

Margaret Barker

Text and Context

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Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation. So that whatsoever is not read therein nor can be proved thereby, it is not required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or be thought requisite or necessary for salvation. In the Name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church. And the other books, as Jerome saith, the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners, but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine.

This is Article 6 in the Book of Common Prayer, which has been the defining influence on many biblical scholars, and has often led to the exclusion of other texts even from the field of scholarly research.

Once a community has defined itself by means of a canon of Scripture, there is a new beginning. All the texts in the chosen canon would have had an original context, which presupposed a certain pattern of shared beliefs within which the text was set. The context was as much a part of the meaning as the words themselves. Set in a new context, the same text would soon acquire a new meaning. This, together with the complex history of how the familiar Old Testament was formed, has important implications for any reconstruction of Christian origins. We have to ask: Which Scriptures did the first Christians know and use, and how did they understand what they were reading? The evidence suggests that the texts which became the Old Testament of the Western Church were not identical to those used by the earliest Church, and that removing even the texts we have from their cultural context in the so-called Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha has hindered any attempt to reconstruct Christian origins.

Jerome, (around 400 CE) made a new translation of the Bible to replace the many older Latin versions. Where there was a Hebrew original to use, he made this the basis of his translation, but the books found only in the Greek Old Testament, which had been the Church's Scripture from the beginning, he considered to be of less importance. Thus there arose a division within the Christian Old Testament, not on the basis of Church custom but on the basis of the Jewish canon of Scripture. Augustine warned that this procedure would divide the Church by implying that the Greek tradition was defective, and would create difficulties for Christians in the West who would not have access to a Hebrew text in cases of dispute.¹ Jerome argued that a translation from the Hebrew text (and the Hebrew canon) was imperative, *if the Jews were to accept it as the basis for discussion and cease their declaration that the Church had false Scriptures*². Jerome used the Hebrew text of his day, even though there had been accusations in the second century that the Jews had altered the text of Scripture after the advent of Christianity.³

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Jerome's was a mismatch of both text and canon, even though he believed that he was promoting *Hebraica veritas*, Hebrew truth.

Origen, in the early third century, did not use that description, but he knew that passages important for Christians (i.e. ones used in debate) were not in the current Jewish texts, and that the Jewish Scriptures had passages not in the Christian text. He recognised the importance of these differences 'so that in our debates with the Jews we do not use passages that are not in their texts, and so that we use those passages which are in their texts but not in ours.'⁴ It is likely that his Hexapla was compiled as the basis for discussion with Jews, and he did not intend it for use in the Christian communities.

'Should we suppress the texts used by the churches and order the community to reject the sacred books which they use and flatter the Jews and persuade them to give us pure texts in their place, without any forged additions?'⁵

¹ Jerome's *Letters* 104: '...quod a Graecis ecclesiis Latinae ecclesiae dissonabunt vix aut numquam ad Hebraea testimonia pervenitur quibus defendatur obiectum.

² Preface to Isaiah: 'ne Iudaei de falsitate Scripturarum ecclesiis eius diutius insultarent.'

³ E Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origin of the Bible* Grand Rapids and Leiden 1999 p. 47: 'Are there any indications that they (Jerome and the Reformation Bible translators) chose the MT in contradistinction to alternate Hebrew texts forms of whose existence they were aware but which they passed over?'

⁴ *Letter to Julius Africanus* 5(9).

⁵ *Ibid* 4(8). See S.P. Brock 'Origen's Aims as a Textual Critic of the Old Testament', *Studia Patristica* X (1970) pp. 215-8.

Unfortunately 'Origen began with the incorrect assumption of a single Hebrew form of the biblical text';⁶ he was not aware of the variety of Hebrew texts which had been superseded by the one he knew. He 'corrected' the Greek Old Testament which the Christians were using in the light of the current Hebrew and of the Greek translations made from that Hebrew, and the result was a disaster for our knowledge of the original Christian Old Testament.⁷ Even though Enoch had long been treated as Scripture by the Church— Jude and Barnabas had quoted it— Origen also felt that he could not quote it in his exposition of Numbers, on the grounds that the books did not seem to have authority with the Hebrews.⁸

Justin, who lived one hundred years before Origen, wrote an account of his discussions with a learned Jew about the points at issue between Jews and Christians. Perhaps it was fictional, perhaps drawn from life, but one point they debated was the alteration of the Scriptures. 'I certainly do not trust your teachers', said Justin to Trypho, 'when they refuse to admit that the translation of the Scriptures made by the seventy elders at the court of king Ptolemy is a correct one and attempt to make their own translation. You should also know that they have deleted entire passages from the version composed by those elders' (*Trypho* 71). A Christian scholar of the mid second century, then, claimed that the older Greek version of the Scriptures was being replaced by new translations, and that parts which the Christians were using as Messianic texts had been removed. The Jewish scholar denied this. Justin quoted words deleted from 1 Esdras,⁹ which cannot be found in any text today, but were known to Lactantius,¹⁰ and words deleted from Jeremiah,¹¹ which, again, cannot be found in any text today, but which were quoted by Irenaeus.¹² The words 'from the tree' had been deleted from Psalm 96.10, he said, so

⁶ Ulrich, *op. cit.* (n. 3 above), p. 224.

⁷ D. Barthelemy 'Origene et le texte de l'Ancien Testament' in *Epektasis. Melanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Danielou*, Paris 1972, pp. 247-61.

⁸ *On Numbers*: Homily 28.

⁹ 'And Esdras said to the people, This Passover is our Saviour and refuge. And if you have understood and it has entered into your hearts that we are about to humiliate him on a cross and afterwards hope in him, then this place will never be forgotten saith the LORD of Hosts. But if you will not believe him nor listen to his teaching, you shall be the laughing stock of the Gentiles.'

¹⁰ *Inst Div.* 4.18.

¹¹ 'The LORD God, the Holy One of Israel, remembered his dead that slept in their graves and he descended to reach to them his salvation.'

¹² *A.H.* 4.22 and *Dem.* 78. He attributes these words to Isaiah in *A.H.* 3.20.

that it no longer read 'The LORD reigns from the tree'.¹³ Justin also claimed that Jeremiah 11.19 had

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recently been removed from the text, but was 'still found in some copies of the Scripture in Jewish synagogues' (*Trypho* 72). It is still in both the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Old Greek, so Justin must have known of more deletions than actually survived. Justin agreed to debate with Trypho on the basis of Scriptures that a mid-2nd century Jew would accept.¹⁴

The story of how the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, *and the story Justin knew* (*To the Greeks* 13), was that Ptolemy II, king of Egypt 285-247BCE, commissioned for his great library a Greek translation of the Law of Moses. Scrolls and scholars were sent from the high priest in Jerusalem, and when the work was completed, it was read to the Jewish community of the city. They agreed that it was an accurate translation. 'Since this version has been made rightly and reverently and in every respect accurately, it is good that it should remain exactly so and that there should be no revision.' A curse was then pronounced on anyone who altered the text, added to it or took from it. (*Letter of Aristeas* 311). Altering the text must have been a matter of controversy even when this was written.¹⁵ Eventually the other Hebrew books were translated into Greek, including at least one (the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira), which was not eventually accepted into the Hebrew canon but was included in the Greek Old Testament. Justin claimed that new translations were being made in his time— these would have been the versions of Theodotion and Aquila to which we shall return— and that significant parts of the LXX, which had been declared a true rendering of the Hebrew, had been removed. Scripture was a battle ground, and at least one community was altering Scripture to strengthen its claims. This alteration of the Scriptures was remembered for a very long time; it appeared centuries later in Muslim scholars' accusations that the Book had been altered.

¹³ A version known to several other Christian writers e.g. *Barnabas* 8, Tertullian *Against the Jews* 10, Venantius whose late 6th century hymn 'Vexilla regis prodeunt' was translated by John Mason Neale's as 'The royal banners forward go'. The third verse is: 'Fulfilled is all that David told, In true prophetic song of old, Amidst the nations, God, saith he, Hath reigned and triumphed from the tree. The reading also occurs in the *Verona Psalter*, and is implied in the Dura Fresco see p. ***.

¹⁴ *Trypho* 71 'those passages still acknowledged by you'.

¹⁵ *Aristeas* 31 may refer to the existence of earlier defective translations into Greek or to there having been unsatisfactory Hebrew texts already in Egypt. The Greek text is ambiguous; see *OTP* 2 p. 14n.

