet*) means *solution* or *interpretation* and is used only in Eccl. 8:1 (*BDB*, p. 833). It corresponds to the Aramaic noun פִּשְׁתָּא (*peshar*) of the same meaning and used 31 times in the Aramaic portion of Daniel (Dan. 2:4, 5, 7:16; et al.; *BDB*, p. 1109).

79 F. F. Bruce, "Peshet," *EncJudaica*, XIII:331; brackets added. Note that Bruce, the author of this article in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, is a well-known Christian scholar of the highest order.

80 The Aramaic noun רַז (*raz*) means *secret* and is a Persian loanword used 9 times in the Aramaic portion of Daniel (*BDB*, p. 1112).

81 Bruce, "Peshet," XIII:331.

82 F. F. Bruce, "Teacher of Righteousness," *EncJudaica*, XV:885. The Teacher of Righteousness is mentioned in the Book of the Covenant of Damascus as well as various Qumran commentaries on books or sections of the Bible. Scholars have proposed many identities and dates for him but without any consensus. LaSor, "Dead Sea Scrolls," I:893, makes the following suggestion: "Therefore the Teacher must be recognized as one of the significant leaders in the community, probably the most significant of its spiritual leaders in its earlier days, and possibly the only spiritual leader of any stature in the entire history of the sect."

two parts of the revelation, the *raz* and the *peshet*, are brought together is its meaning made plain."<sup>83</sup> Bruce summarizes the three basic principles of Qumran interpretation as follows:<sup>84</sup>

- (1) God revealed His purpose to the prophets, but did not reveal to them the time when His purpose would be fulfilled; this further revelation was first communicated to the Teacher of Righteousness.
- (2) All the words of the prophets had reference to the time of the end.
- (3) The time of the end is at hand.

Bruce adds that "knowledge of the context of the prophet's own day, which a modern exegete would regard as indispensable for understanding his message, was irrelevant."<sup>85</sup> For example, if Isaiah prophesied the downfall of Assyria, the reference was not the Assyria of Isaiah's day but to the great Gentile powers oppressing God's people of the end time.

In conclusion, the *raz-peshet* motif in biblical interpretation can be defined as follows:

PESHER INTERPRETATION: the divine intent of the prophets, the *raz* (mystery) that God revealed to them, cannot be understood until its *peshet* (interpretation) has been revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness.

Such an approach to interpreting the Bible must be summarily dismissed, and it has no parallel to anything in mainline Rabbinic literature.<sup>86</sup>

## Philo

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C to ca. A.D. 50), as a representative of hellenistic Judaism, is also an important source for the study of early Jewish biblical exegesis. There are thirty-eight extant works of Philo, and thirty-one of those are commentaries on the five books of the Torah or discussions of topics in the Torah.<sup>87</sup>

Philo is the name most often associated with Jewish allegorical interpretation of the OT.<sup>88</sup> However, he did not originate this method of interpretation, nor was he the last to practice it.<sup>89</sup> What is the motivation for an allegorical interpretation of Scripture?

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83 Bruce, "Peshet," XIII:331. As an example, the following is found in the Habakkuk Commentary (1QpHab. 7.1-5, on Hab. 2:1ff.): "God commanded Habakkuk to write the things that were coming on the last generation, but the fulfillment of the speech He did not make known to him. And as for the words, that a man may read it swiftly [Hab. 2:2]; their interpretation (*peshet*) concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries (*razei*) of the words of His servant the prophets" (cited by Bruce, "Peshet," XIII:331; brackets added).

84 Ibid. "Peshet," XIII:331. See also Bruce's lengthier discussions in F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959) and *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 70-79.

85 Ibid., "Peshet," XIII:331.

86 Incredible as it may seem, many New Testament scholars believe the the NT authors actually employed a *raz/peshet* method of interpreting the Old Testament in their citations from it. The *peshet* revelation that revealed the deeper meaning of the OT text is, according to this view, the revelation received by the NT writers. Although I believe, as do all conservative Christians, that the NT authors were divinely inspired to write the NT documents, my view on this issue is that the NT writers used no such method when interpreting and citing the OT.

87 "A vast range of writings by Philo has been preserved by the Christian Church in the original Greek, others in Armenian translation" (Yehoshua Amir, "Philo Judaeus [Philo of Alexandria]," *EncJudaica*, XIII:410; brackets original).

88 Among the Church Fathers, the name most often associated with allegorical interpretation is Origen (ca. 185-254), who was also from Alexandria. This method of exegesis dominated in the Christian church until the Reformation, with only a few exceptions such as the Syrian school at Antioch.

89 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.; original publication date, 1890), p. 614; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 47-48.

The allegorical explanation could come into existence only among a people possessed of sacred books, and only at a time when the spokesmen and leaders of that nation had already chosen for their possession another philosophy than that presented by the literal meaning of the written revelation.<sup>90</sup>

For Philo, as an Alexandrian Jew, this philosophy was hellenism. He was greatly influenced by both Stoic and Platonic ideas, and his goal was to vindicate the Jewish Scriptures and theology before the court of Greek philosophy. In pursuit of this goal, he did occasionally use literal interpretation, but his primary method was an allegorical interpretation.

Philo usually treated the Old Testament as a body of symbols given by God for man's spiritual and moral benefit, which must be understood other than in a literal and historical fashion. The *prima facie* meaning must normally be pushed aside--or even counted as offensive--to make room for the intended spiritual meaning underlying the obvious; though...at times he seems willing to consider literal and allegorical exegesis as having "parallel legitimacy." In the main, however, exegesis of Holy Writ was for him an esoteric enterprise which, while not without its governing principles, was to be dissociated from literal interpretation.<sup>91</sup>

A similar assessment is given by Jewish scholar Yehoshua Amir:

This series [*Legum allegoriarum* or "Allegorical Interpretation"], consisting of 18 exegetic treatises (others being lost), parallels the first 17 chapters of Genesis, completely disregarding their narrative content and transposing them by way of allegorization into a set of abstract philosophical-mystical concepts, connected by a free play of associations with a wealth of motifs, brought together from all parts of the Pentateuch.<sup>92</sup>

To understand this method, it is important to distinguish between a *literary allegory* and *allegorical interpretation*. A literary allegory is an extended metaphor, as a parable is an extended simile. It is intentionally constructed by its author of the text to communicate a message under concrete or material forms. Allegorical interpretation, by contrast, can be defined as follows:

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION: the reworking of a passage, which has a *prima facie* meaning intended by its author, in such a way as to bring out another hidden, symbolic meaning.<sup>93</sup>

## Rabbinic Literature

### Maintaining the Relevance of the Torah<sup>94</sup>

Beginning with Ezra and the postexilic period, the foundations of Judaism, perhaps more than any time during Israel's history as a nation, were centered on the Torah (the five books of Moses) and Scripture in general. However, it had been over 1200 years since God gave the Torah to Israel through Moses. The continuing relevance of the Torah during the period of the Second Temple depended on how it could be kept applicable to ongoing generations living during ever-changing times. The Pharisees emerged during the second century B.C.

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90 Gförer, *Philo und die alexandrinische Theosophie*, I:69, cited by Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 611.

91 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 46.

92 Amir, "Philo Judaeus (Philo of Alexandria)," XIII:410; brackets added.

93 Adapted from Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 49, n. 111. Here are two examples of allegorical interpretation from Philo. (1) On planting the garden paradise in Eden (Gen. 2:8), Philo commented as follows: "Virtue is called a Paradise metaphorically, and the appropriate place for the Paradise is Eden; and this means luxury; and the most appropriate field for virtue is peace and ease and joy, in which real luxury especially consists" (cited by Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 613). (2) The Mosaic dietary laws allowed Israel to eat animals that "divide the hoof" (e.g., Lev. 11:3). About this, Philo said, "For the division of the hoof and the separation of the claws are intended to teach us that we must discriminate between our individual actions with a view to the practice of virtue" (cited by Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 47).

94 I am indebted to John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 40-43, for this summary.

as the group determined to maintain the total relevance of the Torah to everyday life for every succeeding generation.<sup>95</sup> This meant unceasing study of the Torah to determine its interpretation when it seemed to have lost its relevance. However, this must be done without altering it: the Torah was the revelation of God for all time and the solution to any problem must be found within the text itself. The interpretive problem was to apply past revelation to the present.

The two classic and basic methods for achieving relevance was through the use of *gezeroth* and *taqqanoth*.

- A *gezerah*<sup>96</sup> was a rule or enactment for a particular local or limited purpose; it was a temporary measure often canceled when there was no longer a need for it.
- A *taqqanah*<sup>97</sup> was a modification or reinterpretation that carried the force of law.

However, over time a much wider and more general work of study and interpretation emerged. These interpretations became so numerous and detailed that they covered not only actual situations as they occurred, but virtually any situation that could be imaged. The interpretations and decisions were never arbitrary but took into account the work of previous scholars, thus demonstrating the importance of tradition in Pharisaic Judaism. A large body of traditional teaching was built up, which came to be known as the Oral Torah. Most important for the study here is that during this Pharisaic period formal rules of exegesis and interpretation began to emerge. These culminated in the *middoth* of Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael.

### Types of Rabbinic Literature

The Rabbinic writings represent a vast body of material. However, they can be organized by type. The four terms used to describe Rabbinic literature are *halakhah*, *haggadah*, *midrash*, and *mishnah*. According to John Bowker, these terms can be defined broadly as follows:<sup>98</sup>

- *Halakhah* and *haggadah* describe the two types of *content* of Rabbinic literature.
- *Midrash* and *mishnah* describe the two types of *method and form* of Rabbinic literature.

Each of these four terms is briefly explained before the actual literature itself is discussed.

### *Halakhah*

The word *halakhah* (plural, *halakhoth*)<sup>99</sup> was first used during the tannaitic period and was originally applied to a specific law or legal decision. Although this use continued, the word came to be used as "a generic term for the

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95 For more information on the Pharisees, see footnote 19 in this chapter.

96 According to *BDB*, p. 160, the Hebrew verb גָּזַר (*gāzar*) in the Qal stem can mean *to decree*. Thus the noun *gezerah* (not used in biblical Hebrew) could mean *decree* (Menachem Elon, "Takkanot," *EncJudaica*, XV:714).

97 The Hebrew verb תָּקַן (*tāqan*) in the Piel stem means *to make straight* (*BDB*, p. 1075). According to Elon, "Takkanot," XV:713, the noun תִּקְנָה (not used in biblical Hebrew) means *directive*.

98 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 40.

99 The Hebrew noun הֲלָכָה (*halakhah*) comes from the verb הָלַךְ (*halak*), *to walk* (*BDB*, p. 229), thus meaning *the path* or *the way of walking*. By extension, the idea becomes *walking according to the law* or simply *law*. According to Isidore Epstein, "Halachah," *IDB*, II:512, this use of the noun is based on Exod. 18:20: "Then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do." It is also of interest to note the term is used by the Pharisees in Mark 7:5. The Pharisees and scribes ask Yeshua (Jesus), "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?" The Greek verb used by Mark translated "walk" is περιπατέω. The equivalent Hebrew verb would be הָלַךְ, from which, as just stated, the noun הֲלָכָה or *halakhah* comes.

whole legal system of Judaism, embracing all the detailed laws and observances,"<sup>100</sup> or as described by Isidore Epstein, "the authoritative Jewish way of life as expressed in moral law and ritual precept."<sup>101</sup> Thus, as a type of Rabbinic literature, *halakhah* refers to religious rules and regulations.

### *Haggadah*

The word *haggadah* (sometimes written *aggadah*; plural, *haggadoth* or *aggadoth*)<sup>102</sup> is usually defined in a negative manner as "that portion of rabbinic teaching which is not *halakhah*, i.e., which is not concerned with religious laws and regulations."<sup>103</sup> On the positive side, the following can be said:

- *Subject matter*: "The *aggadah* is for the most part an amplification of those portions of the Bible which include narrative, history, ethical maxims, and the reproofs and consolations of the prophets."<sup>104</sup>
- *Goal*: Epstein writes that *haggadah* consists of "all scriptural interpretation...which aims at the development of inner piety and religious devotion."<sup>105</sup>
- *Method of instruction*: Epstein further notes that the method of instruction "is by means of story, saga, legend, parable, homily, maxim, proverbs, and wise sayings."<sup>106</sup>

As is discussed in the next section, "Midrash," the term "Midrash *haggadah*" represents one sphere of study by the sages. However, that is not the only type of Rabbinic *haggadah*. Steinsaltz lists the following types of haggadic material.<sup>107</sup> Thus, as a type of Rabbinic literature, *haggadah* includes the following types:

- Midrashic *haggadah* as defined in the next section.
- Anecdotes about great men. Steinsaltz adds, "We should differentiate between legends about biblical figures and their activities (sometimes accompanied by suitable verses as evidence) and longer anecdotes and stories about the mishnaic and talmudic sages."
- "Material on theological and religious problems that cannot be included within the sphere of *halakhah*, such as the relations between man and God, or the coming of the Messiah."
- "Popular legends of the age, proverbs, and folk sayings, and since the scholars devoted attention to almost every subject under the sun, it is a potpourri of travel tales, philological questions, commercial advice, medical hints, and history."

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So in the view of the Pharisees, the general purpose of their "tradition" (*παράδοσις, paradosis*) is to "walk" (i.e., "live") in the manner prescribed by "the elders." Therefore, this manner of describing their tradition may have led to the use of *halakhah* in the later tannaitic period.

100 Jacobs, "Halakhah," VII:1156, section "Definition."

101 Epstein, "Halachah," II:512.

102 The Hebrew noun *הַגְּדָה* (*haggadah*), or with a weakening of the laryngeal, *הַגְּדָא* (*'aggadah*), comes from the verb *גָּדַד* (*nagad*), which in the Hiphil stem, *הִגְדִּיד*, means *to declare, to tell* (Strack, "Talmud," V:2904; *BDB*, p. 616). In post-biblical Hebrew *haggadah* came to mean *narrative* ("Aggadah," *EncJudaica*, II:354, a section of the article written by the editorial staff) or *narration* (Isidore Epstein, "Haggadah," *IDB*, II:509) or *lore* (Jacob Neusner, "Talmud," *ISBE*, IV:720).

103 "Aggadah," *EncJudaica*, II:354, a section of the article written by the editorial staff).

104 *Ibid.*

105 Epstein, "Haggadah," II:509.

106 *Ibid.*

107 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, pp. 253-54.

