

A Short History  
of the  
Interpretation  
of the Bible

Second Edition  
Revised and Enlarged

ROBERT GRANT  
with  
DAVID TRACY

FORTRESS PRESS

## Contents

This edition is reprinted by arrangement with Macmillan Publishing Co.,  
**Inc.**

Biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Revised Standard  
Version of the Bible, copyright 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973 by the Divi-  
sion of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of  
Christ in the U.S.A. and **are** used by permission.

Chapters 1-15, copyright © 1963, 1984 by Robert M. Grant  
Chapters 16-18, copyright © 1984 by Fortress **Press**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored  
in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, elec-  
tronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the  
prior permission of the copyright owner.

---

### Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

**Grant, Robert McQueen**, 1917-

A short history of the interpretation of the Bible.

Bibliography: p.

Includes indexes.

1. Bible-Criticism, interpretation, etc. -History.

I. Tracy, David. II. Title.

**BS500.G7** 1984 220.6'09 83-18485

**ISBN** 0-8006-1762-2 (pbk.)

---

Preface to the First Edition vii

Preface to the Second Edition ix

### PART 1 BY ROBERT GRANT

1. Introduction 3
2. Jesus and the Old Testament 8
3. Paul and the Old Testament 17
4. The Old Testament in the New 28
5. The Bible in the Second Century 39
6. The School of Alexandria 52
7. The School of Antioch 63
8. The Authoritative Interpretation 73
9. The Bible in the Middle Ages 83
10. The Bible and the Reformation 92
11. The Rise of Rationalism 100
12. The Nineteenth Century 110
13. Roman Catholic Modernism 119
14. Modern Protestant Interpretation 126
15. The Interpretation of the Bible 134

Printed in the United States of America 1-1762

99 98 97 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

## PART 2 BY DAVID TRACY

Preface to Part 2	151
16. Interpretation of the Bible and Interpretation Theory	153
17. Theological Interpretation of the Bible Today	167
18. Theological Interpretation of the Scriptures in the Church: Prospect and Retrospect	181
Notes	189
Select English Bibliography	199
Index	205

## Preface to the First Edition

Fifteen years ago, when this book appeared as ***The Bible in the Church***, American concern for the history of interpretation was not so widespread as it has come to be since then. Perhaps for this reason, among others, it now seems advisable to make some changes as the book goes forth again. The basic historical information remains much the same. My own views, influenced by further study, chiefly of the New Testament and of the early church, have been modified; and I have tried at several points to set them forth more systematically. The principal changes, therefore, occur at the beginning and the end of the book. At the end I have decided to refrain from prophecy, and, instead, to set forth what I regard as the basic principles of historical and theological interpretation. The quotations from the Greek New Testament are in my own translation.

It would be impossible to express my thanks to everyone who by criticism, debate, or discussion has helped me to move a little toward clarity; it would be equally impossible not to mention my colleagues and students in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

1963

R.M.G.

## Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition appeared twenty-one years ago. Meanwhile theologians and philosophers have been exceedingly active in this area, and I am fortunate indeed to have taken David Tracy aboard as our pilot. He brings the whole book into its new port. Meanwhile I have made a few changes mostly in the first six chapters, partly out of further reading, partly for the sake of clarity. Both of us believe that the book holds together and has something rather straightforwardly theological (and historical) to contribute.

1984

Robert M. Grant

## Introduction

The story of the Bible in the church is a long and complex one. In the course of Christian history many methods have been employed in order to interpret the record of God's revelation. For the interpretation of scripture is the principal bond between the ongoing life and thought of the church and the documents which contain its earliest traditions. In past ages it has often been thought necessary to justify every doctrine of the church by explicit or implicit statements of scripture. And yet the scriptures are usually addressed to specific occasions to meet specific needs. The universal and permanent meaning of many passages of scripture does not seem to have been intended by its authors. On the other hand, when scripture is regarded as completely sufficient for doctrine, and at the same time the needs of the contemporary situation are quite different from needs long past, some means has to be found for relating the ancient book to the thought and life of a later day. This task is performed by interpretation.

