

4. History of Interpretation.

*Jewish and Christian Hermeneutics; Medieval Interpretation;
the Bible in the Renaissance, Reformation, and
Enlightenment; towards modern Hermeneutics.*

Jewish Hermeneutics

*Inner-biblical allusion; post-biblical interpretation;
Hellenistic Judaism; Qumran; Rabbinic Judaism.*

Inner-Biblical Allusion

- Preceded and eventuated (led to) the canonization of the Hebrew Bible
- **Some texts were updated, amended, and even rewritten to make applicable**
 - Some reworked texts achieved authority almost equal to their sources (e.g., Kings and Chronicles)—revisers became authors!
 - Shorter, and sometimes longer, explanatory parenthetical explanations (e.g., place names, sandal exchange custom in Ruth 4:7)
 - Reinterpretation or application of prophecies (e.g., Jeremiah’s Seventy Year theme)

The Transition in Post-Biblical Interpretation

- *Targumîm*
 - **A *Targum* was an interpretation and explanation (usually in Aramaic) of a Hebrew biblical passage**
- **Started with Ezra’s Levitical assistants:**
 - “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.
 - “Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, **caused the people to understand the law**: and the people stood in their place. So **they read in the book in the law of God distinctly**, and **gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.**” (Nehemiah 8:5–8)
- Anonymous religious leaders “turned interpretation into a central and fundamental religious activity” (Kugel as cited in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 69)
 - **Three distinct and geographical schools of interpretation followed . . .**

Hellenistic Judaism

- **Greek became the major language of the Jewish Diaspora** (at least in the eastern Mediterranean outside of the Holy Land)
 - **Alexandria** was the intellectual and cultural epicenter of the Hellenistic World
- **The Septuagint (LXX)**
 - First the Torah (in Greek, the Pentateuch) and later the other biblical books (and much of the Apocrypha)
 - **Translated from a different exemplar than Masoretic version currently extant**
 - Stylistic and idealistic developments
 - Generally translated literally, importing Hebrew word order and constructions
 - **Idiosyncratic vocabulary and usage** [sometimes contemporary, sometimes calques such as *diathēkē*, both leveling and differentiation]
 - Avoided offending Greek hosts
 - **Avoided anthropomorphisms**
 - Avoided religious terms used by “heathen” religions
- **Philo**
 - Syncretized Jewish law and scripture with Greek philosophy (mostly Platonic but also Pythagorean)
 - **Allegorical method**
 - A text’s true meaning *lies behind its written words*
 - **Body (literal meaning)** and **soul (allegorical meaning)**

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Qumran Community

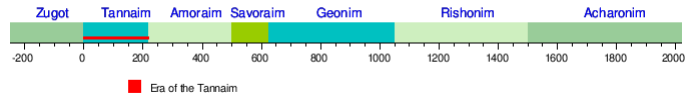
- **Origins**
 - Majority view : The Dead Sea Scrolls are the product of a sectarian group at Qumran, probably an extreme branch of the Essenes
 - Minority View: They represent many different sects and communities of Second Temple Judaism—might be, in fact, a temple archive deposited in the desert during the Roman-Jewish War of AD 66–73
- **Types of Texts**
 - **Biblical books**, *Targumim*, **Pesharim** (commentaries), apocryphal texts, sectarian writings
- **Qumranic exegesis**
 - **Prophetic scriptures of the Hebrew Bible deal primarily with the End Times**
 - The End Times have begun!
 - **Prophetic texts have cryptic references to contemporary events** (i.e., that is to events at the time of the Qumran community)
 - **The Teacher of Righteousness was infallibly-inspired in his interpretations**