## Midrash

The word *Midrash* (plural, *Midrashim*)<sup>108</sup> is roughly equivalent to the English word *exegesis*.<sup>109</sup> and thus refers to the exegesis and interpretation of the Bible *in general*.<sup>110</sup> Isidore Epstein describes it as "the name given to that exegesis of the Bible which emanated from the rabbinic schools in ancient Palestine."<sup>111</sup> He continues,

Its aim was to elucidate the meaning of the text of Holy Writ, to penetrate into its inner significance, to deduce from it new laws and principles, and to establish by reference to it authentic religious and ethical doctrines.<sup>112</sup>

Therefore, *midrash* refers to a *method* of study (exegesis of Scripture) that produces two *types* of Rabbinic literature: *Midrash halakhah* and *Midrash haggadah*.

- *Midrash halakhah*: "the result of deriving a rule or law from a verse of Scripture"<sup>113</sup>

There are two important tasks that constitute *Midrash halakhah*: (1) showing the relationship of a rule in the Mishnah to a statement in the Torah and (2) deriving a rule not found in the Mishnah from a verse of Scripture.<sup>114</sup> Collections of halakhic *Midrashim* are discussed in the section, "Rabbinic Literary Works," later in this chapter.

- *Midrash haggadah*: the result of interpreting nonlegal passages of Scripture in an ethical or expository manner<sup>115</sup>

As a result of this use, the word *Midrashim* is now often used as a

term for those literary works, some of them quite ancient, which contain scriptural interpretation of the haggadic, more rarely of the halakic, character; often then *Midrash* is outright the title by which such a literary work is known.<sup>116</sup>

Collections of haggadic *Midrashim* are also discussed in the section, "Rabbinic Literary Works" later in this chapter.

A third type of midrashic literature is sometimes listed, although in one sense it does not represent a distinct type:

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108 The Hebrew noun מִדְרָשׁ (*midrash*) comes from the verb דָּרַשׁ (*darash*), which means *to resort to, to seek* (*BDB*, p. 205; cf. Lev. 10:16; Deut. 13:15; Isa. 55:6; et al.). This meaning of *darash* is also found in Rabbinic Hebrew (Moshe David Herr, "Midrash," *EncJudaica*, XI:1507). *Midrash* occurs in the Tanakh only twice: 2 Chron. 13:22; 24:27 defined simply as *study, exposition* by *BDB* (p. 205). According to Roland K. Harrison, "Midrash," *ISBE*, III:351, *Midrash* in 2 Chron. 13:22 and 24:27 is probably used in the sense of *annals* or *treatise* and not as it is used later in reference to rabbinic commentaries on biblical passages. In post-biblical Rabbinic usage, *darash* came to mean "'to search out a scriptural passage, expound it,' then also 'to find something by exposition' *Midrash* denotes... 'investigation'... 'exposition'" (Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 6).

109 "The English word 'exegesis' carries the same generic sense as the Hebrew word "Midrash" (Neusner, "Talmud," IV:720).

110 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 46.

111 Isidore Epstein, "Midrash," *IDB*, III:376.

112 *Ibid.*

113 Neusner, "Talmud," IV:720. Curiously, there seems to be another use of the term *Midrash halakhah* current among contemporary scholars. According to Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1423, *Midrash halakhah* can refer to the exegesis of "available halakhic material," apparently in contrast with exegesis of the Bible. He contrasts *Midrash halakhah* with *Midrash Torah*.

114 Neusner, "Talmud," IV:720. According to Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 15, it was the scribes of the Great Assembly "who evolved the basic methods of *midrash halakhah* (halakhic exegesis), that is, methods of learning and deriving *halakhah* from the biblical texts themselves..."

115 Harrison, "Midrash," III:351.

116 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 6. For example, *Bereshith Rabbah* (*Genesis Rabbah*) and *Midrash Rabbah* (*Great Midrash*).

- *Homiletic midrash*: sermons used in conjunction with synagogue lectionaries and containing large amounts of both halakhic and haggadic material based on the Torah and Haftarah<sup>117</sup> readings for that Sabbath.<sup>118</sup>

The section, "Rabbinic Literary Works," later in this chapter includes collections of homiletic midrash as well.

### Two Methods of Developing and Teaching *Halakhah*

The word *mishnah* is used in a number of senses in Rabbinic literature.<sup>119</sup> This section describes one of its uses, namely, to describe one of two methods of developing and teaching the *halakhah*, which became known as the *oral law*. *Mishnah* later became the name or title of the collection of oral laws compiled and codified by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (Judah the Prince) around A.D. 200. Between the time of Ezra and the end of the first century B.C., however, *Midrash* and *Mishnah* developed as two different methods of developing and teaching *halakhah*.

#### *Midrashic Method of Teaching Halakhah*

It was noted above that Midrash was an exegetical study of a text of the Bible to determine its meaning, a practice that began with Ezra.

The Midrash method was employed already by Ezra and his associates in the public reading of the Law which they held on that memorable convocation in the year 444 B.C., at which the Torah was enthroned supreme in the constitution of the new community of Judea [Neh. 8-10, shortly after completing the wall]. The Midrash method was followed by those generations of teachers who succeeded Ezra, the Soferim (סופרים, "bookmen," or "scribes"), whose activities came to a close ca. 270 B.C.<sup>120</sup>

It was also noted above that when the Midrashic method derived a law from a legal biblical passage, the result was called *Midrash halakhah*.

#### *Mishnaic Method of Teaching Halakhah*

However, a new method for the development and teaching of *halakhah* began with the *zugoth*.

After the Soferim came in succession the five "Pairs" (זוגות, *zûghôth*) of teachers, of whom the last and greatest were Shammai and Hillel (both at the end of the first century B.C.).

With the *Zugoth* a new method of teaching began to emerge as a rival to that of the Midrash--a method in which the oral law was taught without reference to the Holy Writ. This evidently represented a progressive method of teaching in that it enabled the teachers to put on the order of the day any such

117 Readings from the prophets.

118 Summarized from Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 72-74. Bowker also points out that adding a reading from the prophets to the Torah Scripture probably began before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

119 The Hebrew noun מִשְׁנָה (*mishnah*) comes from the verb שָׁנָה (*shannah*) meaning *to repeat, to do again* (BDB, p. 1040). However, in post-biblical Hebrew its meaning was expanded. According to Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, "Mishnah," *EncJudaica*, XII:93, "Under the influence of the Aramaic word *tanna*...it received the meaning of 'to learn,' and was applied specifically to studying the Oral Law..." Strack, "Talmud," V:2904, enumerates five ways in which *mishnah* was used: "(a) the whole of the oral law which had come into existence up to the end of the 2d cent. AD; (b) the whole of the teaching of one of the rabbis living during the first two centuries AD (*tannā'*, pl. *tannā'īm*); (c) a single tenet; (d) a collection of such tenets; (e) above all, the collection made by Rabbi Jehūdāh ha-Nāsi'."

120 Epstein, "Talmud," IV:512; brackets added.

subjects as they desired, without being tied to the sequence of biblical texts. It would still have been possible, while retaining the Midrash form, to trace back every oral teaching to its respective biblical source. That this course was not resorted to, it may be assumed, was a result of the attitude of the Sadducees, who, by employing the very text of the written Torah to attack the validity of the oral law, weakened the biblical warrant claimed in support of oral traditions and teachings. On the other hand, deprived of the aid to memory which the Holy Writ could supply, the oral law could be imparted and retained chiefly by means of repetition. Hence the name Mishna (משנה, lit. "repetition") was given to the new method of teaching; and Tannaim (from Aramaic תנא, *t'nâ*, a variant of Hebrew שנה, *shânâ*, "to repeat," "to hand down orally") was the name by which Mishna teachers became known.<sup>121</sup>

The Mishnaic method of teaching, however, did not replace the Midrashic.

The adoption of the Mishna method did not, however, oust altogether the older Midrash form. Not only was it allowed to retain the Haggadic field almost to itself, but even in the realms of Halachah its sway, though disputed, did not entirely cease, with the result that Midrash and Mishna continued to exist side by side as media for teaching Halachah.<sup>122</sup>

### The Predecessors of the Mishnah

According to Isidore Epstein, the history of attempts to compile halakhic teachings in Mishnaic form can be summarized as follows.<sup>123</sup>

- There is evidence of the existence of codified Mishnaic material during the days of the schools of Shammai and Hillel (ca. 50 B.C.), possibly even earlier.
- Rabbi Akiba (executed by the Romans in A.D. 135 after they suppressed the Bar Kochba revolt) assembled a collection of *halakhot*.
- This collection was further developed by Rabbi Akiba's student, Rabbi Meir (A.D. 110? - 175?).
- Rabbi Meir's collection became the basis for the definitive collection codified about A.D. 200 by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi and known simply as the *Mishnah*.

### The Rabbinic Literary Works

#### *The Mishnah*

Longenecker describes the Mishnah simply as "the basic halakic document" of Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>124</sup> Many of the *halakhoth* in the Mishnah have their origin in a *bet din*'s<sup>125</sup> decision.<sup>126</sup> Isidore Epstein has this to say about the content of the Mishnah:

[The Mishnah] presents a digest of the whole legal system governing Jewish life and action as taught and developed in the schools of Palestine throughout the period of the Soferim, Zugothe, and Tannaim up to the beginning of the third century that followed the rise of Christianity. Rabbi Judah's Mishna soon

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121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 23.

125 The phrase בֵּית דִּין (beth din, or bet din) literally means *house of judgment* but refers to a Jewish court of law.

126 Urbach, "Mishnah," XII:96.

gained wide recognition and became the authoritative canon of the oral law and the main basis of instruction and principal subject of study, investigation, and research for the schools, both in Palestine and in Babylon for several centuries.<sup>127</sup>

Although the Mishnah itself makes no direct reference to its own compilation or to Rabbi Judah's part in it, the compilation of the Mishnah is universally regarded as his work. It is divided into six *orders* (סדרים, *sedarim*), the orders are divided into *tractates* (or treatises; מסכתות, *massekhtoth*), 63 in all, and the tractates are divided in *chapters* (פרקים, *pereqim*), 523 in all.<sup>128</sup> References to passages in the Mishnah begin with the letter "M" followed by the name of the tractate in abbreviated form and then the chapter and verse. Thus, "M. Ber. i.1" refers to the Mishnah tractate *Berakoth*, the opening chapter and verse 1.

### *The Gemara*

As noted in the citation above from Isidore Epstein, the "study, investigation, and research" on the Mishnah by the Rabbinic schools, both in Palestine and in Babylon, continued for several centuries after its compilation. This work was performed by the *amoraim*, roughly spanning the period from A.D. 200 to 500. The results of this massive study of the Mishnah is recorded by the *amoraim* in the *Gemara*, one originating in Palestine and the other in Babylonia.<sup>129</sup> The language of both Gemara, though with some Hebrew sections, is primarily Aramaic, though the dialect in each case is different.

Describing these works is somewhat difficult. Solomon Schechter once described the Gemara as "a work too varied, too disconnected, and too divergent in its elements, to be concisely defined at all, or to be even approximately described within the limits of an English sentence."<sup>130</sup> Epstein, however, offers the following brief description:

Their endeavor was to interpret the Mishna, explain its obscurities, discuss its contents, trace back its teachings to the Bible, and harmonize contradictions in oral traditions as enumerated from different authorities or schools. Theirs was also the task of making final decisions of Halachah as well as formulating new Halachoth (legal judgments) in answer to problems which arose out of changed conditions of life. This intellectual activity of centuries was crystallized in the Gemara (Aramaic גמרא, "completion"), which, together with the Mishna of Rabbi Judah, constitutes the Talmud.<sup>131</sup>

The Gemara "primarily studied the Mishnah line by line, word for word."<sup>132</sup> Developing new *halakhoth* for "changed conditions of life" was singularly important, for according to Jacob Neusner,

The Mishnah's Israel is governed by an Israelite king, high priest, and Sanhedrin--a political world that for two centuries had existed, if at all, only in imagination or aspiration.<sup>133</sup>

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127 Epstein, "Talmud," IV:512; brackets added. It might be noted, however, that Rabbi Judah did not include all of the then current *halakhoth* in the Mishnah. Those remaining are called simply *beraitoth*, meaning "outside," "excluded," or "external." Many of the *beraitoth* were subsequently compiled in a secondary collection, "suuplement" to the Mishnah called the *Tosefta* ten or twenty years after Rabbi Judah's Mishnah. See Daniel Sperber, "Tanna, Tannaim," XV:799.

128 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, pp. 26-28.

129 The Aramaic noun גמרא (*gemara*) means *completion* or *tradition* ("Gemara," *EncJudaica*, VII:368, an article written by the editorial staff).

130 Cited by Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 64.

131 Epstein, "Talmud," IV:512.

132 Neusner, "Talmud," IV:719.

133 Ibid.

## The Talmud

The Talmud is comprised of the Mishnah and Gemara.<sup>134</sup> Its significance to Judaism cannot be overstated.

If the Bible is the cornerstone of Judaism, then the Talmud is the central pillar, soaring up from the foundations and supporting the entire spiritual and intellectual edifice. In many ways the Talmud is the most important book in Jewish culture, the backbone of creativity and of national life. No other work has had a comparable influence on the theory and practice of Jewish life, shaping spiritual content and serving as a guide to conduct. The Jewish people have always been keenly aware that their continued survival and development depend on the study of the Talmud...At times, talmudic study has been prohibited because it was abundantly clear that a Jewish society that ceased to study this work had no real hope of survival.<sup>135</sup>

As pointed out in the previous section, there were two major centers where the study of the Mishnah took place: Israel and Babylonia. Each group of *amoraim* produced its own Gemara.<sup>136</sup> Thus, there are two versions of the Talmud: the Jerusalem<sup>137</sup> or Palestinian Talmud and the larger Babylonian Talmud (end of the fourth century and end of the fifth century, respectively).<sup>138</sup> The Palestinian Talmud is generally taken as subordinate to the Babylonian Talmud; it is on the latter that "all subsequent codifications of the law rest."<sup>139</sup>

It is important for the study of Jewish hermeneutics to note that the authors of both the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud "include sizable passages of both *midrash halakah* and *midrash haggadah*."<sup>140</sup> According to Epstein, haggadic material represents about one sixth of the Palestinian Talmud.<sup>141</sup> However, although the authors of the Palestinian Talmud "produced a major treatment of the Mishnah and only episodic statements focused upon Scripture," the authors of the Babylonian Talmud "built considerable systematic statements out of both types of writing, as it worked its way toward a massive and encyclopedic restatement of both components of the Torah, written and oral."<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Rabbi J. H. Hertz, late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, noted that "in addition...to legal discussions and enactments on every subject of Jewish duty, whether it be ceremonial, civic, or moral, it [the Gemara] contains homiletical exegeses of scripture."<sup>143</sup>

References to passages in the Babylonian Talmud (Gemara) begin with the letter "B" followed by the name of the tractate in abbreviated form and then the folio (or page) number, since the Babylonian Talmud (following Bomberg's edition) is always printed uniformly, with the same material on any given page. The final item of the reference is an "a" or "b," referring to the front or back side of the folio, respectively. Thus, "B. Ber. 2a" refers to the Babylonian Talmud, Gemara tractate *Berakoth*, the front side of the second folio (page). The Talmud is printed with the Mishnah followed by the Gemara in the center of the page. Surrounding it in smaller type are

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134 The Hebrew noun תַּלְמוּד (*talmud*) is from the verb תָּלַם (Epstein, "Talmud," IV:511). In biblical Hebrew the Qal stem of this verb means *to learn* and the Piel stem *to teach* (*BDB*, p. 540). Thus the meaning of *Talmud* is *study* or *learning* (Eliezer Berkovits, with the editorial staff, "Talmud," *EncJudaica*, XV:750) or *the studying* or *the teaching* (Strack, "Talmud," V:2904). There is some variation in the use of the words *Gemara* and *Talmud*. Both the words can be used either for the work of the *amoraim* alone, or they can be applied to the combination of the Mishnah and the work of the *amoraim*. I will use *Gemara* as the title for the work of the *amoraim* and *Talmud* as the title of the combination of Mishnah with the Gemara, as used by Epstein, "Talmud," IV:512.