In the lifetime of Jesus, the LXX had been held in great honour as an inspired text, regarded 'with awe and reverence as the sister of the Hebrew'. The translators, according to Philo, were 'prophets and priests of the mysteries whose sincerity and singleness of thought has enabled them to go hand in hand with the purest of spirits, the spirit of Moses' (*Moses* II.40). There was an annual celebration at Pharos, where the translation had been made. Schurer famously compared the status of the LXX to that of Luther's Bible for German Protestants.¹⁶ One hundred years later, after the advent of Christianity and the Church's use of the LXX, the Diaspora Jews were using a new Greek version of the Scriptures, and the translation of the LXX was eventually compared to the sin of the golden calf: 'The day of its translation was as grievous for Israel as the day when the golden calf was made, for the Torah could not be adequately translated (*m. Soferim* 1.7). Aquila made a new Greek translation in the second century CE which was praised by the rabbis: 'Aquila the proselyte translated the Torah for R Eliezer and R Joshua

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and they congratulated him saying 'You are fairer than the children of men' (*Ps* 45.3)¹⁷ The Christians, however, remembered Aquila rather differently. The *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* is set in Alexandria in the early fifth century, but thought to be a reworking of much earlier material. The Christian Timothy accuses Aquila of corrupting not only the Greek text of Scripture but also the Hebrew: 'If you find that a testimony to Christ has disappeared from the Hebrew or has been concealed in the Greek, it is Aquila's plot'.¹⁸ The date of this text is almost immaterial: a late text would simply show that the dispute was not forgotten. Muslim scholars were later to say that the true text of the Book had been corrupted to remove the name of Muhammed, and that evidence had been concealed.

For several generations, the early Church was beset with the problem of the Old Testament Scriptures: in the second century Marcion had advocated abandoning the

¹⁶ E. Schurer, *Geschichte des jüdischen volkes im Zeitalter Jesu-Christi* III(4), Leipzig 1909; p. 424. The revised *ET* (1986) p. 474 compares it to the AV in the Church of England.

¹⁷ *j. Megillah* 9. This is the familiar form of the quotation, attributed to R Jeremiah. It appears differently in J Neusner *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* vol.19 *Megillah* Chicago and London 1987. There is wordplay on 'you are fair', *yaphiyta* and the Yaphet, Noah's son who was the ancestor of the Greeks. Greek was the only other language which the rabbis permitted for the Scriptures (*j. Megillah* 9). Aquila's text was later described as *Japhet* in the tents of Shem, *Gen.* 9.27, b. *Megillah* 9b.

¹⁸ F.C. Conybeare, *The Dialogues of Athanasius and Zacchaeus and Timothy and Aquila*, Oxford, 1898, fol. 119ro.

whole Hebrew tradition, but the churches condemned this stance and kept the older Scriptures. The question is: which Scriptures? As early as the mid second century the 'Christian' and the 'Jewish' versions were different. The Clementine Homilies record some early Christian responses to the alteration of the Scriptures; the date of these texts is not important. What matters is how the early period was remembered. Christians had to discern between true and false Scripture in Jewish texts. Peter explained to Simon Magus how the Jews went astray:

'(Jesus) says, wishing to show them the cause of their error more clearly: On this account do you go astray, not knowing the true things of the Scriptures (Mk.12.24), and for this reason you are also ignorant of the power of God. Therefore every man who wishes to be saved must become, as the Teacher said, a judge of the books written to try us. For he said: 'Become experienced bankers'. Now the need for bankers arises when forgeries are mixed up with the genuine. (*Clem. Hom* 18.20, with a similar account in 3.50).

It is possible that Jesus had known of changes in the text of Scripture; the Jewish Christian community, for whom this must have been a pressing concern, preserved the saying: 'Not a dot or an iota shall pass away from the Law until all is fulfilled' (Mat. 5.18).

Marcel Simon, writing in 1948 about the material which only appears in Christian texts concluded: 'We are entitled to reckon such passages not as ones that the Jews suppressed but as Christian interpolations' on the grounds that they could not be found in the original Hebrew.¹⁹ Thirty years later, after impact of the Qumran discoveries, Robert Kraft wrote in M.Simon's Festschrift:

'Our suppositions about what is or is not possible or probable in pre-Christian and non-Christian Jewish circles need to be carefully re-evaluated and reformulated.... For the topic in hand, overtly Christian influences on the transmission of Jewish Scriptures,

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most of the older claims can be dismissed because the assumptions on which they were based are no longer convincing...'.²⁰

An unacknowledged problem at the heart of Western Christian biblical study is that the Church, and especially the Western Church, has as its Scriptures the Jewish canon and text of the Old Testament, when the evidence shows clearly that the earliest Church

¹⁹ M. Simon, *Verus Israel*, Paris 1948 p. 185: 'Nous sommes en droite d'y connaitre non pas les suppressions dues aux juifs mais plutot des interpolations chretiennes.'

²⁰ R.A. Kraft, 'Christian transmission of Jewish Scriptures', in *Paganisme, Judaisme, Christianisme. Melanges offerts a Marcel Simon* Paris 1978; pp. 207-226, p. 225.

used very different Scriptures. Let us examine that evidence. This is a complex field and what follows can be no more than a sketch of what is there. There are many unexamined assumptions, and many facts which must be set alongside each other.

After the destruction of the Temple, certain of the Hebrew books came to be accepted as Scripture and others rejected. R. Akiba, a third generation rabbi teaching some fifty years after the destruction of the temple, said that anyone who read a book excluded from the Scriptures ('the outside books') would have no part in the world to come (*m. Sanhedrin* 10.1). There must have been a Hebrew canon in his time and it must have been very important if such a penalty attached to reading the other books. The decisions about the Hebrew canon are often associated with the scholars who established a new centre of Jewish life and learning at Jamnia, and whilst there is no actual evidence for this, the scholarly expertise required to collect and establish the Hebrew texts is as likely to have been there as anywhere. A thinly veiled account of the process appears in *2 Esdras* (4 Ezra), which describes how 'Ezra' was inspired to dictate and define the Scriptures. Although set in the aftermath of the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the text of *2 Esdras* is usually dated after the destruction in 70 CE. 'In the thirtieth year after the destruction of our city' (2 Esd.3.1) indicates 100 CE. *2 Esdras* (originally the *Apocalypse of Salathiel* 2 Esdr.3-13) was expanded, and then preserved by the Christians. It was probably written by Hebrew Christians reflecting on the outcome of the first revolt against Rome, in which they had been heavily involved, and thus gives the Christian perspective on the formation of the Hebrew canon.²¹

The prophet Ezra, whose genealogy presents him as descended from Aaron (2 Esd.1.1), heard the Most High speaking to him from a bush. This Ezra was a new Moses, but he was not named Moses. He was told to take five scribes and many writing tablets and then to write what was revealed to him. In forty days he dictated 94²² books, and was told by the Most High that only the first 24 were to be made public. The other 70 books were to be given 'to the wise among your people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom and the river of knowledge' (2 Esd.14.47). The 24 books are assumed to have been the Hebrew canon as it is today,²³ but the books are

²¹ I argued that the Christians were a major factor in the revolt in my book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh 2000. The nature and origin of *2 Esdr.* is interesting. Described as Jewish, but the contemporary 2 (*Syriac*) *Baruch* is more in accordance with later Rabbinic Judaism and seems to have been a response to *2 Esdr.* Was the present *2 Esdr.* compiled by Hebrew Christians? There are many similarities to the NT especially to Revelation, and also to *1 Enoch*. See OTP1 pp. 517-523.

²² Thus Syr., Eth., Arab 1 and Arm. Latin has 204 books.