It has been suggested that the more similar the situation of a later individual or group is to the situation of Bible times, the simpler will be the interpreter's task. Such a suggestion does less than justice to the diversity present among those who in various circumstances recorded their own responses, and their communities' responses, to the revelation of God. Environmental situations have influenced prophets, evangelists, and interpreters. But in spite of the varying environments and the diversity of responses-to which the author of Hebrews points in his opening period-there is a unity which is based on a fundamental presupposition: God lives and works in history; he has chosen a people to be his own; he has guided, and still guides, the course of this people's life and work, in spite of its rebellion against him. Without acknowledgment of this presupposition, at least as a working hypothesis, **bibli-**

cal interpretation is impossible. When **Gnostics** insisted that the real God was quite different from, and even opposed to, the God of the Old Testament, they could hardly understand the revelation of the God whom Jesus called Father. When Alexandrian theologians laid tremendous emphasis upon the impassibility of God, they had to allegorize away the passages, in Old and New Testament alike, in which it is quite clear that God is not impassible. A faulty theology used a faulty method of exegesis as its instrument.

Our study will examine the principal methods which Christians have employed in the interpretation of scripture, and the circumstances which led to their employment. We shall also show briefly through what channels these methods came into existence, and through what channels they came into the church. Sometimes methods were taken over unchanged from other sources by Christians; sometimes methods were taken over and altered; sometimes almost entirely new methods were devised. We shall lay special emphasis on the early and formative period of the church's life, for in it were sown the seeds of almost every later development, and later interpreters have often claimed that they were returning to the methods of the early church. Our investigations will not attempt to cover every period of the church's history, but only those times in which significantly new developments took place in regard to the interpretation of scripture. Some more detailed and more inclusive works will be found listed in the select bibliography.

Our study is in part a historical sketch of *hermeneutics*, the methodology of interpretation. But since this word seems to have been lost in ordinary English usage, we have employed interpretation, a much broader term, in its place. The interpretation of any written record of human thought is the exposition of its author's meaning in terms of our own thought forms. Though we may try to think his thought after him, ultimately our own mind must determine the way in which we express his meaning. Interpretation is always subjective as well as objective.

A distinction is sometimes made between interpretation and *exegesis*. On this view interpretation is the task of the theologian, while exegesis is for the biblical specialist who explains both theological and nontheological materials and offers his work for the use of theology. In our study we tend to reject this distinction and

use the two terms as equivalent. The reason for this fusion will become evident in the course of the book, especially in the discussion of the Reformation.

A new problem for exegesis has arisen in modern times. Many ancient Christians claimed that the scriptures had been given by God to his church, just as in rabbinic thought the Torah was the peculiar possession of Israel. Others might read, but they could never understand. To Paul, for example, the interpretation of scripture was possible only through a charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit. Later Christian writers developed more fully the theory of the Bible as the church's book. Only those who stood in the succession from Christ (as among the rabbis those who stood in the succession from Moses) could interpret the sacred book. Outsiders—with the exception of such writers as "**Longinus**"—**examined** scripture only in order to attack its defenders. With the Renaissance and the revival and diffusion of learning, this situation changed. Lorenzo Valla critically investigated scripture as well as the *Donation of Constantine*; John Colet turned from his study of Greek literature to examine the epistle to the Romans. Philosophers like Hobbes and Spinoza prepared the way for **eighteenth-century** deism. The Reformation was not alone responsible for the modern study of the Bible, although certainly it increased men's interest in questions of the meaning of scripture. In **nineteenth-century** Germany the critical movement reached its peak. The attempt was made to understand the Bible historically, at the same time that the rise of classical philology made possible the historical understanding of other ancient books. This historical method still lives, and presents a constant problem to those who wish to build a modern theology on the foundation of biblical criticism. By its most ardent defenders its methods are set forth with a rigidity **unequaled** by scholastic theologians, and its excesses have aroused suspicion not only among simple believers but among skeptical theologians as well.

Yet in our time the historical understanding of any ancient text is inevitable, and it is not possible for us to turn our backs on past centuries of historical investigation. Today it is our task to reexamine the methods of biblical interpretation and to test them anew. It is often maintained that the historical method is the only means

which can be employed in interpreting the Bible. On the other hand, it is held that the historical method leads to antiquarianism or 'historicism.' In my opinion, as will be seen in the last chapter of this book, both these views are correct. It is impossible for modern people to avoid thinking historically, but their understanding of what historical thinking involves is often inadequate. It does not mean that we should try to think in a B.C.E. manner when we deal with the Old Testament, or that in dealing with the gospels we should pretend that we live before the church came into being. Instead, a truly historical method requires us to take *all* the historical evidence into account, and this evidence includes the purposes for which our documents were written, preserved, and transmitted. In addition, the study of the documents requires what Wilhelm Dilthey called "inner affinity and sympathy."<sup>4</sup> We enter into a conversation with the documents and the authors who stand behind them; we do not simply judge them.