135 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 3.

136 There were also some variants between the two texts of the Mishnah that were used (Eliezer Berkovits, with the editorial staff, "Talmud, Babylonian," XV:758). According to Epstein, "Talmud," IV:513, "No satisfactory explanation has so far been found to account for the textual variants, but there is no doubt that in many cases they represent two recensions of the Mishna made by Rabbi Judah himself..."

137 Although this Talmud was compiled in Israel, it was not in Jerusalem (Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Talmud, Jerusalem," *EncJudaica*, XV:772).

138 Safrai, "Amoraim," II:866.

139 Epstein, "Talmud," IV:513.

140 Neusner, "Talmud," IV:720.

141 Epstein, "Talmud," IV:513.

142 Neusner, "Talmud," IV:720.

143 From Rabbi Hertz' Foreword to *The Babylonian Talmud* (Soncino Press, 1935), cited by Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 65; brackets added.

some of the great commentaries on the Talmud.

References to the Palestinian Talmud are unfortunately not standardized. The initial letter might be "J" (Jerusalem), "Y" (Heb., *Yerushalayim*), or "P" (Palestinian), and the name of the tractate follows in abbreviated form. However, the location within the tractate can be specified in different ways. Sometimes it is indicated by folio, front or back, as with the Babylonian Talmud. Other times it is indicated by chapter and verse, as with the Mishnah. However, the breakdown into chapters and verses is not uniform.

### *The Midrashim*

In a previous section, "Types of Rabbinic Literature," three types of Midrash were defined: *Midrash halakhah*,<sup>144</sup> *Midrash haggadah*, and homiletic midrash. All three types are represented in extant Rabbinic literature.

The *Mekhilta*,<sup>145</sup> the *Sifra*,<sup>146</sup> and the *Sifrei*<sup>147</sup> are works of Midrashic *halakhah*, although they also contain some haggadic material. Together they represent verse-by-verse interpretations of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Concerning these three collections, Strack writes, "The authors of the sayings contained in these works are almost wholly Tannaim; but the final compilers were Amoraim."<sup>148</sup> However, although they represent tannaitic literature, they are, in fact, collections of *beraitoth*,<sup>149</sup> that is, *halakhoth* that are not included in Rabbi Judah's Mishnah.

The Midrashic *haggadah* are the works that actually have "Midrash" as part of their name. The best known haggadic Midrashic work is *Midrash Rabbah (Great Midrash)*.<sup>150</sup> *Midrash Rabbah* is a compilation of several

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144 Sometimes called "Tannaitic Midrashim" (Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 69).

145 The Aramaic noun מְכִילְתָּא (*mekhilta*) means *a measure* and was used by the *amoraim* in the sense of a collection of halakhic material. It was first used as the title of a book in the tenth century A.D. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 70, n. 1, citing the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, points out that *middah* also means *measure* and suggests that the name *Mekhilta* was given to this Midrash because it followed the *middoth* of exegesis. There are actually two works entitled *Mekhilta*: *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael* and *Mekhilta of Rabbi ben Yohai*, both from the period of the *tannaim*. Both are also an exegetical Midrash on the Book of Exodus, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. They are primarily halakhic Midrashim, but both contain some haggadic material as well. However, they represent two different approaches to biblical exegesis. Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba both established academies, and these two *Mekhilta* are products of them, Rabbi ben Yohai being a student of R. Akiba. See Moshe David Herr, "Mekhilta of R. Ishmael," *EncJudaica*, XI:1267-68, and "Mekhilta of R. Simeon ben Yohai," *EncJudaica*, XI:1269-70. For more on the differences between R. Ishmael and R. Akiba, see the section, "Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba," later in this chapter.

146 The Aramaic noun סִפְרָא (*sifra*) corresponds to the Hebrew noun סֵפֶר (*sepher* or *sefer*), which means *book* (*BDB*, p. 706). From the tannaitic period, it is an exegetical Midrash on the Book of Leviticus chapter by chapter and verse by verse. It consists almost entirely of *halakhah* with only limited haggadic content. See Moshe David Herr, "Sifra," *EncJudaica*, XIV:1517-18. Curiously, although the book belongs to the school of Rabbi Akiba, it begins with an exposition of Rabbi Ishmael's *middoth* (Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 71), two Rabbis whose exegetical methods were quite different (see the section below, "Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba").

147 The plural Aramaic noun סִפְרֵי (*sifrei*) corresponds to the plural Hebrew noun סֵפָרִים (*sepharim* or *sefarim*), which means *books* (*BDB*, p. 707). There is some debate as to whether historically there were two separate works, as the plural might be taken to imply, or a single book. The majority view seems to be two separate books, both called *Sifrei*. From the tannaitic period, both are exegetical Midrashim that proceed chapter by chapter and verse by verse. The one book is a halakhic Midrash of Numbers, the other of Deuteronomy. Both have significant amounts of haggadic material. Some scholars believe the *Sifrei* to Numbers derives from the school of Rabbi Ishmael, while the *Sifrei* to Deuteronomy comes from the school of Rabbi Akiba. See Moshe David Herr, "Sifrei," *EncJudaica*, XIV:1519-20. For more on the differences between R. Ishmael and R. Akiba, see the section, "Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba," later in this chapter.

148 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 206.

149 The Aramaic noun בְּרֵיתָא (*baraita*), plural בְּרֵיתוֹת (*baraitoth*), means *outside*.

150 The Hebrew noun רִבְּהָ means *great*, although in biblical Hebrew it is used only as a proper name of a city (*BDB*, p. 913)--either of the capital of the Ammonites (Deut. 3:11; et al.) or a city in Judah (Josh. 15:60).

separate Midrashim, the oldest component being *Genesis Rabbah*,<sup>151</sup> possibly going back to the third century A.D.<sup>152</sup> The other components are Midrashim on the remaining four books of the Torah, plus the five books of the *Megilloth*<sup>153</sup> (Five Scrolls): Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, and Esther. Strack writes that "it is exceedingly difficult to ascertain the date of composition" of the Midrash,<sup>154</sup> and he gives virtually no attention to the origin of the material prior to composition.<sup>155</sup>

The three earliest collections of homiletic midrashim are *Pesiqta*,<sup>156</sup> *Pesiqta Rabbati*,<sup>157</sup> and *Tanḥuma*.<sup>158</sup> However, these works shed little light on the hermeneutical issues central to this chapter, so they are not further discussed.

### The Oral Torah

Before concluding this section on Rabbinic literature, a brief discussion of the traditional view of the Oral Torah is in order.

Regarding the *halakhah*, Jewish scholar Isidore Epstein has this to say:

[It] embraces the whole body of Jewish teaching, legislation, and practices which have proceeded from the interpretation and reinterpretation of the laws of the Bible through an unbroken succession of generations of Jewish teachers **from Ezra onward**.<sup>159</sup>

That the "tradition of the elders," or the *halakhah* as it later was called, began at or just after the time of Ezra is the position taken in the section, "The *Sopherim*," earlier in this chapter. In contrast to this statement, traditional Judaism has come to believe that the *halakhah* was divinely inspired and was actually revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai, constituting what is called the *Oral Torah* in contrast to the *Written Torah* (the five books of Moses or the Pentateuch). Jacob Neusner summarizes the belief as follows:

At Sinai, Judaism maintains, God revealed the Torah in two media--writing and memory. The written Torah corresponds to the Hebrew Scriptures [the five books of Moses]...The memorized, or oral, Torah was orally formulated and orally transmitted for many centuries, from Moses to Joshua to prophets and sages and ultimately to the authorities who composed the Mishnah...the Mishnah constitutes a statement of the oral, or memorized, Torah of Sinai.<sup>160</sup>

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151 The actual Hebrew name is **בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה** (*Bereshith Rabbah*). In the Hebrew Bible the titles of the five books of the Torah (the Pentateuch) are the first word of the book. The first word in Genesis is **בְּרֵאשִׁית** (*bereshith*), meaning "in the beginning." The same pattern applies for the names of the other four books of the Torah.

152 Epstein, "Midrash," III:376. However, Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 79, calls *Genesis Rabbah* a "diverse compilation" but considers it basically a Palestinian work of the fifth century A.D., "though drawing, of course, on earlier material."

153 The Hebrew noun **מְגִלָּה** (*megillah*), plural **מְגִלּוֹת** (*megilloth*), means *roll* or *scroll* (*BDB*, p. 166). Here the plural, *Megilloth* (Scrolls) is used as the accepted name of the *Five Scrolls*: Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, and Esther.

154 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 203.

155 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 79-84 cites a number of suggestions for the remaining nine books, but Strack's assessment still seems accurate.

156 According to Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 211, some scholars argue for an origin about A.D. 700 and others suggest it can be no earlier than 800.

157 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 212, points out that Rabbi Tanḥuma lived somewhere around the beginning of the fifth century A.D. and was associated with the work of collecting homilies. Over half of the sermons in this collection are associated with his name.

158 According to Bowker, *ibid.*, since his name appears with several of the homilies, he may have been instrumental in forming the nucleus of this collection.

159 Epstein, "Halachah," II:512 (emphasis added; brackets added).

160 Neusner, "Talmud," IV:717; brackets added.

However, not only does traditional Judaism believe that the origin of the *halakhah* was by divine revelation to Moses at Mt. Sinai, it also considers the Oral Torah to be of more significance than the Written Torah (the Pentateuch). David Herr states,

From the dogmatic point of view the Oral Law has its basis in, and derives its validity from, explicit verses in the Written Law, but at the same time the Written Law itself obtains its full validity and its authority for practical *halakhah* from the Oral Law....Furthermore the Oral Law lays down explicitly that from the moment of the giving of the Written Law...it is handed over absolutely to the judgment of the human intelligence of the scholars of the Oral Law...The Oral Law is able to circumvent the Written Law (see TJ, Kid. 1:2, 59d) [Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Kiddushin*].<sup>161</sup>

Similarly, Benjamin De-Vries states,

The sages have the power to abolish a biblical injunction (Yev. 89b-90b) [talmudic tractate *Yevamot*] in certain circumstances...At times the sages gave their pronouncements the same, and at times, even greater validity than those of the Torah.<sup>162</sup>

In contrast to this Orthodox view that the Oral Law originating with Moses at Sinai, Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 10, states that

We know very little of the origins and early development of the the oral law...But from various hints in the Bible, we can ascertain how the oral law evolved to interpret and complement written legislation.<sup>163</sup>

He goes on to note that some laws are

...possibly dated from the beginning of the Hasmonean period. Certain isolated laws undoubtedly date from an even earlier age. There are certain *halakhot* which the Talmud itself attributes to the period of Nehemiah, that is, the beginning of the Second Temple era.<sup>164</sup>

Louis Jacobs concludes,

The general assumption in the classical Jewish sources is that the *halakhah* in its entirety goes back to Moses, except for later elaborations, extensions, applications, and innovations in accordance with new circumstances....But the verdict of modern scholarship is that the *halakhah* has had a history and that it is possible to trace the stages in its development with a considerable degree of success.<sup>165</sup>

Other Jewish scholars argue similarly against the concept of an inspired Oral Torah dating back to Moses at Mt. Sinai.<sup>166</sup> Christian scholars, even staunch conservatives, universally reject the notion of an Oral Torah. Rabbinic scholar Hermann Strack makes a rather blunt statement:

It is maintained by orthodox Jewish scholars that from the very beginning, i.e., from the time of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, there had been in existence an oral law, carried on traditionally....This view, however, is untenable.<sup>167</sup>

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161 Moshe David Herr, "Oral Law," *EncJudaica*, XII:1441 brackets added.

162 Benjamin De-Vries, "Halakhah," *EncJudaica*, VII:1159, section "Dogmatics of the Halakhah" (brackets added).

163 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 10.

164 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

165 Jacobs, "Halakhah," VII:1156-57, section "Definition."

166 See, e.g., Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing, 1991). It should also be noted that the Karaites, a Jewish sect that originated at the beginning of the eighth century, has as its central doctrine the denial of the talmudic-rabbinical tradition, thus reject the belief in an inspired Oral Torah given by God to Moses at Mt. Sinai. See Shlomo Hofman, "Karaites," *EncJudaica*, X:761.

167 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 11.

## Introduction to the *Middoth*

According to John Bowker, "the basic purpose of Pharisaic and Rabbinic exegesis was to discover the meaning of the text of scripture."<sup>168</sup> The previous sections in this chapter have presented the background needed to understand the nature and application of these exegetical methods that comprise Jewish hermeneutics. This background consisted of a brief review of the scribal periods as well as the Jewish literature from the time of Ezra until the end of the period of the *amoraim* (ca. A.D. 500). To narrow the field of interest, the remainder of this chapter explores the hermeneutical principles used by mainstream Judaism, that is, the historic sages and the Rabbinic scholars, to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. Based on the material presented so far, this means a review of the interpretive methods used in the Midrashim and Talmud (primarily the Gemara, since the Mishnah cites very little Scripture), as well as the methods of the later scholars, specifically the three great medieval commentators, Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki (Rashi, 1040-1105), Abraham ibn Ezra<sup>169</sup> (Abenezra, 1089–1164), and Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak, 1160-1235).