²³ 5 books of the Law, Josh, Jud., 1/2 Sam., 1/2 Kgs., Isa., Jer., Ezek., the Twelve., Pss., Prov., Job., Song., Ruth., Lam., Eccl., Esth., Dan., Ez-Neh., 1/2 Chron.

not named. *The 70 other books were recognised as more important than the Hebrew canon* because they were the source of understanding, wisdom and knowledge. What were

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these 70 books? Presumably they were the 'outside books' which were forbidden to anyone who identified as a Jew. If, as seems likely, they were the pre-Christian texts which were only preserved by the Christians e.g. the earlier strata of the Ascension of Isaiah, the texts known as 1 (& 2) Enoch— the texts now classified as the Pseudepigrapha— there must have been something of great importance in these texts. It is entirely possible that Justin had first hand knowledge of these events. He was born around the end of the first century CE in Flavia Neapolis (near ancient Shechem), which is about forty miles from Jamnia. The Christians in Palestine must have known what was being done to the Scriptures,— hence the 'Ezra' story— and Justin was the first to raise this issue of altering texts. *The Christian telling of this story showed that they did not accept the Ezra canon as exclusive.*

The definition of the canon must have been a major factor in the distinction between Judaism and Christianity, so what are the consequences of the Western Church having accepted the Hebrew canon and, in effect, excluding the other books? One has to ask what understanding, wisdom and knowledge for the wise was lost because of this choice of canon? The other books would not have been simply 'the apocrypha', the additional books which were to become part of the Greek canon, although some may have been among them.²⁴ In later Jewish writings there is no reference to *1 Enoch* for several centuries, *even though it was cited as Scripture by the early Church*, and the quantity of material found at Qumran ranks Enoch with the major texts of the Hebrew Scriptures: 20 copies of *1 Enoch*, compared with 21 of Isaiah, 20 of Genesis, but only 6 of Jeremiah. There is good reason to believe that this 'Ezra' not only determined the canon but also gave the Hebrew text the form which superseded all earlier texts and became the MT. The differences between the texts were only a tiny proportion of the whole, but they were not simply matters of style and spelling. Some indicate a major dispute being conducted through the text of Scripture, and the Church eventually found itself with the 'other' text. This dispute was also remembered, as we shall see, and appeared in later accusations that the Scriptures had been rewritten by Ezra. Thus Porphyry, the Neoplatonist from Syria wrote at the end of the third century CE that nothing of the original Mosaic Torah

²⁴ One would be hard pressed to find spiritual nourishment for the wise in the story of Bel and the Dragon.

remained; it had been burned with the temple. The Mosaic writings had actually been composed by Ezra and his disciples.²⁵ He must have known the story in *2 Esdras*.

Josephus reveals that the Jews defending Jerusalem against the Romans had oracles in what he calls 'their' Scriptures, in other words, works not in the Hebrew canon which Josephus would have acknowledged as Scripture. 'The Jews had it recorded in their oracles that the city and the sanctuary would be taken when the temple should become four-square' (there was also) an ambiguous oracle, likewise

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found in their sacred Scriptures, to the effect that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world (*War* 6.311-313). This sequence of two oracles appears in the Book of Revelation: first John was told to measure the temple but not the outer court, and then the seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and the voices in heaven cried 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our LORD and of his Christ' (Rev.11). The Book of Revelation seems to be the fulfilment of a programme of prophecies not in the Hebrew canon but known to Jesus. Josephus himself, when he decided to change sides and fight for the Romans, went to Vespasian and his son Titus and declared that he was a prophet who had to reveal that Vespasian was the one destined to rule the world (*War* 3.400-402).²⁶

Josephus also reports one of his own speeches to the people in the besieged city: 'Who does not know the records of the ancient prophets, and the oracle which threatens this poor city and is even now coming true? For they foretold that it would be taken whensoever one should begin to slaughter his own countrymen' (*War* 6.110). Jesus cited this as one of the signs that would precede the fall of the temple: 'Brother will deliver up brother to death and the father his child, and children will rise against their parents and have them put to death' (Mk 13.12-13). Josephus described this saying of Jesus as an ancient oracle, and we must assume he was correct. What book was Jesus quoting? Not one we have in the Hebrew canon today, but presumably one recognised as Scripture by his followers.

Perhaps this is how we should explain the quotations in early Christian writings from Scriptures which cannot be identified. The fact that the lines are quoted at all shows that they were significant texts, and yet their sources are unknown. Is it more likely that

²⁵ *Against the Christians* in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol 2, Jerusalem 1980; p. 480. The Karaite writer al Qirqisani attributed this claim to the Rabbinic Jews of his day, see below n. 76.

²⁶ This interpretation was also known to Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13 and Suetonius, *Life of Vespasian* 4.

writings preserved by the Church contained fictitious references, or that, given the evidence from other sources which we shall examine in a moment, certain key texts have simply disappeared from the form of the Hebrew Scriptures which became the Western Old Testament? *The Letter of Barnabas*, for example, quotes an otherwise unknown prophecy about the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement: 'Let them eat of the goat which is offered for their sins at the fast, and let all the priests, but nobody else, eat of it inward parts unwashed and with vinegar' (*Barn.* 7). Something similar occurs in the Mishnah, which says that the 'Babylonians' used to eat the sin offering of the Day of Atonement raw (*m. Menahoth* 11.7). This verse is very important for understanding the original significance of the Eucharist. Eating unwashed parts of a sacrifice means that blood was consumed in a temple ritual. 'Drinking blood', so often cited as an example of the extreme 'un-Jewishness' of Eucharistic symbolism, was temple practice for the great Atonement sacrifice of Yom Kippur. One can understand why that verse might have had to disappear, even though there is a disparaging reference to it in the Mishnah. Barnabas linked this

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sacred meal of entrails and vinegar to Jesus' drinking vinegar just before he died, which may be why the evangelists included that detail (Mat. 27.48; Mk 15.36; John 19.29). Barnabas also added what seems to be a saying of Jesus: 'When I am about to offer my body for the sins of this new people of mine, you will be giving me gall and vinegar to drink.'

There are other 'Scriptures' quoted by Barnabas which are not known elsewhere: 'A heart that glorifies its maker is a sweet savour to the LORD (*Barn.* 2 introduced by 'He tells us'). 'I am now making the last things even as I made the first' (*Barn.* 6— introduced by 'the LORD says') 'The land of Jacob was extolled above all the earth (*Barn.* 11— 'another of the prophets') 'If my sons keep the Sabbath I will show mercy upon them' (*Barn.* 15— 'When God spoke to Moses we read and in another place we read'). 'When the week draws to its close, then a temple of God will be built gloriously in the Name of the LORD (*Barn.* 16— 'He himself tells us'). Barnabas 16 also quoted *1 Enoch* as Scripture: 'for Scripture says' is followed by *1 Enoch* 89.56 'It will come to pass in the last days that the LORD will deliver up to destruction the sheep of the pasture with their sheepfold and their watchtower.' The Letter of Jude also quoted Enoch as prophet (Jude 14).

The evidence that the early Church quoted from Scriptures no longer known to us could indicate either that they used different versions of books in the current Hebrew canon, as

suggested by their use of the Qumran version of Isaiah,²⁷ or that they had holy books other than those which eventually became the Hebrew canon, as suggested by their use of *1 Enoch*. Both these possibilities create huge problems for understanding the context of Christian origins, but the case of the Christians is not unique. The great Temple Scroll (11QTemple) found at Qumran was clearly a scriptural text. The Damascus Document describes a group who separated themselves from the pollution of the second temple and devoted themselves to the Law. They quoted the Book of Jubilees as Scripture (CD XVI), and their leader had to know the Law and the Book of Hagu (CD XIV, if that is how the word is to be read). This important book is lost; we have no Book of Hagu. Something similar could have happened to books that the earliest Churches regarded as Scripture. The collection of writings now known as *1 Enoch* was lost to the West until rediscovered in Ethiopia 1770, and parts of a Greek copy were found in Egypt in 1886. It had, however, been available in Constantinople at the end of the eighth century, and was used by George Syncellus the Byzantine historian. The texts known as *2 Enoch* must have travelled north with the Christian missionaries into Russia, as they survive in Old Slavonic. These must have been among the 70 books for the wise which are the lost context of Christian origins. *Muslim tradition was later to describe how parts of the Book had been abandoned and hidden.*

One has only to look at the variety of text forms found at Qumran to

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see that the idea of one fixed Hebrew text is untenable. Some of the differences from the MT are minor— a fuller spelling, a word here and there, the tense of a verb or the use of a synonym. These would be sufficient in themselves to show that the text was in no way fixed. *Some of the differences, however, are very important, and they should be described as differences rather than variants.* In Genesis 22.14, for example, the MT has the LORD, the LXX has the LORD, but 4QGenesis-Exodus has 'God, Elohim', showing that scribes used either name. This is disastrous for the Documentary hypothesis of the formation of the Pentateuch, if the J and E forms of the name were still interchangeable at the end of the second temple period. The fact that the names of God could be changed in the Hebrew text should be considered in the light of Jerome's remark about the translators of the LXX, *that they had to suppress certain prophecies of the Messiah lest they give the king of Egypt the impression that the Jews worshipped a second*

²⁷ See below.