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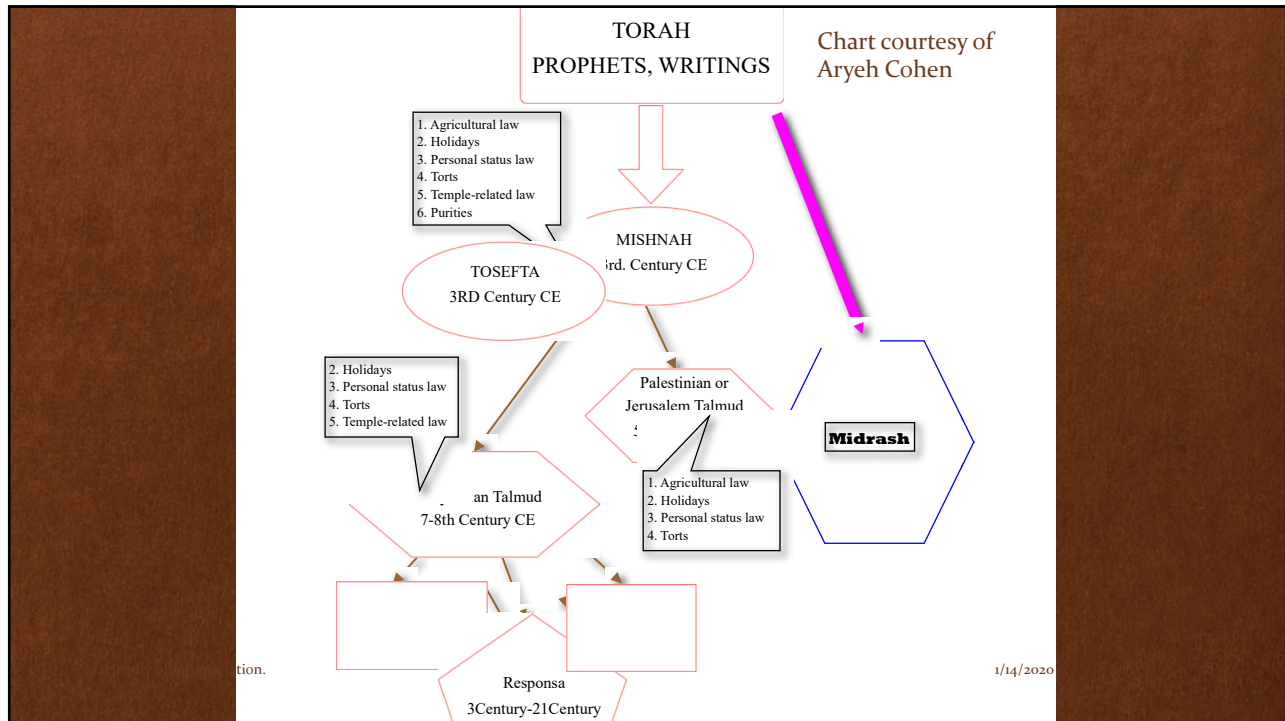
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Rabbinic Judaism



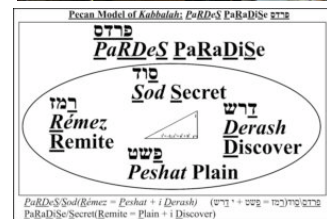
- Rose in the Tannaitic period (Aramaic, *tanna*, “teachers”) after the destruction of the temple (A.D. 70 and the compilation of the Mishnah (A.D. 200)
- Produced an astounding amount of **literature about scripture** (see next slide)
 - **Halakah** (legal material)
 - **Haggadah** (stories illustrating biblical texts)
- **Mishnah** (*mišnāh*, “study by repetition”)
 - Oral traditions of the rabbis were compiled and written down in 200; mostly *halakah*
- Tosefta (“supplement,” addition)
- **Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds**
 - Amoraic commentary (Aramaic, *amoraim*, “those who say or speak”) c. A.D. 200–500 interpreting biblical passages; largely *haggadah*
- Midrash



Developed Jewish biblical interpretation

(much of what they, like us, do is perhaps more properly exposition of community readings, not exegesis)

- **Torah as the “blueprint of all creation”** (Jasper, 26)
 - Rabbis came to see a heavenly Torah as being divine and preexistent, only being written in letters or “clothed in the garment of the text” with Moses
 - Studying the text of Torah was “touching the hem of the garment of the divine”
- **Jewish hermeneutics “as conversation”**
- **“Struggling with the text”** (Geoffrey Hartman)
 - The process of study and struggling for understanding is like Jacob’s wrestle with the angel (see Genesis 32:22–32)
 - *Havruta*: the tradition of studying the text in pairs
- **Pardes** (פרדס, “orchard” or garden): Kabbalistic (Jewish mystical) approach to the text
 - *Peshat*: straight or **literal meaning**
 - *Remez*: “hints” or **allegorical interpretation**
 - *Daresh*: “seek” or **comparative approach**
 - *Sod*: “secret” or **hidden meanings**