With regard to the rules of exegesis, the Talmud and the Midrashim can be grouped together. According to Hermann Strack, there are "certain rules *middoth* which one must know in order to form a correct opinion of the talmudic exposition of Scripture. In the Haggada the same rules are employed, but in a still freer manner..."<sup>170</sup> Adin Steinsaltz describes the scope of the *middoth* similarly:

There are certain hermeneutical rules for interpretation of the biblical text, usually enumerated according to the order established by Rabbi Ishmael, who formulated thirteen principles for interpretation. This list is not exhaustive, since not all the possible methods are encompassed, and there is an amplified list of thirty-two rules for aggadic interpretation, most of which also apply to the *halakhah*. But even this number does not cover all the details of interpretive methods in the Talmud, and in recent times these have been estimated at several hundred. At the same time, R. Ishmael's rules cover the fundamental methods, and several are widely utilized.<sup>171</sup>

The noun *middoth* (Heb. מִדּוֹת ) is the plural of *middah* (Heb. מִדָּה ), which means *measure, measurement*; both are used often in biblical Hebrew.<sup>172</sup> *Middoth* is also the name of a tractate in the Mishnah that gives details and measurements of the Temple of Herod, perhaps to serve as a guide for rebuilding the Second Temple.<sup>173</sup> Finally, *middoth* is used in the sense of "norms" to designate a set of hermeneutical rules.

Historically, as noted earlier in this chapter in the subsection "Maintaining the Relevance of the Torah," it was during the Pharisaic period that formal rules of exegesis and interpretation began to emerge. These culminated in the *middoth* of Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael. Somewhat later these sets were expanded to include additional rules. There have been three formal sets of Rabbinic rules of interpretation:

- The 7 rules of Hillel
- The 13 rules of Rabbi Ishmael
- The 32 rules of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose

There are two issues that deserve notice.

### Were the *Middoth* Intended to Derive "Hidden Meanings"?

According to Louis Jacobs,

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168 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 43.

169 *Ibn* is the Arabic equivalent of Hebrew *ben*, son of.

170 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 93.

171 Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 224.

172 *BDB*, p. 551.

173 Arnost Zvi Ehrman, "Middot," *EncJudaica*, XI:1504.

The rabbis saw the Pentateuch as a unified, divinely communicated text, consistent in all its parts. It was consequently possible to uncover deeper meanings and to provide for a fuller application of its laws by adopting certain principles of interpretation (*middot*; "measures," "norms").<sup>174</sup>

With the rabbis' view of the Pentateuch, I am in full agreement. However, as pointed out in Chapter 2, I believe that only the **פְּשָׁט** (*peshat*), the literal, grammatical meaning, has divine authority. While "fuller," additional, or new applications of a text are possible, there is no "deeper meaning" to a biblical text other than the meaning the human author, who received that revelation from God, intended to convey with his words and grammar.

Furthermore, as the subsequent discussion of the *middoth* argues, the 7 *middoth* of Rabbi Hillel and the 13 *middoth* of Rabbi Ishmael were certainly *not* adopted to find hidden meaning in the Scripture text. Only with the expansion to 32 *middoth* by Rabbi Eliezer are rules provided that promote the search for hidden meanings.

### Were the *Middoth* Based on Hellenistic Thought?

David Daube wrote a paper to defend his thesis "that the Rabbinic methods of interpretation derive from Hellenistic rhetoric."<sup>175</sup> However, Hermann Strack makes the following comment:

According to orthodox Jewish opinion it was the merit of M. L. Malbim to "demonstrate brilliantly and irrefutably how all *derashoth* of our great teachers, all their deductions of the oral law from the written rest upon the rules of logic and of the Hebrew language...In the introduction *Ayeleth ha-Shahar*...he gives a summary presentation of the rules and principles discovered by him in the course of his investigations."<sup>176</sup>

The "rules of logic," of course, are not the exclusive domain of the Greeks. Louis Jacob concludes,

It is debatable whether...any Greek influence can be detected, though terminologically some of the rules have Greek parallels.<sup>177</sup>

## **The 7 *Middoth* of Hillel**

### Introduction

While it is true that these seven *middoth* "were not innovations of Hillel" and that "he simply crystallized them," he probably "provided some of the names which adhere to them."<sup>178</sup> Hermann Strack adds an important point:

The Seven Middoth of Hillel were not invented by Hillel; they represent merely a compilation of the main kinds of the method of evidence customary from that time on. It is certain that Hillel stressed the need of scriptural interpretation in contrast to the statements of abstract Halakah.<sup>179</sup>

In fact, Hillel is likely the first to apply these seven rules "for the determination of practical *halakhah*."<sup>180</sup>

The fourth pair of the *zugoth*, Shemaiah and Abtalyon, were said to be "the two greatest men of our generation"

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174 Louis Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," *EncJudaica*, VIII:366.

175 David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *HUCA* 22 (1949):239-64.

176 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 93.

177 Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VII:367.

178 Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1417.

179 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 93.

180 *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, in an entry reproduced as "Hillel" in *EncJudaica*, VIII:482.

and "great sages and great interpreters."<sup>181</sup> Hillel was a student of Abtalyon, so his seven *middoth* are probably a "crystallization" of hermeneutical procedures used by the *zugoth*. Indeed, one of "the outstanding indications of the revolution in the spiritual life of Israel under Hillel's influence" was "the application of the hermeneutical laws for the exposition of the Torah and for the determination of the *halakhah*."<sup>182</sup>

### The Seven Middoth<sup>183</sup>

**Rule 1: *Qal wa-ḥomer*.**<sup>184</sup> argument from the minor premise, the less important case (*qal*, "light"), to the major premise, the more important case (*ḥomer*, "heavy")<sup>185</sup>

According to the simplest form of this rule, what is true of the lesser must necessarily be true of the greater, also called "argument from the lesser to the greater." However, there are two variations of this argument.<sup>186</sup>

*Simple:* If *A* has *x*, then *B* certainly has *x*.

For example, consider Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (NASB):

If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

Rabbi Meir takes this to mean that God is distressed by the criminal's death. Therefore, he argues, "If God is troubled by the shedding of the blood of the ungodly, how much more [*kal va-ḥomer*] at the blood of the righteous!" (*Sanhedrin* 6:5).<sup>187</sup>

Here: *x* = God's distress  
*A* = the blood of the criminal  
*B* = the blood of the righteous

*Complex:* If *A*, which lacks *y* has *x*, then *B*, which has *y*, certainly has *x*.

In the complex form, an extraneous element, *y*, is introduced. For example, in *Hullin* 24a it is argued, "If priests, who are not disqualified in the Temple by age, are disqualified by bodily blemishes (Lev. 21:16-21), then Levites, who are disqualified by age (Num. 8:24-25), should certainly be disqualified by bodily blemishes."

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181 Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1417, citing *Pesaḥim* 70b (talmudic tractate).

182 *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, "Hillel," *EncJudaica*, VIII:483.

183 Explanations and examples for much of the material in this section are in general taken, and at times in combination, from Louis Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:367-70; Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1420-22; Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 34-35; and Kaiser in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 259.

184 More accurately, *qol*; see Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:367, and Strack's explanation for using the "current pronunciation" (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94, n. 2). The expression literally means "light and heavy."

185 According to Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94, the argument can also proceed in the reverse direction, namely, from the major premise to the minor premise.

186 Both examples are taken from Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:367.

187 As a principle of hermeneutics, it is the exegete who applies the argument from the lesser to the greater by deducing the "greater" statement. That is the what Rabbi Meir does at Deut. 21:22-23. However, examples of the complete argument can be found in the biblical text itself. For example, Prov. 11:31: "If a righteous person is punished on earth, surely a wicked one and a sinner" (*Stone Edition*). New Testament writers also make arguments from the lesser to the greater. See, e.g., Paul in Rom. 5:8-9. Peter makes the following argument: "For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (NASB). He then quotes the somewhat free rendering of Prov. 11:31 in the LXX.

Here: x = disqualification due to bodily blemishes  
y = disqualification due to age  
A = priest  
B = levites

**Rule 2: Gezerah shavah:**<sup>188</sup> comparison of similar expressions

Rule 2 might also be called "inference by [verbal] analogy."<sup>189</sup> According to this rule, if words or phrases of similar connotation occur in two different Torah passages, then both laws, however different, are subject to the same regulations and applications.

For example,<sup>190</sup> the word *be-mo'ado* ("in its appointed time") is used both with reference to the Paschal lamb (Num. 9:2) and to the *tamid*, the daily sacrifice (Num. 28:2). Since the daily sacrifice includes the Sabbath, it can be inferred that the term *be-mo'ado* includes the Sabbath. Therefore, by this rule, the Paschal lamb may be offered on the Sabbath (should Passover fall on the Sabbath), even though work is normally forbidden on the Sabbath.<sup>191</sup>

As another example,<sup>192</sup> according to Leviticus 16:29, the Israelites on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) are told to "humble your souls" (*NASB*), "afflict your souls" (*KJV*), or "afflict yourselves" (*Stone Edition*) without any explanation as to the meaning of this command. However, since the same expression is used in Deuteronomy 8:3 with reference to hunger, it is inferred that to "afflict yourselves" on Yom Kippur means to abstain from food.

**Rule 3: Binyan 'ab mi-katuv 'ehad:**<sup>193</sup> construction of a principle from one verse or passage

According to this rule, a principle is constructed from one principal verse or passage; the *ab* ("father") is the basic premise, and the *binyan* ("construction") is the general principle constructed or derived from it. This principle is then applied to other verses or passages containing the same phrase or similar contents as the principal verse.

For example,<sup>194</sup> consider Deuteronomy 17:2-6 (*NASB*):

If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the LORD your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, by transgressing His covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded, and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire

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188 The meaning of *gezerah* is difficult. Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," p. 367, suggests that etymologically the word means "law."

According to *BDB*, p. 160, the Hebrew verb גָּזַר (*gāzar*) in the Qal stem can mean *to decree*. Thus the noun *gezerah* (not used in biblical Hebrew) could mean *decree* (Elon, "Takkanot," XV:714). The verb *shavah* means *to agree with, to be like, to resemble* (*BDB*, p. 1000). Thus the likely literal meaning of *gezerah shavah* is "similar law" or, according to Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94, "similar injunction or regulation."

189 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94; brackets added.

190 This example is taken from *B. Pesahim* 66a (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:368).

191 Jacobs, *ibid.*, points out that rules were later laid down to prevent abuse of the principle of *gezerah shavah*: "A man cannot advance a *gezerah shavah* independently, but must receive it by tradition from his teachers (*Pes.* 66a); both passages must be from the Pentateuch (BK 2b); the words of the *gezerah shavah* must not only be similar but also superfluous (*mufneh*, 'free') in the context in which they appear, so that it can be argued that they were placed there for the express purpose of the *gezerah shavah* (*Shab.* 64a)." He goes on to note that "it would appear that the school of R. Akiva disagrees with that of R. Ishmael and does not require *mufneh* (TJ [Jerusalem Talmud], Yoma 8:3, 45a)."

192 This example is taken from Kaiser in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 259.

193 The expression literally means "construction [of or sired by] a father from one writing [verse];" *BDB*, p. 125, gives *binyan* the meaning *structure*.

194 This example is taken from *Sifrei Deut.* 17:2 (Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 286, n. 7).

thoroughly. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates, *that is*, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death. On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

The "father" (*ab*) or basic premise here is the need of two or three witnesses for conviction when someone is found breaking the covenant. The "construction" (*binyan*) or principle constructed from this father or premise is that all such cases (not just idolatry) require two or three witnesses for conviction. These other cases to which this principle must be applied are those in verses or passages that have a phrase in common or similar contents as this passage. Here the word that links other verses or passages together is the verb "to find." So other examples would include Deuteronomy 18:10; 22:22; and 24:7. In all four verses the verb "find" is used.<sup>195</sup> However, only in Deuteronomy 17:6 is the regulation given that guilt must be established on the basis of two or three witnesses. Therefore, by this rule of interpretation, a principle has been constructed by which guilt in the other three cases must also be established by two or three witnesses.

**Rule 4: *Binyan 'ab mi-shenei khetuvim*.**<sup>196</sup> construction of a principle from two verses or passages

This rule is an extension of the previous rule, and therefore the *ab* ("father") is still the basic premise, and the *binyan* ("construction") is the general principle constructed or derived from it. However, there are some differences between the two rules. With Rule 4:

- The general principle is constructed from two principal verses or passages instead of just one.<sup>197</sup>
- These two verses are similar in some way to obtain the basic premise.
- The principle could not be constructed from either verse alone.
- This general principle is then applied, not in general to other verses as in Rule 3, but to each of the two verses themselves, thus giving a complete interpretation of each.

For example,<sup>198</sup> consider Deuteronomy 23:24-25 (NASB; Hebrew, 23:25-26):

24 When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you are fully satisfied, but you shall not put any in your basket.

25 When you enter your neighbor's standing grain [corn], then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain.

Note how these two verses are similar: when someone (perhaps a farm laborer) enters his neighbor's field, he may eat of the grapes and standing corn, but under a similar limitation.

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195 The Hebrew verb that links all these verses together is **נָצַח** meaning *to attain to, to find* (BDB, p. 592). It should be noted that both Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94, and Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 34, speak of "constructing a family" or "building up a family." With this terminology, the passage in Deut. 17:2-6 becomes the "father" of a "family" of other verses to which the principle of two or three witnesses must be applied. This approach represents a slightly different metaphor than the one used by Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:368, and Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1421-22, and which I use in my explanation above. However, the effective use of the rule is the same.

196 The expression literally means "construction [of or sired by] a father from two writings [verses]."

197 Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1421, points out that "it appears from the halakhic literature that the application of this rule was also extended to derivation of a principle from three passages (e.g., Sif. Num. 160) and even from four passages (e.g., BK 1:1)."

198 This example is taken from *Bava Mezia* 87b (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:368-69).

The question arises as to whether either of these laws applies to other things growing in the field. Is there a general principle that can be constructed or derived from these two verses to answer this question? Examined individually, the answer is no.

- Regarding vineyards (the subject of verse 24), the owner is obligated by another law to leave the gleanings that remain after harvest for the poor (Lev. 19:10). One could possibly argue that since the owner has this obligation, he also has the obligation mentioned in verse 24. But no further conclusion can be drawn.<sup>199</sup>
- Regarding standing corn (the subject of verse 25), the owner is obligated by another law to make a cake of the first of the corn and offer it to the Lord (Num. 15:17-21). One could possibly argue that since the owner has this obligation, he also has the obligation mentioned in verse 25. But no further conclusion can be drawn.