God.²⁸ This is confirmed by Jewish sources: certain passages in Genesis, for example, had the plural reference to God changed to the singular. 'Thirteen matters did sages change for Talmi (Ptolemy) the king. They wrote as follows for him: 'Let me make man in an image, in a likeness (Gen. 1.27) Come, I shall go down (Gen. 11.7).'²⁹ This is no longer the text of the LXX.

In Deuteronomy 32 the Qumran texts are significantly different from the MT. The Qumran text of Deuteronomy 32.8 says that the Most High divided out the nations of the earth according to 'the number of the sons of God' similar to the LXX which has 'angels of God.'³⁰ Israel was given to the LORD, one of the sons of God, implying that LORD worshipped by the Hebrews was not the Father but the Son. The phrase 'sons of God' is not in the MT, and thus the MT lacks a key text for demonstrating the early Christian belief that Jesus was the LORD, the God of Israel, the Son of God Most High. This absence of the sons of God could be coincidence but for the fact that the phrase is also missing from the MT of Deuteronomy 32.43. The Qumran and LXX of this verse are both longer than the MT,³¹ having 'his sons' where the MT has 'his servants'. The line used by the Church as a Messianic proof text 'Let all God's angels worship him' (Heb.1.6), represented in the Qumran text and in the LXX, is also absent from the MT. Thus the early Christian belief that the LORD was coming to bring the Day of Judgement disappeared from the MT. In the light of the accusations made by Justin, that the text of the Scriptures had been altered to remove Messianic proof texts, these cannot have been random variations. References to 'sons of God' of whom the LORD was one, and messianic proof texts, did disappear from the Hebrew which became the MT, but this nevertheless had to be the basis for discussion with Jews and eventually became the standard by which the Christian text of the Old Testament was 'corrected'.

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The distinctive readings of the great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran raise some important questions about the state of that text in the period of Christian origins, in other words, the form of Isaiah which could have been known to Jesus and the early Church. There can be little doubt that the Qumran form of Isaiah is the one presupposed by the New

²⁸ Preface to *Hebrew Questions*, CCL 72 'cum illi Ptolomaeo regi Alexandriae mystica quaeque in scripturis sanctis prodere noluerint, et maxime ea, quae Christi adventum pollicebantur, ne viderentur Iudaei alterum deum colere.

²⁹ *j. Megillah* 1.9: *op. cit.* (n. 17 above), Also *b. Meg* 9a.

³⁰ 4QDeutⁱ.

³¹ 4QDeut^g.

Testament. A glance will show that the evangelists associated Jesus more closely with this prophet than with any other, and so when the Qumran Isaiah differs from the MT in significant passages *this is unlikely to have been coincidence*. First, there is a different form of the Immanuel prophecy, 'the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son' (Isa.7.14). Photographs of the Scroll³² show an '*aleph*' where the MT has an '*ayin*' in Isaiah 7.11,³³ and so the text reads: 'Ask a sign from the Mother of the LORD your God.' This could be a careless scribe, a spelling mistake, but this is the only known example of the pre-Christian Hebrew of Isaiah 7.11, and it mentions the mother of the LORD. Those reading it might not have known it was a spelling mistake, if that it what it was.

There are also places in the Fourth Servant Song, another key text for the early Church, where the later MT differs from the Isaiah Scroll. The Targum understood this passage as description of the Messiah whose appearance was not that of an ordinary man. 'My Servant the Messiah shall prosper' (Tg.Isa.52.13), 'his *countenance* shall be a holy *countenance*' (*zyw*, literally splendour or brightness, *Tg Isa.* 53.2), neither of which is obviously in the MT. The early Church read the whole passage as a prophecy of the life and death of Jesus. Apart from the Targum, there was no Jewish text which described a suffering Messiah, and so it became a commonplace to suggest that the Messianic reading of the Fourth Servant Song had been a Christian innovation to explain a Messiah who suffered. 1QIsaiah^a 52.14 however, has one more letter than the MT in the word usually rendered disfigured or marred. That extra letter could change the word into 'I have anointed', *masahti* or 'my anointed one', *moshati*,³⁴ (c.f. Num.18.8), which would give a meaning: '...I have anointed him more than a man in his appearance... and he will sprinkle many nations...'.³⁵ It would then be a reference to the exalted and transfigured Servant, the anointed Servant of Psalm 89 who was raised up and triumphed over his enemies, and it would explain the Targum. In Isaiah 53.11 the MT again differs from the Qumran text and from the LXX having the word 'light' and giving the sense 'After the struggle of his soul he shall see the light...' The Qumran Isaiah describes an anointed one who has been transfigured, suffers, and then sees the light, presumably of the glory of God. Compare this with Luke's account of the walk to Emmaus. The risen LORD joins the disciples and rebukes them for not believing the prophecies. 'O foolish men and slow

³² I have not found this in any transcriptions.

³³ *m'm yhwh* instead of *m`m yhwh*.

³⁴ Similar contemporary word play on abomination and anointed is found in Rev.12, where the mother of the Messiah has fled to the desert and the mother of abominations is in Jerusalem. See my *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh 2000 p. 280.

³⁵ The sprinkling is the conclusion of the atonement rite, performed in the second temple by the high priest.

of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the anointed one should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' (Lk.24.25-6). There is nothing in the MT of the prophets which

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describes a suffering Messiah who sees the glory of God, so *the story in Luke presupposes the Qumran version of Isaiah*.³⁶ This reference to the prophecy of a suffering Messiah was not removed from Luke's Gospel, or smoothed over,³⁷ and so it cannot have caused the difficulties to the earliest Church which it causes to those using an Old Testament based on the MT. Jerome noted that there were many quotations in the New Testament which were not Old Testament of his time, but gave this as a reason for preferring the Hebrew text.³⁸ By the middle of the second century CE, however, Justin had been accusing the Jews of removing Messianic texts from the Scriptures, and, *given the very small amount of the biblical material found at Qumran, it is interesting how many differences from the MT support to Justin's claim even though they are not examples he used.*

The process by which the MT became the only text of the Hebrew Scriptures is sometimes described as 'stabilising' the Hebrew text, but factors other than scholarly can shape judgements in this area e.g. 'MT reflects a text like all other texts and has no specific characteristics— the single typological feature that could be attributed to it is the slightly corrupt nature of the Book of Samuel.'³⁹ Scholars seem not to consider the major implications for Christian origins of the Qumran readings, in, say Deuteronomy and Isaiah, which are not in the MT.⁴⁰ The original assumption had been that the Qumran

³⁶ Scholars still do not consider the Qumran evidence. Thus J Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, New York 1985, p. 1558: 'The modern reader will look in vain for the passages in the OT to which the Lucan Christ refers when he speaks of what pertained to himself in every part of Scripture'; and his note p. 1565: 'The notion of a suffering Messiah is not found in the OT or in any texts of pre-Christian Judaism (there is) no proof of such a figure in pre-Christian Palestine.'

³⁷ As happened to another difficult reference in the Luke's original account of Jesus' baptism. Unlike Mark and Matthew, the earliest texts of Luke give Psalm 2.7: 'You are my son. Today I have begotten you' as the words heard at the baptism. That Jesus became the son of God at his baptism created obvious difficulties, and the later versions of Luke's Gospel were brought into agreement with the account in Mark and Matthew. 'You are/This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.'

³⁸ Preface to *Hebrew Questions*, CCL 72: 'Sed et evangelistae et dominus quoque et Paulus apostolus multa quasi de veteri testamento proferunt quae in nostris codicibus non habentur.'