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Christian Hermeneutics

Apostolic period; apostolic fathers; Alexandrian School; church councils; Medieval interpretation; the Reformation; the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

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Apostolic Period (c. A.D. 30–100)

- Understanding the Old Testament **Christologically**
 - Jesus as the literal fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy
- Interpreting the Old Testament more broadly **typologically**
 - OT types anticipate (or are superseded by) NT antitypes
 - Often characters (like Adam or Jonah) or events (like the sacrifice of Isaac) rather than particular prophecies
- Continued **literal-contextual interpretation**
 - Paul's use of the idea of God's vengeance in Deuteronomy in Romans 12
- New **principal application**
 - Example of Paul applying Hosea 1:10 to the grafting in of Gentiles in Romans 9:25

Apostolic and Early Fathers (c. A.D. 100–150)

- **Apostolic Fathers**
 - Church leaders who had known apostles (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp); other early texts (*Epistle of Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Didachē*)
- Continued use of **typology**
 - Barnabas' use of Moses' outstretched arms and the brazen serpent as types of the crucifixion
- **Allegory**
 - Barnabas' use of the ritual of the red heifer
- **Canon of Truth**
 - The beginning of the use of **traditional interpretation**
 - Appeal to authority of tradition handed down from the apostles
 - ***Risked making church interpretation equal to that of scripture itself***
- **Setting of Canon** (Marcion, Irenaeus)
 - ***Its establishment led to unity of scripture and its authority***

Competing Schools of Interpretation

- **Alexandrian school** (Clement of Alexandria and Origen)
 - Focused on **the person of Christ** as the key to interpretation (extreme Christological approach)
 - Adopted the **allegorical approach** of Philo (both **literal** and **spiritual** meanings with the spiritual paramount)
 - Origen added a third, an **ethical** meaning
- **Antiochan school** (Theodore of Mopsuestia)
 - Resisted the anachronistic and arbitrary nature of allegorical interpretation
 - **Favored literal, grammatically-based interpretation**
 - Only 4 Psalms were Messianic and the Song of Songs was a love poem!
- **Augustine** (A.D. 354–430)
 - Strove to resolve the hermeneutical arguments between the Alexandrian and Antiochan schools
 - **Theory of signs** (semiotics)
 - focus first on the **text's literal or historical meaning** but controlled by its **"real meaning,"** what it intended to say (example of "image of God")
 - Nevertheless, guard against the excesses of allegory

Medieval Hermeneutics

- **Traditional Interpretation** paramount
 - *sacra doctrina* ("sacred doctrine," church teaching as priority over even the text itself)
- **Interpretive glosses**
 - Marginal glosses took *catenae* (chains) of interpretation and placed them on the page
- **Fourfold interpretive approach**
 - **literal** (actual, historical)
 - **allegorical** (symbolic, representing doctrine)
 - **moral** (rules for everyday life; illustrating right and wrong)
 - **anagogical** (allusions to metaphysical knowledge; experiential of the divine)
- **Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism**
 - reason as conformity to the mind of God
 - *Summa theologica*
 - **hierarchy of authorities**
 - emphasis on literal meaning of texts and their use as proofs

Christian Humanism and the Reformation

- The Reformation was not a completely new movement; it grew out of the best of scholasticism and especially the new humanism
- **Desiderius Erasmus**
 - search for a “correct” text of the Bible; looked at scripture with fresh eyes
 - reading as an exchange between text and reader
 - continued role of prayer and disposition for better understanding
 - concern with aesthetics, how a texts says something and not just what it says
- **Martin Luther**
 - role of the printed text in Reformation hermeneutics
 - *sola scriptura* (“scripture alone,” the text determines doctrine for the church and not vice-versa)
 - “scripture is its own interpreter” (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*)
 - subjective experience with the text; Christological interpretation
- **John Calvin**
 - “internal testimony of the Holy Spirit”
 - search for the mind of the biblical author

Modern Hermeneutics

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The Age of Romanticism and the Nineteenth Century; the Twentieth Century; the Twenty-first Century; literary, narrative criticism, and theological criticism.