However, taking the two verses together, the basic premise (*ab*, the "father") from which a general principle (*binyan*) can be constructed or derived must be a common factor between the two verses. The verses are, of course, similar in that permission is given a laborer to eat something from a neighbor's field. However, since the permission pertains to two different items, grapes and corn, this is not the needed common factor. Neither can the common factor be the additional separate regulations tied to grapes and corn, for the law of gleanings (Lev. 19:10) does not apply to corn, and the law of the firstfruits (Num. 15:17-21) does not apply to grapes. The rabbis therefore argued that the common factor between verses 24 and 25 must be that both vines and corn are *plants*. Therefore, the rabbis derived a general principle that applies to both verses, namely, that both verses 24 and 25 apply to *all plants*, and that both verses therefore allow one to eat, but not harvest, any plant from a neighbor's field.<sup>200</sup>

**Rule 5: Kelal u-pherat perat u-kelal:**<sup>201</sup> argument from the general to the particular or the particular to the general

This rule is in two parts:

- According to the first part, general to particular, if a law is stated in general terms and then followed by particular instances, then only those instances are governed by the law.
- According to the second part, particular to general, if particular instances are mentioned first and followed by a general law, then instances other than the ones mentioned can be included in the law.

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199 One occasionally wishes he had a set of *middoth* for interpreting some scholarly writings. This example of *Binyan ab mi-shenei khetuvim* in operation on Deuteronomy 23:24-25 is taken from Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:368-69. The sentence from Jacobs on which I based my bulleted explanation to which this footnote is affixed is the following: "This cannot be derived from the case of the vineyard, for the owner of a vineyard is obliged to leave the gleanings to the poor (Lev. 19:10) and it may be that since the owner has this obligation, he also has the other." What does he mean by "the other [obligation]"? I can think of three possibilities: (1) the obligation to let his neighbor (in addition to the poor) eat some grapes, as per verse 24, (2) the obligation to let his neighbor eat some corn (in addition to the grapes), as per verse 25, or (3) the obligation to leave the gleanings of other types of harvest (in addition to the grapes). There is a second problem of interpretation here. Whichever of the three options is selected, how does it complete the argument of Jacobs that the general principle cannot be derived from verse 23 alone? I took Jacobs to mean option (1) and then completed the missing step in his argument by adding, "But no further conclusion can be drawn." It would seem that regardless of which option is selected, some type of "but not..." phrase must be added to complete the argument in Jacob's sentence to establish why a general principle cannot be derived from verse 24 alone.

200 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, pp. 286-87, n. 8, offers another, perhaps simpler, example of Rule 4 from *Mekhilta* on Exod. 21, linking verses 26 and 27. The common factor between these two verses is a body part that does not grow back if damaged or destroyed, and the general principle derived from the verses is that a slave must be freed in the case of an injury to any body part that does not grow back, not just an eye or tooth.

201 The expression literally means "general and particular, particular and general."

For a general to particular example,<sup>202</sup> consider Leviticus 1:2 (*Jerusalem Bible*):

If any man of you bring an offering to the LORD, of the cattle shall you bring your offering, of the herd and of the flock.

Here the general is mentioned first: the Hebrew word translated "cattle" here is **בְּהֵמָה** (*behemah*), which can be used of domesticated cattle, but it can also be used in a more general sense for non-domesticated or wild beasts.<sup>203</sup> However, according to this rule, the general statement using the word *behemah*, "beast," is limited by the particular statement mentioned second: the offering must be "from [Heb. מִן, *min*] the herd" or "from the flock."

For a particular to general example,<sup>204</sup> consider Exodus 22:10 (KJV; Hebrew 22:9):

If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it...

Here the particular is mentioned first. Based on this rule, items in addition to those mentioned come under the domain of the general law mentioned second.

**Rule 6: *Kayotse bo bemaqom 'aher***:<sup>205</sup> exposition by means of another similar passage

According to this rule, a difficult verse may be explained by comparing it with another verse that is similar or that deals with the same subject.

**Rule 7: *Dabar halamed me' inyano***:<sup>206</sup> meaning deduced from its context

According to this rule, the meaning of a doubtful passage may be determined from its context.

For example,<sup>207</sup> " 'Thou shalt not steal' in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:13) must refer to the capital offense of kidnapping, since the two other offenses mentioned in the same verse, 'Thou shalt not murder' and 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' are both capital offenses."<sup>208</sup>

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202 This example is taken from Sifra, introd. 7 (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:369).

203 *BDB*, pp. 96-97.

204 This example is taken from Sifra, introd. 8 (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:369).

205 *Kayotse bo* is a difficult expression. The two words are the preposition **כְּ** (as or like) prefixed to the verb **יָצָא** (to go or to come out; *BDB*, p. 422) followed by the preposition **בְּ** (in, with, or by) with the 3ms pronominal suffix (*him*). Strack, in characteristic enigmatic form, writes, "**יָצָא** with **כְּ** of the price: is given out for ..., is worth..., amounts to the same.-- Bacher, *Terminologie*, I, 80f.; II, 83-85" (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 287, n. 10; ellipses original). It would seem that Strack is citing a Hebraic idiom noted by Bacher, though the precise syntactical role of the phrase "of the price" remains elusive. Does the idiom refer to the price of an item offered for sale? The connection between the price of some item and the meaning of a verse of Scripture might seem a bit dubious. Moving on, the remaining part of the rule title, *bemaqom aher*, is straightforward: it means "in another place." Thus using one of Bacher's suggested idiomatic translations, the entire expression perhaps literally means, "as amounting to the same in another place."

206 The expression literally means "a word [or matter] derived from its context."

207 This example is taken from *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael*, Ba-Hodesh, 8, 5 (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:370).

208 Rule 7 is an important principle of interpretation, but the interpreter, of course, is not guaranteed infallibility when applying the context. The particular interpretation in this example is dubious since its main strength comes from the verse divisions. In this case, the traditional Jewish division of the Hebrew text does indeed place these three commandments into a single verse, with the *Soph Pasuq* placed after yet a fourth commandment, "You shall not bear

## Hillel's Passover Decision

According to Strack, these seven *middoth* of Hillel were not the only exegetical rules used during the early tannaitic period.<sup>209</sup> Jacobs mentions two rules similar to *gezerah shavah* not included in these seven, namely, *hekkesh* ("comparison") and *semukhim* ("juxtaposition").<sup>210</sup> In fact, Hillel himself apparently used *hekkesh*, together with *qal wa-ḥomer* and *gezerah shavah*, to settle the issue of whether the Passover offering may be slaughtered on the Sabbath, since Passover that year fell on the Sabbath.<sup>211</sup> Based on the use of these three hermeneutical principles, his answer was a definite yes.<sup>212</sup> Although not certain, according to Rabbinic tradition it might have been the ability of Hillel to solve this problem from the Scriptures that resulted in his appointment as *nasi* in the Sanhedrin.<sup>213</sup>

One more point deserves notice. The distinction between *hekkesh* and those *middoth* of Hillel that deal with analogy highlights an important hermeneutical observation:

It [*hekkesh*] is distinguished from the other three analogic *middoth* [*qal wa-ḥomer*, *gezerah shavah*, *binyan 'ab mi-katuv 'ehad*, and *binyan 'ab mi-shenei khetuvim*, the latter two considered one] by the fact that in their case it is the halakhic scholars who draw the analogy whereas *hekkesh*...represents an analogy drawn in the Bible itself. From this point of view the rule has been of fundamental importance to the process of Bible exegesis, since it enabled halakhic scholars to find in the Bible itself the basis for reasoning by analogy for purposes of drawing legal conclusions. A classic example of this form of analogy is found in the scriptural passage dealing with the violation of a betrothed maiden...which enjoins that the maiden, even though she is betrothed, must suffer no punishment: "But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death--for as when a man riseth against his neighbor, and slayeth him, even so is this matter" (Deut. 22:26). Here, through the analogy with the murderer's victim, Scripture holds the violated girl blameless, and the halakhic scholars pursued the analogic argument from the two cases, deriving additional *halakhot* from them (Sanh. 74a).<sup>214</sup>

## **Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba**

Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha enjoyed such renown that the patronymic is generally omitted. He "was one of the sages...whose personality and teachings had a permanent effect on tannaitic literature and on Judaism as a whole."<sup>215</sup> The dates of his birth and death are unknown, but he probably died before the disastrous Bar Kokhba revolt (A. D. 132-135).<sup>216</sup>

Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, another rabbi almost universally identified without use of the patronymic, was a contemporary of Rabbi Ishmael. Born ca. A.D. 50, Rabbi Akiba was executed by the Romans at the conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt.<sup>217</sup>

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false witness against your neighbor" (see, e.g., the *Stone Edition*, both its Hebrew text and its English translation). On the other hand, in *Biblia Hebraica* a *Soph Pasuq* is placed after each of these four commandments, and all Christian English translations follow that division in labeling verses. Thus the argument here is much weakened if based on *Biblia Hebraica*.

209 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94.

210 Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:368.

211 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94 and p. 287, n. 12.

212 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 315-17, has a thorough discussion of this event, the identity of the "bene Bathyra," the three arguments used by Hillel (a separate argument based on each of the three *middoth*), and the three slightly different versions of the story in *J. Pes.* vi. 1, *T.Pes.* iv. 1-3, and *B.Pes.* 66a. For Hillel's argument based on Rule 2, *gezerah shavah*, see the first example for Rule 2 given in the previous section.

213 *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, "Hillel," *EncJudaica*, VIII:482.

214 Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1422.

215 Shmuel Safrai, "Ishmael ben Elisha," *EncJudaica*, IX:83-84.

216 *Ibid.*, IX:85.

217 Harry Freedman, with the editorial staff, "Akiva," *EncJudaica*, II:489.

Akiva came to be regarded as "one of the fathers of the world" (TJ, Shek. 3:1, 47b) [Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Shekalim*]. He is credited with systematizing the Midrash *halakhah* and *aggadah* (or, the principles on which they were built; TJ, Shek. 5:1, 48c).<sup>218</sup>

Both Rabbis Ishmael and Akiba formed academies named after them, and most of the extant halakhic Midrashim belong to one or the other of these two schools.<sup>219</sup> However, there was much disagreement between them.

He [R. Ishmael] disputed with him [R. Akiba] on *halakhah*, *aggadah*, and in halakhic expositions of the Bible. Both of them laid down and evolved different systems of exposition and the derivation of the *halakhah*...<sup>220</sup>

According to John Bowker, Rabbi Akiba was the innovator.

Broadly speaking, the difference between them was that R. Akiba was prepared to allow new and elaborate exegetical methods in order to extract even further meaning from the text of scripture, whereas R. Ishmael resisted such innovations, and kept to the traditional methods as they had been developed up to his time.<sup>221</sup>

The causes of this dispute are traceable far back to the period of the *sopherim*.<sup>222</sup> During the second century B.C. the Pharisees gradually replaced the Scribes as interpreters of the Law and in making authoritative decisions in legal cases, thus establishing *halakhah*. Although the *halakhoth* were always based on Scripture, as the body of *halakhah* grew, actual Scriptural proof did not need to be quoted on every occasion. *Halakhah* as developed and applied by the Pharisees became something in its own right. All this took place before the fall of Jerusalem. However, the great achievement of Rabbi Akiba after A.D. 70 was that he succeeded in relinking the *halakhoth* with Scripture. But to do that he had to take much greater liberty interpreting Scripture because the original links were either long forgotten or obscure: *halakhoth* had given birth to more *halakhoth*, and the chain was almost impossible to unravel.

R. Ishmael [also] saw the need to link *halakhoth* to scripture, but he resisted the artificiality of new and exotic methods of exegesis, which would certainly have simplified the task, but only by inventing previously unknown 'rules' of exegesis. Hence, with R. Ishmael's name there is associated a conservative 'canon' of exegetical rules, the 13 Rules of R. Ishmael. R. Akiba's view prevailed and the new ways of interpreting scripture came to be accepted, thus opening the way to even more extensive interpretations. But the exegesis produced by R. Ishmael and his school did not entirely disappear. It has survived in various rabbinic works, particularly in the *Mekilta*.<sup>223</sup>

Freedman summarizes Rabbi Akiba's approach as follows:

The guiding principle of Akiva's system of exegesis is that the Torah, emanating from God, contains no redundancies and that even a particular spelling (where an alternative spelling is possible) has its definite purpose. Similarly he maintained that there was a halakhic significance in the apparently redundant accusative particle *et* in the Torah (Pes. [*Pesahim*] 21b)...Akiva is credited [in *Menahot*, 29b] with interpreting even the crownlets with which certain letters are traditionally embellished in a Torah scroll, though no such interpretations are found in talmudic and midrashic literature. Akiva's method had its opponents, chief of whom was R. Ishmael who maintained that the language of the Torah follows normal human usage (Ber. [*Berakhot*] 31b).<sup>224</sup>

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218 Ibid.

219 Safrai, "Ishmael ben Elisha," IX:84.

220 Ibid.

221 Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 54.

222 This review is based on Bowker, *ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

223 *Ibid.*, p. 55; brackets added.