³⁹ E. Tov, *The Text Critical use of the LXX in Biblical Research* (Revised and Enlarged Second Edn.), Jerusalem 1997; p. 210.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 210.

evidence represented sectarian or vulgar versions of the Hebrew text, but scribes updating texts and producing uniformity must mean that some things were being altered, some things were being removed. Misleading comparisons have been offered. It is true that texts of the Masoretic type predominate after 100 CE. It is also true that translations made after that time— Aquila and Symmachus— the Rabbinic literature and several Targums, and the fifth column of the Hexapla were all based on the MT,⁴¹ but this should raise the question of why, at this precise period, only one Hebrew text was in use after the earlier pluriformity. It could well have been the influence of ‘Ezra’, imposing the MT. There is a glimpse of this situation in the Talmud; the books of the *minim*, even if they contained verses of Scripture, were to be destroyed, and any scroll copied by the *minim* had to be destroyed, even if it contained the Name.⁴² There is an enigmatic reference in the *Scroll of Fasting*, an Aramaic document from second century CE which lists the days when fasting was forbidden. They commemorate the great events of the second temple period such as the triumphs of the Maccabees, the destruction of the Samaritan temple, the rescinding of Caligula’s order to have his statue in the temple, the departure of the Romans from Jerusalem. On the third of Tishri ‘the memory of the documents was removed’ (or ‘the memory was removed from the documents’). What might this have been? Even though there are no details, the text shows that the destruction of some records was being celebrated at the end of the second temple period.⁴³ Tov admits

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that the situation after 100CE ‘does not imply superiority of that (MT) textual tradition. The communities which fostered other textual traditions either ceased to exist (the Qumran covenanters) or disassociated themselves from Judaism (the Samaritans and Christians).’⁴⁴ The period of uniformity and stability in Hebrew texts after 100 CE was due to ‘political and socio-religious events and developments those who fostered (the MT) probably constituted the only group which survived the destruction of the second temple.’⁴⁵ This is clearly not the case. The Christians survived the destruction of the second temple. They believed themselves to be the heirs to its traditions, and they had another tradition of Scripture which was obliterated in the interests of finding common

⁴¹ E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, Assen and Philadelphia 1992; p. 34.

⁴² (*b. Gitt. 45b*) c.f. Origen, *Psalms Homily 1*, observed that the Jews did not hate the Gentiles who worshipped idols and blasphemed, but they had an insatiable hatred of Christians.

⁴³ Text in J.A.Fitzmyer and D.J.Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts*, Rome 1978; p. 187.

⁴⁴ Tov, *op. cit.* (n. 41 above), p. 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 195.

ground for debate. *Eventually, the Christians found themselves with that very text which had originally defined the Jewish position.*⁴⁶

After Jerusalem had fallen in 70 CE, Josephus asked Titus if he could have the holy books (*Life* 75), and he then went straight to the temple presumably because the books were there. He also records that the greatest prize of war displayed together with the temple vessels in the victory procession in Rome was a book of the Jewish Law (*War* 7.152). The temple vessels were placed in the Temple of Peace, but the Book of the Law and the curtains of the holy place were kept in Caesar's palace (*War* 7.162). The Emperor Severus (222-235), a contemporary of Origen, donated this scroll to a new synagogue, and later writings which quote from this scroll show that it differed in many ways from the MT.⁴⁷ When Origen made his Hexapla in Palestine (about 240CE), he used a variety of Greek texts but only one Hebrew, which Eusebius was later to describe as 'the original documents circulating among the Jews'.⁴⁸ It is a great irony that just as the older temple text was being returned to the Jews by the Emperor Severus, Origen began his quest for the original using the Hebrew text in current use, i.e. the later version. Earlier in the third century, a scroll of the Psalms had been found in a jar at Jericho, and Origen used this in his Hexapla alongside the other versions, i.e. he recognised that it was a different text.⁴⁹ When Jerome, also working in Palestine at the end of the fourth century, opted for the Hebrew text as the basis for his Latin translation, he too must have used the later text.

Origen made his 'improved' text of the Greek Old Testament on the basis of the MT and the Greek translations made by Jews after the Christians had adopted the LXX—Theodotion, Aquila and Symmachus. Theodotion and his successor Aquila aimed to produce a Greek text closer to the Hebrew of their time, i.e. closer to that Hebrew text which became the MT. In other words, Origen was using various versions of the post 100 CE Hebrew to 'improve' the older Greek. Jewish scholars describe the process

⁴⁶ The Preface to the *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985) declares the translators' criteria for choosing a text: 'For the Old Testament, the Masoretic Text is used.... Only when this text represents insuperable difficulties have emendations or versions of other Hebrew manuscripts or ancient versions (notably the LXX and Syriac) been used'. E. Ulrich *op. cit.* (n. 3 above), p. 35, commented: 'I randomly selected one of the many Bibles that sit on my shelf, and the Introduction to the first Bible I picked up simply stated clearly and precisely the method that I think is at work, by reflective choice or by unreflective custom, as the principle underlying the work of many Bible translators.'

⁴⁷ J.P. Siegel, *The Severus Scroll*, SBL, Missoula 1975.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Eusebius, *History of the Church* 6.16.

differently: 'It seems that the LXX had fallen from favour (with the Jews), and a new translation

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was sought which was more faithful to the original (or, in other words, which better conveyed the rabbinic exegesis of the Bible). *Several attempts were made to bring the LXX up to date*, but it was Aquila's version which won acceptance in Rabbinic circles⁵⁰ Up to date? What had changed? It must have been the Hebrew text on which the translation was to be based. Justin's own example for Trypho will illustrate a characteristic of the new translations. "Behold the Virgin shall conceive" but you say it ought to be read "Behold the young woman shall conceive."⁵¹ The Hebrew word in dispute is *'almah*, which does usually mean a young woman. But the Hebrew of Isaiah 7.14 has the *'almah*, implying a special female figure, one whom the original translators of the LXX could well have remembered as The Virgin, *parthenos*.⁵² This is how the word was understood in Matthew's Gospel, and so presumably by the early Christian community. The post Christian translators of the Hebrew text, even though there was no difference in the underlying Hebrew at this point, were unanimous that the word had to be *neanis*, young woman. Aquila also avoided '*Christos*' as the translation of Anointed or Messiah; he made a new word *eleimmenos*, even though his predecessor Theodotion had used the traditional *christos*. In Aquila's situation, this would not have been acceptable.⁵³

A letter to Sergius, Metropolitan of Elam, dated 800 CE from Timotheus I, Patriarch of Seleucia, also testifies to the existence of earlier and different biblical texts. Some Jews being instructed as catechumens had told him about some 'books of the Old Testament and others in the Hebrew script' discovered in a cave.

'Since there was a scholar well read in literature among them, I asked him about many passages quoted in our New Testament as coming from the Old Testament but found nowhere in it, neither in copies among the Jews nor in those among the Christians. He said they are there and can be found in the books discovered there If these passages

⁵⁰ N. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish Christian Relations in Third Century Palestine*, Cambridge 1976; p. 56, my emphases.

⁵¹ *Trypho* 71; also Irenaeus, *A.H.* 3.21.1.

⁵² See p. 234-8.

⁵³ See Kraft *op. cit.* (n. 20 above), p. 211.

occur in the books named, these are clearly more trustworthy than those among the Hebrews and those among us.⁵⁴

The implication is that the books from the cave had a Hebrew text, which antedated the formation of the MT and the corruption of the Old Greek. The Patriarch Timothy tried without success to make further enquiries, for example about 'He shall be called a Nazarene' (Mat 2.23). He also wrote about these discoveries to Gabriel, a Christian physician in the court of Caliph Harun-alRashid in Baghdad. This must have confirmed Muslim belief that the Book had been altered.

Since the original Ezra had led the 'men of the great synagogue', and represented the traditions which came back from Babylon, the story of Ezra dictating the Scriptures may be describing how *the Babylonian tradition eventually determined the Hebrew canon*.⁵⁵ This is significant for

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Christian origins, as their roots lay elsewhere.⁵⁶ The tradition described itself thus: 'Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue' (*m. Aboth* 1.1). *This tradition bypasses the temple and the priesthood* as described in the books of Moses, even though the genealogy of Ezra presents him as descended from Aaron. Josephus said that this group of people who returned from Babylon were known as 'the Jews' (*Ant.* 11.173) whereas the Samaritans claimed to be 'Hebrews but not Jews' (*Ant.* 11.344). One wonders who else was claiming to be a Hebrew but not a Jew. In the New Testament there is a Letter to the Hebrews, but the Jews are depicted, especially in the Fourth Gospel, as hostile to the disciples of Jesus. From the beginning, the Church identified itself as the heir to the temple, with Jesus as the Great High Priest, and his teachings described as the secrets of the holy of holies. Thus Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, early in the second century, wrote: 'To Jesus alone as our High Priest were the secret things of God committed' (*Philadelphians* 9) and Clement of Alexandria, writing towards the end of the second century used similar

⁵⁴ English text in G.R. Driver, *The Judaean Scrolls*, Oxford 1965 pp. 8-9 citing the original edn. by Braun in *Oriens Christianus*, 1901, pp. 304-9.

⁵⁵ Later tradition remembered that when the Torah had been forgotten in Israel, it was three times restored by men from Babylon: Ezra, then R. Hillel, then R. Hiyya (*b. Sukkah* 20a).