Post-Reformation and Enlightenment

- Reborn familiarity and interest in Greek and Roman philosophy had driven the Renaissance; renewed facility with Hebrew and Greek had aided the Reformation.
- Reliance on human reason, reemphasized in the Renaissance led to the **Enlightenment** (17th-18th cent.)
 - **Rationalism**: the human mind is an independent authority in determining truth
 - Rational or empirical ways of reading leading to critical scrutiny of the Bible and **treating it as another ancient text**
 - Post-Reformation period led to a **fragmentation of biblical interpretation**

Enlightenment Figures and Positions

- Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)
 - *Moses lived long before the Torah and could not have been its author*
- René Descarte (1596–1650)
 - clear division between sacred and secular
 - capacity of human reason
 - *reading the Bible with “an open mind”*
- Baruch (Benedict/Bernard) Spinoza (1632–1677)
 - ***primacy of reason in biblical interpretation, scripture should be studied like any other book***
 - a *herem* (ban) issued against him by the Jewish community; his books were placed on the Catholic *Index of Forbidden Books*

Nineteenth Century Developments

- **Developmentalism**—evolving historical process underlies everything
 - Confidence in the scientific method
 - led to repudiation of Christianity among some intellectuals
- **German universities pioneered the historical-critical method**
 - Human reason, free of dogmatic limitations, is the best tool with which to study the Bible
 - *Regarded the Bible's ideas as time-bound, not timeless, truths*
 - The Bible's contribution is in its **moral and ethical values**, not in historical claims or even theological teachings
- **Source Criticism**
 - Looking for the *written antecedents of scriptural texts*
 - Received texts are compilations and/or editions of earlier materials

Nineteenth Century Figures and Positions

- **Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860)**
 - Founded **the Tübingen School**, which applied dialectical history to Christianity (an evolving model)
 - Posited a divide between the Jerusalem (Jewish or Petrine) and Pauline (Gentile) Christianity
 - *Documents that did not support or reflect that were late, even second century!*
- **Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918)**
 - *Posted four separate sources between 850–550 B.C. for the Torah*
 - The Law originated *after* the historical books; actual history of ancient Israel was different than what the historical books narrated

Nineteenth Century Counter-Currents

- **Romanticism**
 - Reaction against the Enlightenment with *an emphasis on emotion and individualism* as well as glorification of all the past and nature, preferring the medieval rather than the classical
 - **Robert Lowth**
 - *rediscovered form and function of ancient Hebrew poetry*, studied the Bible as literature
 - *connection of poetry and passions: the historical role of poetry in worship* [Romantic impulse]
 - **hermeneutic of suspicion and faith**: at once skeptical *but also moved by holiness* [another Romantic impulse]

Early Twentieth Century

- **History of Religions**
 - Attempts by Baur and Wellhausen had depended upon their own reconstructions that were based on their deconstruction of biblical texts
 - Archaeological discoveries and the recovery of ancient texts gave insights into the religions of contemporary cultures > *comparative religions and cultures*
- **Form criticism** [Herman Gunkel]
 - Initially tried to recover *shorter oral components upon which the Bible's written sources were derived* [source criticism was concerned with *textual antecedents*]
 - Later focused increasingly on **the literary types** of the different components of the present text [genre study]

Post-War Figures and Positions (for interest only)

- Grew out of the experiences of world wars *and* existentialism
 - The need to *deal with the disorientation, confusion, and even dread found in the apparent meaningless of life*
 - Existence precedes essence; dealing with the absurd—no meaning to existence except what we give it; authenticity—one must create oneself and find one's own meaning; etc.
 - **Søren Kierkegaard** and **Martin Heidegger**
- **Karl Barth** (1886–1968)
 - The authority of *scripture as the Word of God*
 - Inspiration over historical-critical method
 - God's word as *a call to action*
- **Rudolf Bultmann** (1884–1976), started by applying form criticism to the Gospels
 - **demythologizing**
 - subject matter behind the text
 - *Dasein*
- **Redaction criticism** > narrative criticism