224 Harry Freedman, with the editorial staff, "Akiva," *EncJudaica*, II:491.

Elon provides a similar contrast:

R. Ishmael and his academy endeavored to uphold modes of interpretation that would maintain the legal and logical meaning of the scriptural passages concerned. Thus, for instance, they laid down the rule that "the Torah speaks in the language of men" (Sif. Num. [*Sifrei Numbers*] 112; Sanh. [*Sanhedrin*] 64b. etc.; in TJ, "a language of synonym, employed in the Torah"; Shab. [*Shabbat*] 19:2, 17a). That is to say, just as the language of synonym occurs in the narrative part of Scripture for purposes of reinforcement and emphasis--because this is the phraseology adopted by men in their discussions (e.g., Gen. 31:30; 40:15)--so in the legal part of the Torah there ought to be no interpretation of such repetition (e.g., Lev. 19:20). R. Akiva, and his academy took a different approach and adopted modes of interpretation that widened the meaning of Scripture far beyond the terms of the written text, expounding every seemingly superfluous word or phrase (see BK [*Bava Kamma*] 41b), and the occurrence of every synonym or repetition of word or even letter (see Yev. [*Yevamot*] 68b). Often the dispute between the two schools is found to relate not to the actual legal principle involved, but to the question of how to integrate such a principle with the scripture verse...R. Ishmael's method was to integrate the *halakhah* with the scripture verse by means of interpretation that remained within the meaning of the text, while R. Akiva integrated the same halakhic ruling by interpretive devices based on the apparent redundancy of words, or even a single letter, such as a *vav*.<sup>225</sup>

Additional examples of Rabbi Akiva's methods of interpretation are given by Jacobs:

[R. Akiva's method] proceeds from the premise that every word of Scripture has significance. For instance, the particle *et* begins the verse "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God" (Deut. 10:20). This implies that the application of the verse is extended to include reverence for scholars (Pes. [*Pesaḥim*] 22b). According to Akiva's school the use of the infinitive absolute (which repeats the verb) implies an amplification. An example is "That soul shall utterly be cut off (Num. 15:31)--"*hikkaret tikkaret*." R. Akiva remarks, "*Hikkaret* in this world, *tikkaret* in the world to come," but R. Ishmael demurs, "The Torah speaks in human language," i.e., the duplication of the verb is according to regular Hebrew usage<sup>226</sup> and therefore carries no additional implication (Sif. Num. [*Sifrei Numbers*] 112)...It will be seen that the school of R. Ishmael was more restrictive in its use of hermeneutical principles than that of R. Akiva.<sup>227</sup>

Strack adds the following assessment:

Akiba found scope in all sorts of linguistic peculiarities, the duplication of expressions, even particles and letters, for arriving at new ordinances and deductions, whereas Ishmael rejected all such forced interpretations.<sup>228</sup>

These assessments of the exegetical methods of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba draw a rather well-defined distinction between these two highly influential tannaitic scholars. However, this section must not conclude without emphasizing that Rabbi Akiba indeed loved the biblical text for what it truly was: the very words of God. Nevertheless, there were serious problems with his method of hermeneutics. Terry writes,

Surely no exposition of Scripture, however deep its reverence for the letter of God's word, could be safe or useful which proceeded on the principles of Rabbi Akiba, who maintained that every repetition, figure, parallelism, synonyme [*sic*], word, particle, pleonasm, nay, the very shape of a letter, had a recondite meaning...<sup>229</sup>

All this leads to one conclusion: Rabbi Ishmael was the true hero of the biblical text.

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225 Elon, "Interpretation," VIII:1417-18.

226 According to the standard Hebrew grammar, *GKC*, p. 342, "The infinitive absolute occurs most frequently in immediate connection with the finite verb of the same stem, in order in various ways *to define more accurately or to strengthen the idea of the verb*" (emphasis original).

227 Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:371.

228 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 206.

229 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 609, n. 1; brackets added.

## The 13 Middoth of Rabbi Ishmael

It is in this light that the 13 *middoth* of Rabbi Ishmael must be viewed. The seven *middoth* of Hillel encompass a system of hermeneutics that seeks to determine the plain, logical, grammatical sense of the biblical text. They reflect Rabbi Ishmael's own view of interpretation and thus he built into them more detail by expanding them to thirteen.

Strack explains the relationship between the two sets of *middoth* and the method of hermeneutics they represent:

Ishmael rejected the straining interpretation put upon single words, aye, letters, and formulated the principle: *dibberah Torah kilshon bene 'Adam* "the Torah speaks the language of the children of men" [Siphre Num. 15.31, (112)]. He reasoned, in a manner similar to that of Hillel, by means of distinct modes of inference. Ishmael's thirteen Middoth are held by the Jews in high repute (they form an element in the daily morning prayers, so as early as the Siddur of Rab Amram); but in essence they are merely an expanded edition of the seven *Middoth* of Hillel.<sup>230</sup>

Jacobs agrees with this assessment but adds the point that the 13 *middoth* of Rabbi Ishmael are at the basis of general Rabbinic hermeneutics:

The indications are that the rules are earlier than Hillel...R. Ishmael's rules are basically an amplification of Hillel's, so that the best method of studying rabbinic hermeneutics is to consider each of R. Ishmael's rules in detail.<sup>231</sup>

To come up with his list, Rabbi Ishmael subdivided and amplified the seven *middoth* of Hillel.

- Rules 1 and 2 remain the same.
- Rules 3 and 4 are combined to make Rule 3.
- Rule 5 is subdivided into eight *middoth*, Rules 4-11.<sup>232</sup>
- Rule 6 is omitted.<sup>233</sup>
- Rule 7 is expanded but still remains one rule, Rule 12.

Rule 13 is both new and important.<sup>234</sup>

**Rule 13: *Shenei khetibim ha-makhhishin zeh 'et zeh 'ad she-yabo ha-katub ha-shelishi be-yakhrifa beineihem.***<sup>235</sup> two verses contradict one another until a third verse reconciles them

According to this rule, if two verses seem to contradict one another there is a third verse that will reconcile them.

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<sup>230</sup> Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 95; brackets added.

<sup>231</sup> Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:367.

<sup>232</sup> According to Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 287, n. 3, the 11th rule of Ishmael did not meet with general acceptance. The rule states: "When a particular instance of a general rule is singled out for completely fresh treatment, the details of the general rule must not be applied to this instance unless Scripture does so specifically" (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:370).

<sup>233</sup> Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 94, points out that in listing the seven *middoth* of Hillel, some take Rule 5 as two separate rules, becoming Rules 5 and 6, and then omit Rule 6 as enumerated here (and in Strack).

<sup>234</sup> All 13 *middoth* are listed with explanations and examples from Rabbinic literature by Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:367-70. Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, pp. 584-86, also lists and explains them but gives no examples.

<sup>235</sup> The expression literally means "two writs [verses] that contradict one another until the third writ [verse] comes and decides [or determines] between them."

For example,<sup>236</sup> consider these three verses (NASB):

You shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name (Deut. 16:2).

Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats (Exod. 12:5).

You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt (Deut. 16:3).

Deuteronomy 16:2 seems to allow the Passover sacrifice to come from the flock or the herd, thus allowing cattle as an option. However, Exodus 12:5 states that it must be from the sheep or the goats, with no cattle allowed. Christian scholars have addressed this difficulty as well, offering several solutions.<sup>237</sup> However, the solution proposed by C. F. Keil, probably the best, implicitly applies this very *middah*. The verse that provides the reconciliation is Deuteronomy 16:3. Keil comments as follows on Deut. 16:1-8:

Israel was to make ready the Passover to the Lord in the earring month<sup>238</sup> (see at Ex. xii. 2). The precise day is supposed to be known from Ex. xii., as in Ex. xxiii. 15. עֲשֵׂה פֶסַח (*to prepare the Passover*), which is used primarily to denote the preparation of the paschal lamb for a festal meal, is employed here in a wider signification, viz., "to keep the Passover." At this feast they were to slay sheep and oxen to the Lord for a Passover, at the place, etc. In ver. 2, as in ver. 1, the word "Passover" is employed in a broader sense, and includes not only the paschal lamb, but the paschal sacrifices generally, which the Rabbins embrace under the common name of *chagiga*;<sup>239</sup> not the burnt-offerings and sin-offerings, however, prescribed in Num. xxviii. 19-26, but all the sacrifices that were slain at the feast of the Passover (i.e., during the seven days of the *Mazzoth*,<sup>240</sup> which are included under the name of *pascha*) for the purpose of holding sacrificial meals. This is evident from the expression "of the flock and the herd;" as it was expressly laid down, that only שֶׁה , i.e., a yearling animal of the sheep or goats, was to be slain for the paschal meal on the fourteenth of the month in the evening, and an ox was never slaughtered in the place of the lamb. **But if any doubt could exist upon this point, it would be completely set aside by ver. 3: "Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith."** As the word "therewith" cannot possibly refer to anything else than the "Passover" in ver. 2, it is distinctly stated that the slaughtering and eating of the Passover was to last seven days, whereas the Passover lamb was to be slain and consumed in the evening of the fourteenth

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236 This example is based on Strack's summary of the application of this rule in *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael* on Exod. 12:5 (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 288, n. 7). However, I have modified the example. In Strack's note, Deut. 16:2 and Exod. 12:5 were set in contrast, and the third verse providing the reconciliation was Exod. 12:21. However, Exod. 12:21 still falls within the same limitation given in 12:5. The real verse that reconciles the apparent contradiction between Deut. 16:2 and Exod. 12:5 is Deut. 16:3, as explained above in the quote from Keil. The actual reconciliation reached, however, is the same: Deut. 16:2 applies to the general sacrifices of the seven days of Unleavened Bread.

237 See, e.g., Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, gen. ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 241-42.

238 Keil refers to the month of *Abib*, אֲבִיב , the name meaning *fresh, young ears* (of barley); thus Abib was the "month of ear-forming, or of growing green" (*BDB*, p. 1). The name is used in Exod. 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1; the month is called *Nisan* after the exile (Neh. 2:1; Esth. 3:7). In terms of modern months, it ran from approximately the middle of March to the middle of April.

239 From the Hebrew verb לָגַל meaning *to make pilgrimage, to keep a pilgrim-feast* (*BDB*, p. 290). Passover began at sunset of the 14th day of Abib, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the 15th day and ran for seven days (Lev. 23:4-8). Thus *chagiga* as used here refers to the general sacrifices offered over the entire Passover week.

240 "Unleavened cakes." The Hebrew noun מִצּוֹת is the plural of מִצָּה meaning unleavened bread or cake (*BDB*, p. 595).

## The 32 Middoth of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose<sup>242</sup> was one of the last seven pupils of Akiba<sup>243</sup> and is dated somewhere between A.D. 130 and 160.<sup>244</sup>

Many of the 13 *middoth* of Rabbi Ishmael were developed for halakhic material, but a number of them have obvious application either to haggadic material or to both. With the 32 *middoth* of Rabbi Eliezer, by contrast, "most of the rules apply to the *aggadah*. Moreover, most of his sayings in both Talmuds, in *beraitot*, and in Midrashim, are aggadic."<sup>245</sup> The rules themselves, however, are not mentioned in the Talmud.<sup>246</sup>

Unfortunately, these 32 *middoth* follow in the line of Rabbi Akiba's approach to hermeneutics,<sup>247</sup> and become quite bizarre. They entail decidedly fanciful methods of interpreting the biblical text, especially the last four rules. Rules 29 and 30 are presented here as characteristic of this style of interpretation.

### Rule 29: Gematria<sup>248</sup>

This word is sometimes used in the sense of "calculations" (*'Aboth* 3:18).<sup>249</sup> However, as a hermeneutical rule it refers to "explaining a word or group of words according to the numerical value of their letters, or of substituting other letters of the alphabet for them in accordance with a set system."<sup>250</sup>

For example,<sup>251</sup> the name Eliezer, Abraham's servant, has a numerical value of 318. That happens to be the number of soldiers Abraham took with him to battle the four kings who had taken Lot prisoner:

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan" (Gen. 14:14; NASB).

*Midrash Rabbah* therefore concludes that Abraham sent only Eliezer into the battle.

For another example,<sup>252</sup> consider Numbers 6:5 (NASB) on the Nazirite vow:

All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long.

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241 C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., in vol. 1 in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975; original publication date, 1865), III:374-375; the emphasis was added to point out that Deut. 16:3 is the verse that supplies the reconciliation between Deut. 16:2 and Exod. 12:5.

242 Often, "Eliezer ben Yose ha-Gelili," the addition, *ha-Gelili*, meaning "of Galilee."

243 Alter Hilewitz, "Eliezer ben Yose Ha-Gelili," *EncJudaica*, VI:629.

244 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 35, n. 55.

245 Hilewitz, "Eliezer ben Yose Ha-Gelili," VI:630.

246 Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 95.

247 A complete list of these 32 *middoth* is given by Strack, *ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

248 The Hebrew noun גִּמְטְרִיָּה is simply a transliteration of the Greek noun *gematria*. The etymology of *gematria* is uncertain. According to Gershom Scholem, "Gematria," *EncJudaica*, VII:369, it is from γεωμετρία (*earth measurement*; English, *geometry*). Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 295, n. 33, discusses other possibilities.

249 Scholem, "Gematria," VII:369.

250 *Ibid.*

251 This example is taken from *Genesis Rabbah* 43.2 (Jacobs, "Hermeneutics," VIII:371).

252 This example comes from Rabbi Matthena, a second generation *amoraim* from Babylonia (Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 124, and p. 295, n. 34).

The period of the vow is not specified in the Bible, but according to the talmudic tractate *Nazir* 1:3, it was 30 days.<sup>253</sup> When asked how this is proved, Rabbi Matthena responded that in the phrase, קֹדֶשׁ יְהוָה, "he shall be holy," the verb יְהוָה ("he shall be") has the numerical value of 30.

**Rule 30: Notarikon**<sup>254</sup>

This rule can be used in one of two ways.<sup>255</sup>

- Every letter of a word is separately interpreted.
- A word is broken into two or more parts and each part is interpreted separately.

For an example of use one, consider 1 Kings 2:8 (NASB):<sup>256</sup>

Behold, there is with you Shimei the son of Gera the Benjamite, of Bahurim; now it was he who cursed me with a violent curse on the day I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD, saying, "I will not put you to death with the sword."

The Hebrew word translated "violent" (it could also be translated "grievous") is נִמְרָצֶת (*nimretseth*, consonants n, m, r, ts, th). According to this rule of interpretation, the implied imprecations included in this curse are five-fold, described by five words, each word beginning with a letter of *nimretseth*. Therefore, David was actually called a/an:

נוֹאֵף	Adulterer
מוֹאָבִי	Moabite
רוֹצֵחַ	Murderer
צוֹרֵר	Oppressor
תּוֹעֵבָה	Despised [one]

It should be noted that there were rabbis who objected to an excessive use of *notarikon*, even in *haggadah*.<sup>257</sup>

What is one to make of these two rules? To cite Terry's verdict, "It is easy to see how such hermeneutical principles must necessarily involve the exposition of the Scriptures in utter confusion."<sup>258</sup> The fundamental problem in these approaches to interpretation is that they allow the interpreter to enter the twilight zone, in which his "boundaries are that of imagination." These procedures of interpretation do not restrict the interpreter to the biblical writer's intent, a writer who had had a revelatory message from God to speak or write to the people of

253 Aaron Rothkoff, "Nazirite," *EncJudaica*, XII:909.

254 According to the article, "Notarikon," *EncJudaica*, XII:1231-32, an article written by the editorial staff, the word *notarikon* (Greek, *νοταρικόν*; Latin, *notaricum*) is from the Latin *notarius*, "shorthand-writer," referring to one who uses a stenographic shorthand system of abbreviations either by shortening the words or writing only one letter of each word. This system was used in the Roman courts.