⁵⁶ I argued in *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London, 1987), that the roots of Christianity lay in the royal cult of the first temple, evidence for which had been all but suppressed by those who dominated the second temple.

imagery: 'We enter in through the tradition of the LORD, by drawing aside the curtain' (*Misc.* 7.17), in other words, by entering the high priestly domain of the holy of holies beyond the veil of the temple. Ignatius, at the time the Hebrew text was being stabilised, and Clement, both contrasted their teaching with the false teaching of others, and both claimed that their teaching was the high priestly tradition. The 'others' are not named. Note too that the one was from Antioch and the other from Alexandria, and so this claim antedated the two distinct schools of biblical interpretation later associated with Antioch and Alexandria.

The tradition in the Mishnah, that there had been an oral tradition of interpretation passed from Moses through Joshua and others but not through the priests was thus recorded *at the same time as the Christians were claiming to have the true high priestly tradition, also unwritten, passed to them from the Great High Priest.*⁵⁷ Hostility to this oral tradition persisted for centuries. In the Church, it took the form of hostility to *deuterosis*, the oral law. As early as the *Letter of Barnabas* it was argued that the Jews had lost their claim to the covenant by making the golden calf; Moses had smashed the tablets, and everything that followed was by way of a punishment (*Barn.* 4 and 14). This argument finds its fullest expression in the *Didascalia*, where the second lawcode, given after the apostasy of golden calf, was 'heavy chains of burdens' from which the Christian had been set free (*Didasc.* 6). It has been observed that *deuterosis* is the exact Greek equivalent of *Mishnah*, and so everything associated with the Ezra tradition was thus condemned. By the fourth century CE, Christian writers were applying this term to rabbinic exegesis, and the scholars themselves were known as *deuterotai* (e.g Jerome *On Matt.*

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22.23; *On Isa.*10.1).⁵⁸ The *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* went so far as to exclude Deuteronomy from the canon because it was not dictated by God and so was not kept in the ark of the covenant.⁵⁹ Muslim tradition was similar. The people at Sinai heard the true words and disobeyed, and they had to drink into their hearts the corruption of the golden calf (Exod.32.20 and Sura 2.92-3).

Thus it was the non-priestly Jewish tradition which defined the Hebrew canon and its text, the canon and text adopted by Jerome as the basis for his Old Testament, on the

⁵⁷ *Numbers R.* 14.19 emphasises that the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt, on Sinai and in the Tent of Meeting, but Aaron was excluded.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of *deuterosis* see Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 19 above), chapter 3.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.* (n. 18 above), fo. 77a.

grounds that this was the version which Jews would accept as the basis for discussion. The non-priestly Jewish tradition also excluded those books such as *1 Enoch* which were the repositories of the older priestly traditions. Thus both the text and the context of the priesthood disappeared. They seem to have survived in the life and liturgy of the Church, but largely unrecognised because there is so little by which to identify what does remain.

The early Church read *1 Enoch* as Scripture; Clement and Origen both knew and quoted from it. *1 Enoch*, however, has a very different estimate of the people who returned from Babylon, the Ezra tradition. Far from restoring the true temple and the true Scriptures, they were a generation of impure apostates who had forsaken wisdom and lost their vision (*1 En.* 89.73; 93.8-9). Lying words had been written, perverting the eternal covenant; sinners had altered the truth as they made copies, they had made great fabrications and written books in their own name (*1 En.* 98.14-99.2; 104.10-11).⁶⁰ If Ezra's heirs defined the canon and excluded books which the Christians continued to read and to preserve, the adoption of this canon and text for the Christian Old Testament since the time of Jerome *must have distorted the tradition and created a considerable impediment to the understanding of Christian origins.*

In addition, it is necessary to take into consideration the historical process by which the Hebrew Scriptures, as we know them, came into being. The Deuteronomistic histories, which have so often been read as histories, are remarkable for the way they systematically condemn almost everything in the nation's history. The kings are judged by the criteria of Deuteronomic orthodoxy, and then condemned and dismissed one by one. Whoever wrote these texts was clearly setting out to discredit what had existed in Jerusalem in the time of the first temple: it was the voice of a new regime. Their description of the temple does not include items such as the veil and the chariot throne, which appear in the Chronicler's account and were important elements in priestly theology. Other sources are mentioned, but they have not survived.⁶¹ Isaiah is the only one of the latter prophets who appears in this account.

Nor has the debate about the Pentateuch reached any conclusion, except that the form with which we are familiar was a second temple

⁶⁰ See G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, Minneapolis 2001 *ad loc.*

⁶¹ 1 Kgs 11.41; 14.29; 15.31. Also 1 Chron. 29.29; 2 Chron. 9.29; 2 Chron. 12.15; 2 Chron. 33.19. *The Book of the LORD*, Isa.34.16, must have been a major text, to judge by the title. It probably underlies the first part of Revelation, see my *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* pp. 65, 67.

composition, and produced by the 'impure apostates' of the Enoch tradition. The stories of rivalry among the priestly families are thinly veiled second temple history, the tabernacle and its Aaronite priests are a glimpse of the second temple cult. The stories of Abraham were selected to substantiate the claims of Isaac, and Mount Moriah became identified as the site of the Jerusalem temple. Nobody knows what do with the episode of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek, who only makes brief appearances in Genesis and Psalm 110, but was a key messianic figure at Qumran and in the New Testament. The early Church seems to have known another version of Genesis 22, that Isaac was sacrificed and resurrected.⁶² The Deuteronomic version of the calendar does not mention the Day of Atonement, only Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles (Deut.16). The episode of the golden calf denies that any person can make atonement for another (Exod. 32.30-33). The secret things are forbidden (Deut. 29.29), and the Law is to replace Wisdom (Deut. 4.6). We should ask whom the Pentateuch defined and whom it excluded. The voices in Isaiah 63.16 had been excluded from the second temple by those who had compiled the Pentateuch, and the cursed the name of their oppressors, claiming that the true servants of God would have a new name (Isa. 65.15).

Texts outside the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic Histories have become unreadable in the MT. The text of Psalm 110, the Melchizedek psalm which the early Church quoted more than any other, is corrupt, and the vital verse is unreadable in the MT. The LXX enables us to see that it described the birth of the divine son who became the Melchizedek priest (Ps. 110.3). The MT of Proverbs 30.1-4 is unreadable, but it seems to describe someone ascending to heaven to learn Wisdom. And what vision was David granted? The MT of 1 Chronicles 17.17 is unreadable, but seems to describe a vision of the man ascending or perhaps being offered. Why are these lines in the MT unreadable? The distribution of unreadable Hebrew texts is not random; *they are texts which bear upon the Christian tradition*. Add to these examples the variants in Isaiah about the Messiah, the variants in Deuteronomy 32 about the sons of God, and there is

⁶² The *Letter of Barnabas* mentions the type created in Isaac, 'when he was sacrificed on the altar' finding fulfilment in the death of Jesus, and this was then linked to the day of Atonement sacrifice (*Barn.* 7). Clement of Rome wrote of Isaac's confident faith in what would follow that stretched him on the altar with a light heart' (Rom. 31). These ambiguous references should be set beside Hebrews 11.17-19 and James 2.21, which have had more point if the recipients of the letters had known that Isaac was sacrificed. 'Abraham... offered Isaac...'. He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence figuratively speaking, he did receive him back (Heb.11.17-19). See also S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, New York 1967.

a case to answer. These are instances where traces remain. We can never know what has completely disappeared.

If we read the Hebrew Scriptures in the way that the first Christians read them, we should understand that Yahweh was the son of God Most High, (El Elyon), the Second person (to use an anachronism), and that Yahweh was incarnate in Jesus.⁶³ Thus Gabriel announced to Mary 'He shall be called Son of God Most High' (Luke 1.32). We should know why Paul could proclaim one God, the Father, and one LORD, Jesus the Messiah (1 Cor.8.6). We should know why two early texts of the New Testament⁶⁴ came to describe Jesus as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt (Jude 5). We should know why the Fourth

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evangelist believed that Isaiah's vision of the LORD had been a vision of Jesus (John 12.41). We should know why Justin regarded the Old Testament theophanies as pre-incarnation appearances of Jesus, why Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Novatian read the Old Testament in the same way, and why Constantine's mother erected a Christian church at Mamre,⁶⁵ the place where the LORD appeared to Abraham. We should also understand why ikons of Christ have in the halo *ho ôn*, the Greek form of Yahweh.