It remains true that the proper place for the Bible is in the church. The church existed before the creation of scripture; it is the environment of scripture. Both church and scripture witness to Christ; but the church came first, and scripture was produced within the church for the use of the members of the body. This environment often allows a sympathetic understanding of scripture, an insight into its genius.

Yet unless investigators into the problems of scripture can remain free; unless they can examine questions of interpretation without being unduly influenced by dogmatic considerations; unless, in short, they are not only church people but also free scholars, how can they hope to understand the Bible and make its insights available for their contemporaries? In a divided age such as ours, such a question can find its answer more readily than in the past. It is a problem of tensions. Such tensions between two authorities, each with its own claim upon the loyalty of the interpreters, are more fruitful than simple resolutions of difficulties. Interpreters are not only responsible to the truth as they see it (and the truth can never be as others would like to have them see it) but also to the Christian community, within whose succession of worshippers they stand and to which they are responsible. Humans are not only rational animals but also worshipping ones. And there

must always be a tension between the mystery which they worship and the truth about the mystery which they attempt to understand.

Interpreters of scripture have also to realize that like all Christians they stand not only in the community which is the church but also in the community which is the world outside. Much of the story which they read in the Bible is the story of the smaller group, told from the inside by one within; but there is also an outside history, and the two overlap. If they concentrate solely on the inner story, their understanding will be mythological, irrational, pietistic; if they know nothing but the story of the world outside, their myth will disappear in matter-of-factness, their sense of God's working in the world will be lost, and they will produce "scientific history." Both elements together, however, will set the church in the village and the village in the world. Both elements together make possible an apologetic or constructive theology. Both elements together are needed to portray the mystery of one who became flesh.

## 2

## Jesus and the Old Testament

Naturally enough, the interpretation of the Bible in Christianity begins with Jesus. This fact might seem sufficiently obvious not to require notice, were it not for the tendency of many modern historical critics to assume that Jesus must have conformed completely to what they call 'normative' Judaism. Therefore, they go on to conclude, he must have interpreted the Old Testament, the Bible of Judaism, just as any other Jewish exegete of his day would have expounded it. There is no novelty in his message, at least insofar as it is an interpretation of the Old Testament. And since a great deal of his message is built upon the foundations of Old Testament theology, there can hardly be any novelty in the methods of interpretation which he employed.

Yet there is a saying in the *tractate* Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud which ought to give these critics pause. "He who says, 'The Torah is not from God,' or even if he says 'The whole Torah is from God with the exception of this or that verse which not God but Moses spoke from his own mouth'-that soul shall be rooted up." Jewish exegetes believed that every word of scripture had been spoken by God. There could be no question of its inspiration or authenticity. And anyone who uttered such a question clearly revealed his own separateness from the holy congregation of Israel. Jesus, on the other hand, finds a distinct difference between the words by which God joined together Adam and Eve in an enduring bond of marriage and the words by which Moses temporized with the people's hardheartedness and permitted divorce (Mark 10:2ff.). Moses spoke for a special situation and neglected the purpose of God at Creation.

Clearly Jesus, while he is a Jew and while his mission is primarily to his own people and is expressed in the terms of their

thought, does not hesitate to distinguish between parts of scripture in which God is more or less fully revealed. It is this discrimination which underlies all later Christian developments of the theory of interpretation. And yet we must not overemphasize the difference between Jesus and his contemporaries. There are significant resemblances as well.

To Jesus, as to other first-century Jews, the scriptures were authoritative and inspired. To his opponents, whether human or superhuman, he can quote scripture and say, "It is written ..." (Mark 11:17; Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4, and so on). He can ask them, "Have you not read . . .?" (Mark 2:25). And he can stress the divine source of inspiration of scripture by saying, "David himself said in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36). This is an especially interesting passage, for we find in the contemporary writings of Philo of Alexandria the concept of the inspired writer as an instrument of God. The Holy Spirit of God uses him as a flute and breathes through him. Jesus' expression is not so mechanical. It is the Holy Spirit which inspires David; but it is David who speaks. This is the same emphasis on the human side of inspiration which we find in Jesus' discussion of Moses' bill of divorcement.