255 *Ibid.*, XII:1232.

256 This example is taken from *Shabbat* 105a (*ibid.*); the article also gives examples of use two.

257 *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 1; *ibid.*

258 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 609.

Israel and which both God and the writer fully expected them to understand from what he said or wrote.

## The פְּשָׁט

Whether from a Jewish or Christian perspective, the most important word in the field of hermeneutics should be and must remain פְּשָׁט, the literal, natural, grammatical interpretation of the biblical text. This section explains the reason.

A study of the word פְּשָׁט (*peshat*), however, must include another important word: דְּרָשׁ (*derash*).

- The Hebrew noun דְּרָשׁ is from the verb דָּרַשׁ, which means *to resort to, to seek*, and is used often in the Tanakh.<sup>259</sup> The noun, however, is not used. As discussed in a previous section, "Types of Rabbinic Literature," the word *midrash* is also based on this same verb.<sup>260</sup>
- The Hebrew noun פְּשָׁט (*peshat*) is from the verb פָּשַׁט, which means *to strip off, to make a dash, to raid* and again is used often in the Tanakh.<sup>261</sup> As with *derash*, however, the noun is not used.

In talmudic literature there does not seem to be a hard distinction between *peshat* and *derash*; both meant something like *meaning* or *interpretation* of a biblical text or the process used to determine it.<sup>262</sup> If any distinction was drawn, it was that *peshat* was either (1) "the teaching recognized by the public as obviously authoritative, since familiar and traditional" or (2) "the usual accepted traditional meaning as it was generally taught."<sup>263</sup>

However, they later came to imply two distinct methods of interpretation.

In the Midrash the distinction between *derash* and the alternate method called *peshat* is not clearly defined and in parallel passages the terms are sometimes interchangeable (cf. Gen. R. [*Genesis Rabbah*] 10:7 with Tanḥ. [*Tanḥuma*], Hukat 1). Only in the Middle Ages, probably under the influence of Rashi's Bible commentary, did *derash* come to be used for homiletical exposition in contrast to *peshat*, the literal interpretation.<sup>264</sup>

Kasher offers the following definition of the *peshat* method of exegesis:

If we define *peshat* as an exegetical method that seeks *to expose the meaning of scripture by considering its context, using philological insights, and with historical 'awareness'*, then the foundations of this method are to be found in rabbinic literature.<sup>265</sup>

This is precisely what Christian scholars call the grammatical-historical method of exegesis, as discussed at

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259 BDB, p. 205.

260 Note, however, that the noun *midrash* is used in the Tanakh at 2 Chron. 13:22 and 24:27. See footnote 108 in this chapter.

261 BDB, pp. 832-33.

262 Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, pp. 552-53: "While in later periods the terms *peshat* and *derash* signified vastly different methods of exegesis, early rabbinic literature makes no methodological distinctions between the two."

263 Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Peshat," *EncJudaica*, XIII:330-31.

264 Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Derash," *EncJudaica*, V:1549. In modern Hebrew, *derashah* is equivalent to the English word *sermon*.

265 Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, p. 553.

some length in Chapter 2.

Defining the *derash* method of exegesis is much more difficult. Kasher suggests that it be done by contrast with the characteristics of *peshat* and thus offers the following characteristics of *derash*:<sup>266</sup>

- *Derash* does not always seek to reveal the original or contextual meaning of Scripture.
- *Derash* ignores both the context and the rules of biblical language.
- *Derash* assigns meanings even to the tiniest unit of language, the letter, and to the form of the text itself.
- *Derash* assumes that a biblical text may contain many different levels of meanings.
- *Derash* is free to interpret grammatical forms without relating them to their context, destroy the syntactical structure of a verse, establish the meaning of words based on tenuous comparisons, and project linguistically late terms back into the Bible.

In view of the previous discussion of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba, what is in a general sense called *midrashic literature* contains both types of interpretation,<sup>267</sup> although when the Midrashim were produced, this terminology was not fixed. The Midrash *halakhah* coming from Rabbi Ishmael and his academy generally emphasizes the *peshat* of the biblical text; that coming from Rabbi Akiba and his academy generally emphasizes *derash*.<sup>268</sup> The Midrash *haggadah* in general emphasizes *derash*.

In the earlier section, "Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba," it was noted that Rabbi Akiba was motivated in his approach to exegesis by the assumption that the Bible in its entirety is the very word of God. Kasher makes a similar point in his discussion of the motivation behind the *derash* approach to exegesis: the liberties taken in that method, in contradistinction to the *peshat* approach, were developed to enable the rabbis to resolve "contradictions" in the Bible and keep it eternally applicable to the life of God's people.<sup>269</sup> It is evident that Kasher himself did not take this view of Scripture and simply accepted the existence of contradictions.

My view of the Bible is in complete agreement with the ancient Jewish sages. However, I do not believe that *peshat* must be abandoned in order to resolve apparent contradictions in Scripture or to keep its teachings relevant to all generations. As I pointed out in Chapter 2 of this book, the assumption that the Bible is the inerrant word of God is foundational to the theory and practice of the grammatical-historical method of hermeneutics. I also argued at some length that grammatical-historical exegesis--*peshat* exegesis--is the only valid method of biblical interpretation. Those who spoke and wrote the Scripture intended to communicate the revelation that God had given them and were preserved from error by God himself. It is that authorial intent, as the only meaning with divine authority, that is discovered through a careful application of *peshat* or grammatical-historical exegesis. Those who are committed to this method of hermeneutics have been addressing (and solving) alleged contradictions and providing applications of biblical truth for every generation.

## The Great Medieval Commentators

The long journey in this chapter has now reached its end. Rashi used the term *peshat* to refer to literal interpretation--the natural, logical, grammatical-historical interpretation of the biblical text. The *middoth* of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael went a long way in providing the rules to use in the practice of this method of

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266 Ibid., pp. 560, 568, 572, 573.

267 "The same methods and techniques are used for both the halakhic and narrative portions of Scripture. Just as both the *peshat* and *derash* approaches are applied to non-halakhic sections, so both can be applied to interpret biblical law" (ibid., p. 578).

268 It should be noted that neither Rabbi Ishmael nor Rabbi Akiba were always consistent with their general approach to Scripture. As Kasher argues, ibid., pp. 566-68, there are examples where R. Akiba gave a literal interpretation to texts for which R. Ishmael gave a non-literal interpretation.

269 Ibid., pp. 575-77.

interpretation. The great medieval Jewish grammarians, like Rashi, approached the Scriptures to determine the *peshat*, the literal, natural meaning of the biblical text and the intent of the original author.

Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki (Rashi, A.D. 1040-1105)<sup>270</sup>

As a grammarian,

Rashi centers his commentaries on meticulous analysis of the language of the text. He was both philologist and linguist and derived his grammatical principles from rabbinic literature and the Hebrew works of the Spanish grammarians, Menahem b. Jacob ibn Saruq and Dunash b. Labrat....Scattered throughout his commentaries are many remarks on syntax, tenses, moods, conjugations (such as the primitive use of the *pi'el*--Ex. 27:3), collective nouns (Gen. 32:6), deletion of parts of the sentence, prepositions required by certain verbs (Judg. 6:32), and changes in word order (Gen. 2:19). Occasionally he formulates rules on linguistic usage (Jer. 51:12), and discusses the shades of meaning of various synonyms (Gen. 1:11; Micah 5:7).<sup>271</sup>

As a commentator on the Bible,

The main distinguishing characteristic of Rashi's commentary is a compromise between the literal and the midrashic interpretations; to the latter, which was the principle method of exposition in French biblical exegesis, he added the former. At least three quarters of Rashi's comments are based on rabbinic sources. The few that are original are mainly philological explanations. When basing his comment on the Midrashim, Rashi chose from the available material those that were closest to the literal interpretation of the biblical text, or solved the difficulties presented by it...The criterion on which he based his choice of comment is clearly stated by him: "As for me, I am only concerned with the literal meaning of the Scriptures and with such *aggadot* as explain the biblical passages in a fitting manner" (Gen. 3:8)...While Rashi based his comment on the halakhic part of the Pentateuch on talmudic literature, his purpose was not to lay down the *halakhah*, and he therefore quoted only some of the many *halakhot* dealing with the subject in question. Sometimes he states that the halakhic Midrash does not give the literal interpretation of a passage (Ex. 16:29; 22:8); at others he interprets a verse contrary to the decided *halakhah* (Lev. 13:6). His partiality for the literal explanation is further attested by the fact that, having revised his commentary several times, he wished at the end of his days to improve it "on the basis of the plain meanings which appear daily" (Rashbam, to Gen. 37:2).<sup>272</sup>

There is certainly little to criticize in this approach to biblical interpretation.

A Christian scholar gives a similar assessment of Rashi's approach to Scripture:

He strove for the *peshat*, i.e., for a sober, natural, and rational interpretation of the Bible. His is still a comm. for both the novice and the master among the Jews. Christian exegetes of the Middle Ages as well as modern times made use of his Bible commentary.<sup>273</sup>

Abraham ibn Ezra (Abenezra, 1089–1164)<sup>274</sup>

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270 "Rashi" is an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki. Although there are different ways his name is transliterated into English letters, his name using the more common English spellings is *Solomon ben Isaac*.

271 Menahem Zevi Kaddari, "Rashi," *EncJudaica*, XIII:1562, section "Rashi as Grammarian." It might be noted in passing that since Rashi did not know Arabic, he was unaware of Judah b. David Hayyuj's and Jonah ibn Janah's work on tri-consonantalism.

272 Avraham Grossman, "Rashi," *EncJudaica*, XIII:1560-61, section "Main Characteristics of His Commentary." "Rashbam" is an acronym for Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, a grandson of Rashi.

273 Ray A. Stewart, "Commentaries, Hebrew," *ISBE*, I:745.

274 "Abenezra" is an acronym for "Abraham ben Ezra," although he is often called simply "Ibn Ezra." *Ibn* is the Arabic equivalent of Hebrew *ben*, meaning *son* or *son of*.

As a grammarian, Ibn Ezra did not create any new grammatical system. However, for centuries he was considered one of the fathers of Hebrew grammar. This was due, first to the fact that he collected the grammatical conclusions of early philologists of the East and Spain. Second, he wrote in Hebrew, which made available to scholars who did not speak Arabic the work of the Spanish grammarians who wrote in that language. Thus it was Ibn Ezra who first introduced to European scholars the principle of the trilateral roots of verbs.<sup>275</sup>

As a commentator on the Bible, he made his views on interpretation clear in the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch. In it he lists four approaches that he *rejects*:<sup>276</sup>

- Interweaving expositions with discussions unrelated to the text
- An anti-traditionalist approach that dispenses with the explanations of the rabbis and interprets texts based on the interpreter's own reasoning
- The assumption that the Bible consists entirely of allegories and mysteries
- An approach that follows the interpretations of the Midrashim without regard to the plain meaning of the text

Instead,

Ibn Ezra...states his intention of establishing independently the literal meaning of the text, but following the explanation of the talmudic sages in interpreting the legislative part of the Pentateuch....Etymological and grammatical explanations are major features of Ibn Ezra's commentary.<sup>277</sup>

#### Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak, A.D. 1160-1235)<sup>278</sup>

As a grammarian, Rabbi Kimchi's chief contribution

lies in the arrangement of the material and the popularization of the innovations of his father and brother...<sup>279</sup> Seeing himself as a "gleaner after the reapers," Kimḥi nevertheless made some original contributions, including his distinguishing of the *vav* consecutive...from the *vav* conjunctive and his concern for the continual development of the language through the recognition of the legitimacy of post-biblical forms.<sup>280</sup>

As a commentator on the Bible,

Kimḥi began his exegetical activity with a commentary on the Book of Chronicles...written in response to the request of a student of his father's for an exegesis of that book in accordance with the plain sense or *derek ha-peshat* in contrast to the homiletic commentaries which were then prevalent. This was followed by commentaries to Genesis...all the prophetic books...and Psalms. In all these Kimḥi endeavored to utilize the methodology of Ibn Ezra and the elder Kimḥi's, stressing scientific philological analysis and de-

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275 *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, in an entry reproduced as "Ibn Ezra, Abraham," section "As Grammarian," in *EncJudaica*, VIII:1168.

276 This summary is based on Tovia Preschel, "Ibn Ezra, Abraham," *EncJudaica*, VIII:1166, section "As Commentator on the Bible."

277 *Ibid.*, VIII:1166-67. Unfortunately, however, Ibn Ezra was the first to maintain that Isaiah was the work of two different authors, and he had doubts about the authorship of the Pentateuch--doubts that were noticed by Baruch Spinoza, an early and leading rationalist of the seventeenth century.

278 "Radak" is an acronym for Rabbi David Kimchi. "Kimchi" is a common way to transliterate the Hebrew letters of his name, but "Kimḥi" is also used. The Hebrew letter that is by some transliterated as "ch" and by others "ḥ" is *ḥeth*.

279 David was the son of Rabbi Joseph Kimchi and the brother and pupil of Rabbi Moses Kimchi.

280 Frank Talmage, "David Kimḥi," *EncJudaica*, X:1002.

emphasizing homiletical digression. Unlike these predecessors, however, Kimchi relied heavily on rabbinic literature, distinguishing between *perush* or interpretation which conformed to his standards of *peshat*, and the purely homiletical interpretations or *derashot*, many of which he included nonetheless for added interest.<sup>281</sup>

For a Christian assessment of Rabbi Kimchi, he, his father, and brother "were the most brilliant contributors to Bible exegesis and Hebrew philology (like ibn Ezra) in medieval times."<sup>282</sup> As an indication of the significance of Rabbi Kimchi to biblical exegesis of the prophets, Christian scholar and Hebraist, Alexander McCaul, late professor of Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis at King's College London, translated Kimchi's entire commentary on Zechariah into English, together with his own comments on the text and on Rabbi Kimchi's interpretive conclusions: *Rabbi Kimchi's Commentary Upon the Prophecies of Zechariah* (1837).

Milton Terry offers these comments:

He [Rabbi Kimchi] defended the simple grammatical method of exposition against the Jewish writers of his time who adopted Hagadic and cabalistic opinions...Christian scholars of his time and long after were greatly influenced by his writings, and used them freely in the preparation of their lexical and grammatical works.<sup>283</sup>

Terry also gives a summary statement concerning all three of these great commentators:

In such writers as Rashi, Aben-Ezra, Maimonides, and David Kimchi, prominence is given to the great principles of grammatico-historical interpretation which are generally accepted by all the leading biblical critics and expositors of the present day.<sup>284</sup>

## Michael Rydelnik on Rashi

Before leaving the three great medieval commentators who endeavored to determine the plain, literal, grammatical meaning of the biblical text, brief notice should be taken of Michael Rydelnik's comments on what he considers one aspect of Rashi's influence on Christian scholars today.