Much scholarly labour has been expended on how the distinction between Yahweh and Elohim might have been a clue to the original strands of the Pentateuch. Far less has been done on the relationship between Yahweh and Elyon, despite the invitation to investigate the 'sons of Elyon' implicit in Qumran versions of Deuteronomy. Elyon and Yahweh had been Father and Son; Luke knew this when he wrote his account of the Annunciation. Later hands smoothed over evidence in the Hebrew text: the God of Melchizedek, according to the other ancient versions of Genesis 14.22 was El Elyon, but only in the MT do we find the name as Yahweh El Elyon. *This change must have been made after the advent of Christianity in order to obscure the name of Melchizedek's God.* Other changes to the names of God were made much earlier, in the wake of the Deuteronomists and their creed of One God One temple. Some years ago I asked the question: 'What period of Israel's thought does the Pentateuch represent, with its many

⁶³ This was the case I set out in *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* London 1992. The Jerusalem Bible's disastrous decision to use Yahweh in the Old Testament and the LORD in the New Testament *destroyed at a stroke the unity of Christian Scripture*. Had the translators had the pre-Masoretic text of Deut 32, they might have made a different decision.

⁶⁴ Vaticanus, 4th C and Alexandrinus, 5th C.

⁶⁵ I have set out this material in detail in *The Great Angel, op. cit.* (n. 63 above), pp. 190-232.

names and manifestations of God all gathered into one tradition?'⁶⁶ There are clear instances in the Psalter and in the central chapters of Isaiah where the title of Melchizedek's El Elyon has been transferred to Yahweh. 'Creator (*qoneh*, literally begetter) of heaven and earth' became 'Yahweh, Maker of heaven and earth.' 'The idea of a procreator God with sons seems to have fallen out of favour with those who equated Yahweh and El.'⁶⁷ The Christian proclamation of Jesus as Son of God could well have provoked further tidying up of the Hebrew text, such as those alterations in Genesis 14.22 and Deuteronomy 32.

If we read the Hebrew Scriptures in the way that readers of *1 Enoch* read them, then we should understand that Josiah's changes to the temple at the end of the seventh century BCE were not a reform but the destruction of the ancient cult. We should recognise that Wisdom had been driven from the temple at that time. We should be hoping for the destruction of the temple and the city built by 'Ezra' and his apostates, as did the Christians of the Book of Revelation. We should remember a time when Moses had not been part of the history of Israel. We should read Proverbs differently and see Wisdom not as a late personification but as an ancient memory, the Queen of Heaven who had been rejected on earth and had returned to take her place among the angels. Had we the other texts and another canon we should know that Wisdom had been excluded from the second temple and from its texts. We should

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recognise that Wisdom was again excluded when the Hebrew canon was formed at the end of the first century CE, *because the Christians had proclaimed the fall of the harlot Jerusalem and the return of the banished Wisdom, and they proclaimed the advent of her son the Messiah*. We should recognise her as the Mother of the LORD, and find this confirmed in Isaiah's prophecy. And we should understand why the Eastern Church dedicated her greatest churches to the Holy Wisdom.

There is evidence to suggest that the refugees from Josiah's changes to the temple settled not only in Egypt but also in Arabia, among the sons of Ishmael.⁶⁸ This tradition was known when the Jerusalem Talmud was compiled in the fourth century CE, i.e. when Christians and Jews were still arguing over the text and canon of the Scriptures. Since 'Ezra' and his heirs were associated with the new ('apostate') ways in Jerusalem

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 19 citing N.C. Habel, 'Yahweh Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study in Tradition Criticism', *JBL* 91 (1972).

⁶⁸ See p. 148.

and with the rejection of Wisdom, it would not be surprising if hostility to his tradition and Scriptures survived among 'the sons of 'Ishmael.' The faithful ones described in Isaiah warned the returned exiles in Jerusalem that their name would become a curse, and that the faithful servants would have a new name (Isa.65.15). Even though the accusations have been made relevant to the new situation after the advent of Muhammed, the pattern of accusation is recognisable in Muslim texts. The enigmatic and allusive nature of the text of the Qur'an makes certainty impossible, but there are striking passages, not least the frequent references to the falsification of the text (*tahrif*), and to 'the Book and Wisdom' (3.81; 4.113; 5.110) which had been given, together with a great kingdom, to the people of Abraham (4.54). They were also given to Jesus (3.48; 3.79). This could be an allusion to the roots of Christianity being in the older faith of Abraham and 'Wisdom', and in the cult of the first temple.⁶⁹ It is quite clear that the earliest Christians had Scriptures other than those in the present Old Testament, and the story of Ezra in 2 *Esdras* 14 shows that wisdom had been lost along with the other secret books.

In the Qur'an a group are accused of claiming as Scripture passages they have written themselves (2.79), of altering the meaning of the text (2.75) and of accepting only part of the text (2.85). One passage describes how a group of the people of the Book threw away the Book of Allah and chose instead to follow evil teaching from Babylon (2.101-102). This could easily be the words of the 'Enoch' tradition which rejected the second temple and the teaching brought back from Babylon. The people of the Book look for allegorical and hidden meanings (3.7), and those who have only a part of the book 'traffic in error' to lead people astray (4.44). The Scriptures have been sold (5.44). The Jews are accused of twisting the words of Scripture (4.46).⁷⁰ Given that 'Jew' was the name given to those who returned from Babylon, but not to all the heirs of ancient Israel, this could be a pre-Muslim complaint emerging in the new situation. Parts of Moses' Book had

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been concealed (6.91) and parts had been changed (7.162), so that the covenant of the Book has been taken from them (7.169). This had been a Christian accusation as early as the *Letter of Barnabas*.

Early discussions between Christians and Muslims, whether actual or fictional, show that the state of the Scriptures was an important issue. By the eighth century CE Jews and

⁶⁹ As I argued in my book *The Older Testament*, *op. cit.* (n. 56 above).

⁷⁰ J. Neusner, *The Incarnation of God. The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 435.

Christians accepted the same (Jewish) text, and so their debates were about the interpretation of a common text. Between Christian and Muslim, however, there was the old debate about the authenticity of the text. Caliph Umar II wrote to the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (717-740):

‘You declare that the Code was more than once written by the Children of Israel who read it and understood it, and that it was many times lost, so that for a long time there was nothing remaining of it remaining among them, till at a later period some men recomposed it out of their own heads... Why is it that in the Mosaic Code one finds no clear indication of either heaven or hell, or of the resurrection or judgement?’⁷¹

Leo acknowledged that the Scriptures had been written by Ezra, but declared that the books were exactly like those which had been lost, due to ‘the marvellous work of God’. Umar’s attitude could be dismissed as petulance (‘our beliefs are not there so it must be wrong.’), but the ‘lost’ Scriptures rejected by the Ezra tradition do in fact deal with heaven and hell, resurrection and judgement. These are major themes of the Enochic, priestly tradition, and enquiry about them was specifically prohibited for Jews.⁷² The present, final form of the Hebrew Scriptures has emphasised later tradition and suppressed the Enochic.⁷³ In 781CE, when the Caliph Mahdi and the Patriarch Timothy debated the two faiths, the Caliph accused Christians of removing from Scripture testimonies to Muhammed. ‘If you had not corrupted the Scriptures, you would have found in them Muhammed as well as the other prophets.’ The Patriarch by this period could use *the fact of Jews and Christians having identical Scriptures as proof that they had not been corrupted!* ‘If the Christians and Jews are enemies, and if there is no possibility that enemies should have a common agreement on the line that divides them, it is therefore impossible for the Christians and the Jews to agree on the corruption of the Books’.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Text and discussion in A. Jeffery, ‘Ghevond’s Text of the Correspondence between Umar II and Leo III’, *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944) pp. 717-741.

⁷² The four forbidden areas of enquiry were what is above, what is beneath, what was beforetime and what will be hereafter (*m. Hagigah* 2.1).

⁷³ As I argued in my book *The Older Testament*, *op. cit.* (n. 56 above).

⁷⁴ A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies* 2, Cambridge 1928: ‘Timothy’s Apology for Christianity’, pp. 55, 57. The midrashim of the thirteen scrolls was probably to counteract such accusations: Moses had made one scroll for the tabernacle and one for each of the twelve tribes, to guarantee authenticity. See H. Lazarus-Yafeh, ‘Tahrif and Thirteen Torah Scrolls’, in *Jewish Studies in Arabic and Islam* 19 (1995) pp. 81-88.