Like his contemporaries, Jesus regards Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and David as the author of the Psalms. He was not a literary or historical critic; indeed, it would be incredible if the tradition had reported any interest on his part in literary questions. He regards the events of the Old Testament times as real events. God made male and female (Mark 10:6); Abel was murdered (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:5 1); and so on. And yet they are more than historical events. They have direct relevance to the times in which Jesus stands. When David was hungry he ate the shewbread; the regulations of cult must be subordinated to human needs; the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:25ff.). With such an appeal to the religious content of scripture as against its merely literal or legal form, Jesus sweeps away the accumulated dust of tradition; he teaches "as one with authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). And we are therefore not surprised when he attacks the authoritative exegetes of his day with the ironic statement: "You do well to set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9).

In Jesus' view of scripture there was a strong emphasis on moral command and personal relations as contrasted with merely **cultic** prescriptions. His attitude toward the Sabbath and the legal requirement of ritual cleanliness (Mark 7: 1 ff.) illustrates this emphasis. He quoted definite passages of scripture to support his point of view. In Hos. 6:6 he finds the expression, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13;12:7). Or again, in Isa. 29:13 he finds his opponents described: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrine the ordinances of men" (Mark 6:6f.). Finally, he finds the present state of the temple foretold in Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:2: "My house shall be called a house of prayer of all nations; but you have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11: 17). The prophetic reinterpretation of religion is close to that of Jesus himself. And when he comes to express in a single sentence the key to the meaning of the whole law of the Old Testament, he makes use of a passage from Deuteronomy, the **Shema**, which every Israelite recited daily: "Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God ..." (Mark 9:29f.). With this passage he joins the other "law of love" from the Holiness Code of Leviticus: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:31). Jesus' statement is clear and explicit: "There is no other commandment greater than these." The evangelist Matthew reinterprets it' only slightly when he says, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40).

The systematic arrangement of the Sermon on the Mount doubtless owes much to the evangelist Matthew.\* Perhaps the series of antitheses beginning "You have heard ... but I say," is not so closely knit as Matthew would have us believe; but as a whole the passage (Matt. 5:21-48) reproduces accurately the attitude of Jesus toward the legal portions of the Old Testament. He is a highly independent teacher. He might accurately be called a nonconformist. He does not set aside the Law, however; he deepens it, reinforces it, raises it all to its highest moral level. It is sometimes said that the expression, "You have heard ... but I say," is characteristic of Jewish exegesis; but the examples adduced are not very **convincing**.<sup>3</sup> The expression is far more characteristic of Jesus

himself, whose teaching is a teaching with personal authority. His exegesis is more unlike than like that of his contemporaries.

We have not yet mentioned the way in which Jesus' interpretation of the Old Testament is most strikingly individual. Jesus not only proclaims the imminent and somehow already present reign of God; he proclaims the fact that it is the fulfillment of the predictions of the great prophets. "The time is completed and the reign of God has drawn near" (Mark 1:15). This knowledge is not esoteric. It is not a mystery known only to Jesus and his disciples. "How do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Elijah does come first and renews all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he suffers many things and is set at nought?" (Mark 9:11f.). Here Jesus points out that the Elijah who was to precede the reign of God according to the scribes, is known to him and to them. But what the scribes cannot understand is a figure who suffers. They cannot believe that Isaiah 53 can refer to an individual as well as to the nation. Indeed, Jewish exegesis of Isaiah 53 never interpreted messianically the passages referring to suffering and **rejection**.<sup>4</sup> Here Jesus' interpretation is unique. He goes beyond contemporary Judaism and interprets the prophecies of the Old Testament in reference to his movement and to himself. It is fairly clear in another passage (Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22) that Jesus regarded his "signs" as fulfillments of the prophecy of Isaiah. And at the end of his life, in the Last Supper in the upper room, he sealed with his disciples a new covenant which fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah (Mark 24:24). To be sure, some of these examples were influenced more by the theological outlook of the early Church than by the remembrance of Jesus, but the idea that he regarded prophecy as somehow fulfilled in himself lies deep in the tradition.

Such an interpretation of scripture was thoroughly repugnant to Jesus' contemporaries. His interpretation of Dan. 7: 13 as referring to himself, if we can rely on the rather confused testimony of his investigation by the authorities, was called "blasphemy" by the high priest (Mark 14:64). And his free attitude toward the Law brought the accusation that his mission was its destruction (Matt. 5:17). Yet there are passages, not only in the somewhat Judaistic Gospel of Matthew but also in the Gospel of the gentile Luke,

which represent Jesus as upholding a rigorous doctrine of scripture like that held by contemporary rabbis. "All scripture is inspired and helpful for teaching" (2 Tim. 3: 16); this is the Jewish doctrine. And it is reflected in Matt. 5:18 (Luke 16:17): "Until heaven and earth pass away, one *yodh*—the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet—or one corner of a letter shall not pass away from the Law." Not even one of the least of the commandments can be "loosed" (Matt. 5:19). And in conformity with this doctrine Jesus orders a healed leper to show himself to the priest and make the offering which Moses commanded (Mark 1:44).