Rydelnik wrote a book called *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?*<sup>285</sup> As was noted in citations from this book in Chapter 1, he points out that a number of conservative Christian scholars today argue that many of the texts traditionally considered Messianic are no longer to be interpreted as direct predictions of the Messiah. Isaiah 9:6 (Heb., 9:5) was cited as an example, and certainly Isaiah 7:14 is another. What brought about this change? Rydelnik suggests that the answer can be traced back to Rashi.

His interpretive methods, along with the approaches of the medieval Jewish commentators whom he influenced, ultimately found their way into Christian commentaries. Is it possible that Rashi's more historical approach ultimately affected the way Christians interpret messianic prophecy?<sup>286</sup>

Before Rydelnik answers this question, he reviews Rashi's life and work. He points out that Rashi "was born into a polemic era":

...public religious disputations between Christians and Jews had become quite common. The focus of these disputations was always the Bible and the question most commonly addressed was, Is Jesus of Nazareth the promised Messiah of the Old Testament? Christian disputants frequently offered allegorical defenses of their interpretations, while Jewish polemicists often presented more literal and historical

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281 Ibid., X:1003.

282 Stewart, "Commentaries, Hebrew," I:745.

283 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 624.

284 Ibid., p. 628.

285 Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

286 Ibid., p. 113.

interpretations to defend their understanding of the biblical text.<sup>287</sup>

Rydelnik then goes on to claim that

"the circumstances of Rashi's times led him to make the most substantive use and to adjust ever so slightly the meaning of peshat....Therefore, Rashi initiated the attempt to rebut Christian interpretation of messianic passages through the use of peshat....

But Rashi's use of peshat took on an additional nuance. In order to refute Christian claims, Rashi made a significant shift in the meaning of peshat: he equated the simple meaning of the text with the historical interpretation. This means that Rashi would often rebut the Christian claim that a given verse was messianic and referred to Jesus by countering that it referred "to a biblical historical person or event." Hence, Rashi no longer understood the peshat as the *plain* sense of the text but the *historical* sense. Moreover, Rashi frequently argued for the historical sense of a passage even if this meant that "he had to depart from traditional exposition."<sup>288</sup>

Because the phrase, "grammatical-historical interpretation," is virtually universal as the name of the method of interpretation that results in the meaning intended by the , referring to "historical interpretation" or "historical sense" in a pejorative way is to use extremely poor, imprecise terms. However, Rydelnik uses these terms throughout his book. What he means by "historical interpretation" is not grammatical-historical interpretation but rather an interpretation of a traditional Messianic text in terms of a historical figure instead of the future Messiah. Thus, a "historical interpretation" takes the child in Isaiah 9:6 (Heb., 9:5) to be Hezekiah, and Immanuel in Isaiah 7:14 to be either Hezekiah or Isaiah's son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

Now Rashi certainly believed in a coming Messiah. In fact, Rydelnik points out that he sought to bring encouragement to the Jewish people suffering persecution with the start of the First Crusade (A.D. 1096) by pointing to the future hope of the Jewish people in some of the traditional Messianic passages.<sup>289</sup> How then, according to Rydelnik, did Rashi pick the passages to interpret "historically" and those to interpret in terms of the coming Messiah?

The deciding factor was whether a particular messianic passage could be understood to refer to the first coming of Jesus or to Jesus' deity. If this was an issue, then Rashi would commonly interpret those texts as referring to a historical figure. However, if the passage fit the traditional Jewish conception of the Messiah or referred to what Christians perceived as the Second Coming, Rashi would maintain the messianic interpretation.<sup>290</sup>

Rydelnik's overall argument, however, has several problems.

(1) As noted above in the section, "The **פְּשָׁט**," there was no hard distinction between *peshat* and *derash* in talmudic literature. Repeating the citation from Rabinowitz, "Only in the Middle Ages, probably under the influence of Rashi's Bible commentary, did *derash* come to be used for homiletical exposition in contrast to *peshat*, the literal interpretation."<sup>291</sup> Dates when precise definitions for *peshat* and *derash* were solidified are difficult to pinpoint. However if Rabinowitz is correct, it is also difficult to see how Rashi could "adjust" or "shift" the definition of *peshat* when it was his Bible commentary that probably solidified its definition.

(2) Included in Rydelnik's discussion is the following citation from Erwin I. J. Rosenthal with reference to Rashi:

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287 Ibid., p. 114.

288 Ibid., p. 116; emphasis original and the two citations are from E. I. J. Rosenthal, "The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

289 Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, p. 117.

290 Ibid. The word "commonly" used in this sentence is imprecise. Did Rashi follow this procedure in every such text? If not, why not?

291 Rabinowitz, "Derash," V:1549.

Many a comment on a passage in the Pentateuch, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or the Psalms is concluded with the statement that his interpretation is according to the plain sense and serves as "an answer to the Christians."<sup>292</sup>

This comment by Rosenthal actually weakens Rydelnik's case. As cited above, Rydelnik claims that "Rashi no longer understood the *peshat* as the *plain* sense of the text but the *historical* sense." Yet Rosenthal, whom Rydelnik always cites positively, stated here that the "plain sense" is precisely the sense that Rashi used to answer Christian arguments.

(3) According to Rabinowitz, as argued in point (1), the definition of *peshat* that resulted from Rashi's Bible commentary was "the literal interpretation." According to Rosenthal, Rashi sought "the plain sense" of Scripture--the simple or literal sense intended by the . This sense is achieved by the use of what is now called the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Rashi's method of interpretation, therefore, cannot be faulted, and he did not change the meaning of *peshat* in order to answer the Christians. Rydelnik himself at this point in his argument had already established the pattern of polemic debates between Christians and Jews: Christians tended to use an allegorical interpretation, while the Jews used a literal interpretation. That is why Rashi's method of interpretation provided "an answer to the Christians," not because he "adjusted" or "shifted" the meaning of *peshat*.

What, then, is the real situation? I would summarize it with the following points.

(1) *Peshat* since the Middle Ages has been used to mean the simple, plain, literal interpretation of a biblical text--the meaning intended by the . It is also used to refer to the method of interpretation used to determine that meaning. In this use, it is equivalent to what is called the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. There has been no change in this definition of *peshat*.

(2) A careful and scholarly application of the grammatical-historical method to a certain specific biblical passage might result in the conclusion that the intended to describe a historical or contemporary figure. When applied to another biblical passage, it might also result in the conclusion that the intended to describe a future figure. In such cases, including Messianic texts, the biblical author generally does not know the time that figure will appear on the scene or the circumstances surrounding his appearance.<sup>293</sup>

(3) A scholar's application of grammatical-historical hermeneutics is not infallible. Therefore, for a given Messianic text, two scholars, both of them honest and competent in its application to the same Messianic text, might come to different conclusions as to whether the is describing a historical figure or the future Messiah.

(4) The theological views held by an exegete, except for the belief that the Scripture is the inerrant word of God, should in theory not influence his application of the grammatical-historical method. However, despite his best efforts, that possibility exists in subtle, perhaps even subconscious, ways.<sup>294</sup> This potential danger is present for both Jewish and Christian scholars, and even when dealing with texts that have nothing to do with Messianism.

So what about Rashi? On the basis of the discussion and citations given in the above section, "Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki (Rashi, A.D. 1040-1105)," I believe that Rashi honestly applied the principles of *peshat*--plain or literal interpretation--to try to determine the intent of the without purposely letting his own Messianic beliefs skew the results. Whether he completely succeeded in that is difficult to say, and might have been difficult even for Rashi himself to say. But applying the principles of *peshat* did lead him in some passages "to depart from traditional exposition," as Rosenthal stated in Rydelnik's citation above. But this was not a departure from a previous and correct definition of *peshat*, but rather a departure from Messianic interpretations of certain passages in the much earlier Talmud, Targumim, and Midrashim.

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292 Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, p. 116, citing Rosenthal, "The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, p. 262.

293 Note the "time and circumstances" phrase in the correct translation of 1 Pet. 1:10-12. For an analysis of this text, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 18-23.

294 For a Christian scholar, the role played by the New Testament citation of Isaiah 7:14 is addressed in Chapter 14 of this book.

For example, Psalm 2 is interpreted Messianically in *Midrash Tehillim* and many times in the Talmud.<sup>295</sup> Rashi in his commentary on Psalm 2 refers to one of these talmudic passages in the following statement:

Our Sages (Ber. 7b) expounded the passage as referring to the King Messiah, but according to its apparent meaning, it is proper to interpret it as referring to David himself, as the matter is stated (II Sam. 5:17): "And the Philistines heard that they had anointed David as king over Israel, and all the Philistines went up to seek, etc.," and they fell into his hands. Concerning them, he says, "Why have nations gathered," and they all gathered.<sup>296</sup>

Obviously, Rashi was seeking the simple, plain intent of the author--the *peshat*, and not some "adjusted" or "shifted" *peshat*. The evidence he provides is consistent with grammatical-historical interpretation, which includes comparisons with similar or identical terms, phrases, or statements in the broader context. I think Rashi's conclusion is wrong and believe there are good and convincing counter evidences. But his method was not wrong.

Did Rashi and his interpretations influence Christian scholars? Of course! This was already pointed out in the above section on Rashi, and it was also true of Abenezra and David Kimchi. Rydelnik himself gives a lengthy discussion of how Rashi influenced Christian scholars throughout the centuries, beginning as far back as Hugo of St. Victor (d. 1141).<sup>297</sup> Has Rashi also influenced modern evangelical scholars to interpret traditional Messianic texts in terms of historical figures? Probably. It is certainly a valid aspect of grammatical-historical hermeneutics to consider the conclusions of scholars who have gone before. It would perhaps be difficult even for those evangelical scholars themselves to know how much of an influence Rashi's interpretation had on them. However, I still consider such evangelical scholars to be honest practitioners of the grammatical-historical method. I think they have simply come to the wrong conclusion, especially in the case of a passage like Isaiah 9:6-7 (Heb., 9:5-6).<sup>298</sup>

## ***Pardes*: The Opposite Extreme from *Peshat* on the Hermeneutical Spectrum**

Unfortunately, during the Middle Ages, when Rashi, Radak, and Abenezra were strong proponents of literal, grammatical interpretation, another trend was solidifying. Moses de Leon (ca. 1240-1305) created an acronym using the Persian word *pardes* ("garden") for four categories or levels of interpretation.<sup>299</sup> The acronym was clever because these four levels were thought to open the "garden of the Torah." They are briefly defined as follows.<sup>300</sup>

- **P: *peshat***: The literal meaning, although as understood here, it included not only the factual and historical content of the Torah, but also the authoritative law of Rabbinic tradition.
- **R: *remez***: Remez means "hint," "clue," or "pointer." These are veiled allusions such as *gematria* and *notarikon*.<sup>301</sup>
- **D: *derash***: The homiletical meaning. It was considered the path of ethical and haggadic commentary.
- **S: *sod***: Sod means "a secret" or "mystery." It represents a mystical or esoteric meaning. Explication on

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295 See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1886), II:716-17).

296 Chabad.org Web site.

297 Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 119-22.

298 Rashi's interpretation of Isaiah 9:5-6 is discussed extensively in Chapter 7. Also, the last section of Chapter 7, "Rashi's Motivation," gives further discussion of the issue just discussed here--Rashi's method of interpretation.

299 Gershom Scholem, "Kabbalah," *EncJudaica*, X:623.

300 Ibid.

301 This definition is taken from the article, "Pardes," *EncJudaica*, XIII:91, an article written by the editorial staff.

the level of sod had infinite possibilities. One classic example is the prayer of Moses to God in Deuteronomy 3:23ff, which is explained in 252 different ways.

All of this was based on a fundamental belief within the Kabbalist movement<sup>302</sup> that the content of the Torah, or of divine speech in general, possessed infinite meaning, which revealed itself at different levels, depending on the capacity of the interpreter. Divine speech could not possibly be exhausted at any one level alone. However well-intended this concept was, it allows interpretation of the biblical text to enter the area of fantasy, where the text and the intent of the , who received the revelation from God, lose all control over the interpretive process.

## Conclusion

Chapters 2 and 3 in this book are intended to set the hermeneutical foundation for the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. In Chapter 2 on Christian hermeneutics, the grammatical-historical method was defined and several additional hermeneutical concepts were evaluated. In this current chapter on Jewish hermeneutics, a number of different approaches to interpreting the biblical text were explored. It was found that since the time of Ezra there has always been an approach that sought to discover the literal, grammatical meaning of the biblical text. The *middoth* of both Rabbis Hillel and Ishmael in general encouraged and provided rules for this approach, culminating in the great commentators Rashi, Abenezra, and David Kimchi (Radak), all of whom championed the same grammatical-historical method used in Christian circles. However, in the terminology of Jewish commentators, the result of this methodology is called the *peshat*--the literal, grammatical meaning of the biblical text. Thus, both conservative Christian scholars and Jewish scholars like Rashi, Abenezra, and David Kimchi agree this result was the meaning of the message known to and communicated by the human author, who had received his message by revelation from God. Thus the interpretations of Isaiah 7:14 by Rashi and Radak, discussed in Chapter 13 play a role in the analysis of this verse.<sup>303</sup>

However, this does not mean that the practitioners of the grammatical-historical method, whether Jewish or Christian, always come to the same conclusion regarding the meaning of a given text. If the history of the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 shows anything, it confirms that fact beyond any shadow of doubt. Even Rashi and Radak disagreed as to the identity of the son to be born of the *עַלְמָה* (*almah*),

It is perhaps a step further to assert that the *peshat* is the **only** meaning that has divine authority. On this point, more Jewish scholars perhaps will dissent than Christian scholars, but there are many in both circles who will make such an assertion. Nevertheless, it is the underlying assumption that governs the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 taken in this book. The only meaning that has divine authority is the meaning Isaiah intended to convey as he spoke to Ahaz.

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302 " 'Kabbalah' is the traditional and most commonly used term for the esoteric teachings of Judaism and for Jewish mysticism, especially the forms which it assumed in the Middle Ages from the 12th century onward" (Scholem, "Kabbalah," X:489).

303 The section in Chapter 13 is "The Jewish Views."