That the Muslim arguments against the Book had their ultimate roots in the disputes between those who became 'Rabbinic' Jews and others whom we glimpse at Qumran and among the early Christians, was implied some fifty years ago in an early reaction to the Qumran discoveries. Chaim Rabin, a Jewish scholar, argued that the remnants of the Qumran group, whom he regarded as a sect, had taken refuge in Arabia, and that their descendants had been among the early followers of Muhammed. He cited numerous similarities both in style and substance between the Qumran texts and the Qur'an, including the interest in heaven, hell and the judgement. Earlier Old Testament

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scholars had denied links between Islam and the earlier faiths, he suggested, because they had lacked the Qumran evidence. He cited Wellhausen whose 'chief objection to a Jewish origin of Islam was the intense pre-occupation with the end of the world, which is absent in Talmudic Judaism and also from seventh century Christianity.' 'We can now understand why so many of Muhammed's attacks against the Jews of Medina can be paralleled from the New Testament; both the NT and he drew *on the same sectarian arsenal.*' 'It may well be that the sectarian writings account for the scrolls of Abraham and Moses from which Muhammed quotes in the early Sura 53.36-54' It is highly probable, he concluded, that Muhammed had contacts with '*heretical, anti Rabbinic Jews*, and a number of... details suggest the Qumran sect.'⁷⁵ Since, as I have suggested, these 'anti Rabbinic' Jews were those whose Scriptural tradition had been superseded first by the work of 'Ezra' and then in the interests of Christian debate with Jews, one can understand the basis of the Muslim arguments.

The tenth century CE Karaite al Qirqisani wrote an account of the Jewish sects and their history. He accused the Rabbinic Jews of teaching that Ezra gave a new Torah.

'They say that the Torah which is in the hands of the people is not the one brought down by Moses, but is a new one composed by Ezra, for, according to them, the one brought down by Moses perished and was lost and forgotten. This is the abrogation of the entire faith. If the Moslems only knew about this assertion of theirs, they would not need any other thing to reproach us with, and use as an argument against us.'⁷⁶

He went on to list the many ways in which the Rabbinic Jews differed from all other Jewish groups, and concluded that they surpassed even the Christians in nonsense and

⁷⁵ C. Rabin, *Qumran Studies*, Oxford 1957; pp. 118, 126-8, my emphases.

⁷⁶ L. Nemoy's translation of Al Qirqisani's *Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity* in HUCA 7 (1930), pp. 317-397, p. 331.

lying.⁷⁷ Ezra again. The earlier Muslim writers do not associate Ezra with the falsification of Scripture,⁷⁸ but by the eleventh century CE, in the work of Ibn Hazm, Ezra was being accused of falsifying the text.⁷⁹

If we could define precisely who and what was indicated by the name Ezra, we should be a good deal nearer to understanding the intricacies of this quest for the 'lost Book', and what was excluded when the Hebrew canon was fixed. His earliest appearance outside the canon is in the additions to the *Apocalypse of Salathiel*, the earlier title for 2 *Esdras* 3-13. Salathiel was identified as Ezra (2 *Esdr.*3.1), but Ezra does not appear again by name until 2 *Esdras* 14, the account of the renewing of Scripture. The canonical genealogies are also suspect: in the list of the high priests, Azariah was father of Seraiah, and Seraiah of Jehozadak the high priest who was taken into exile (1 Chron. 6.14). His son was Joshua, the high priest who returned from Babylon (Hag 2.2). The corresponding genealogy of high priests in Ezra 7.1-5 has Azariah then Seraiah and then Ezra, which is not only a curious anachronism, but an indication that 'Ezra' was replacing the high priestly line. Ezra does not

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appear in Ben Sira's list of famous men (*Ben Sira* 44-50), 'his' period being represented by Zerubbabel, Joshua ben Jehozadak and Nehemiah (*Ben Sira* 49.11-12). Some scholars suspect that 'Ezra' was a literary fiction from the second century BCE, a high priest created as the figurehead for a new development that was seeking a retrospective validity.⁸⁰ The complexities of the texts associated with Ezra and their inter-relationships is certainly compatible with this view. 'We cannot but agree with Wellhausen that Ezra was seen, according to the indication of the Rabbinic tradition itself, as the founder not of the Law but of *the biblical canon*.'⁸¹ Yet again, Ezra and his canon is presented as a substitute for an older priestly tradition at some time in the second temple period.

It has been said that there was within early Judaism a twofold reaction against Christianity: against the LXX which the Church had adopted, and against Wisdom.⁸² The

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 358.

⁷⁸ C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, Leiden 1996; chapter 7.

⁷⁹ See 'Ezra-'Uzayr: The Metamorphosis of a Polemical Motif', in H.Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds. Mediaeval Islam and Biblical Criticism*, Princeton 1992; pp. 50-74.

⁸⁰ Thus G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* ET London 1988.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 157 citing J Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1883), ET New York 1957 pp. 409-410.

⁸² Simon *op. cit.* (n. 19 above), p. 435.

evidence now available suggests that this separation had deeper roots than the crisis precipitated by Jesus. The whole question of the compilation and transmission of the Hebrew Scriptures in their various forms during the second temple period— ‘Ezra’— needs to be examined in the light of early Christian claims that Jesus had been the fulfilment of the temple and messianic tradition. This tradition had been suppressed in certain quarters throughout the second temple period,⁸³ and after the destruction of the temple in 70CE. Neusner, Jewish scholar, made some remarkable observations in his book *The Incarnation of God*. When the Palestinian Jewish community formed the Jerusalem Talmud, he wrote, it was facing the threat posed by the newly triumphant Christianity of the fourth century CE. Since Christianity had its own way of reading the Old Testament, ‘the Judaic response took the form of a counterpart exegesis’ (p. 107). The Jewish sages adapted scripture to their new needs: ‘When the sages read and expounded Scripture, it was to spell out how one thing stood for something else...’⁸⁴ Their as-if frame of mind brought to Scripture renews Scripture, with the sage seeing everything with fresh eyes’ (p. 125). At a time when the Christians were finding Jesus in the Old Testament as the manifested God, Jewish scholars writing in Roman Christian Palestine ‘clearly treated with reticence and mainly through allusion, the perfectly available conception of God as incarnate’.⁸⁵

Recovering the Scriptures as Jesus and the first Christians knew them, may well be an impossible task. One can hope that there will one day be a cache of Christian Greek texts comparable with the Qumran finds. But even with the evidence we have, it is clear that certain fundamental questions need to be asked within the discipline of text criticism and all that is built upon it. Ehrmann showed how theological disputes were conducted through the texts of the New Testament,⁸⁶ something far more complex was happening with the transmission of

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the Hebrew Scriptures. The founder of canonical criticism wrote this, ‘The Church’s use of Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament was valid in its historical context, but theologically provides no grounds for calling into question the ultimate authority of the Hebrew text for church and synagogue’.⁸⁷ When the text is set in its wider context,

⁸³ The subject of my book, *The Older Testament* 1987.

⁸⁴ Neusner, *op. cit.* (n. 70 above), pp. 107, 125, 196.

⁸⁵ Cf. the frequent claims in the Qur’an that the Jews distorted the meaning of the Book, e.g. 4.46.

⁸⁶ B.D. Ehrmann, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford 1993.

⁸⁷ B.S.Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, London 1979; p. 99.

even the little of it we can reconstruct, this simply is not true. To quote Kraft again: 'My conclusion and intuition, with regard to the alleged 'Christian' tampering with Jewish Scriptures is that a thorough re-examination of the problem is in order, and that a strictly controlled approach will, in the long run, serve us well in the quest for a more satisfactory understanding of our Christian and Jewish heritages'.⁸⁸ Muslim too.

What we are likely to recover is the tradition of first temple, which survived in many forms and contexts, but was excluded from the surface form of the MT. The seventh century 'reformers' in the time of Josiah were the first to obscure the world of the temple. This situation was reinforced by the triumph of the group who returned from Babylon in the sixth century and set up the second temple, 'Ezra'— condemned by the Enoch tradition and by all who regarded the second temple period as the age of wrath. It was reinforced yet again with the formation of the Hebrew canon and the text which became the MT— 'Ezra', and eventually the Western Old Testament. The world of the first temple and its high priestly tradition survived in the Hekhalot texts, which, as Schäfer observed, seem to be independent of the canonical Hebrew Scriptures.⁸⁹ It underlies the Gnostic systems, the Kabbalah, and Sufism. It also shaped the Liturgy of the Church.

⁸⁸ Kraft, *op. cit.* (n. 20 above), p. 226.

⁸⁹ P. Schäfer, *Hekhalot Studien*, Tübingen, 1988, p. 291.