This paradoxical attitude of Jesus toward the scriptures is in part due to the way in which his sayings were remembered by conservative groups within Jewish Christianity.<sup>5</sup> But to a greater extent it comes from his own double relation to the Old Testament. The Law in itself is what St. Paul was to call "holy"; the commandment was "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). But "love is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13:10). Moreover the holy history of the Old Testament is significant not only in itself but also in relation to the greater thing which was to come (Matt. 12:38ff.; Luke 11:29ff.). "You have heard that it was said to the ancients"—and for their time it was the word of God to **them**—"but I say"—I who speak with all the authority of the prophets, and more.

Ancient Christian analysis and more than a century of modern critical study make it impossible for us to employ the Gospel of John in interpreting the thought of Jesus himself. The ideas which we find expressed in this gospel are sometimes derived from genuine tradition of the sayings of Jesus; but they have been transposed into another key by those who handed down the tradition. They do not represent so much what Jesus taught as what the church taught in his name. The Spirit of truth comes later and interprets Jesus to a new generation (John 16: 13f.). Nevertheless, the attitude of the Johannine Jesus towards the Old Testament is close to that reported in the synoptic tradition. With his contemporaries in Judaism he knows that Moses gave the Law (John 10:35). And yet Jesus' attitude toward the scriptures is ambiguous. The Law is not all on the same plane. In the Law there is not only the Sabbath but also circumcision; and circumcision takes precedence of the Sab-

bath (John 7:22). Therefore healings are also permissible on the Sabbath. There is a higher way than legalism. Moreover the Jews search the scriptures because they believe' that by them they can attain eternal life. These very scriptures contain an element of prophecy which bears witness to Jesus himself (John 5:39), and this is their true and ultimate meaning. The Jews who do not turn to Jesus are without excuse, for Moses himself has pointed the way. "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote concerning me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:46f.). It is the Law without its proper prophetic interpretation to which Jesus refers as "your" Law (John 8:17;10:34). It is mere law, misunderstood without the Spirit.

In this question of the true meaning of the Law we come close, as we shall see, to the thought of Paul, especially as it is set forth in 2 Corinthians, and it is probable that John was not immune to the insights of his great forerunner to the gentiles. And yet we must avoid mechanical distinctions and oversubtle analyses. Jesus and Paul are not unlike in their attitude towards the question of the Old Testament; and any investigation into the relation of their outlooks which results in sharp antitheses between a Jewish Jesus and a Greek Paul can hardly be correct. Both of them faced the final question of the meaning of the Old Testament for the new Israel of God; and their answers were not dissimilar.

A final question requires our attention. What was the relation of this new understanding of the Old Testament to the exegesis of contemporary rabbis? Let us consider an example in which the form and content of Jesus' interpretation lies close to that of his contemporaries. "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Do not swear falsely, but pay your oaths to the Lord' (Lev. 19: 12; Exod. 20:7; Num. 30:2). But I say to you, Do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is the throne of God; not by earth, for it is the footstool of his feet (Isa. 66:1); not by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king (Ps. 48:2); not by your head shall you swear, for you cannot make one hair white or black" (Matt. 5:33ff.). The content of this example of exegesis is Jewish; we may compare Sir. 23:9: "Accustom not thy mouth to an oath, and be not accustomed to the naming of the Holy One." The form is also Jewish; it

is what the rabbis called *halakah*, from the verb *halak* (to walk), in the sense of following a way of life.

Another example of Jesus' teaching method which is characteristically Jewish may be found in Mark 12:26f. "Concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read in the book of Moses how God spoke to him at the bush and said, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' (Exod. 3:6)? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." According to Luke 22:39 some of the scribes said, "Teacher, you have spoken rightly." The answer was typical of the exegesis called *haggada*, theological and mythological interpretation; a very similar example is to be found in 4 Maccabees. It illustrated the statement of the oldest *midrash* on Deuteronomy: "Those who search out the intimations of scripture say, 'If you wish to know the Creator of the world, learn *haggada*; from it you will come to know God and cleave to his ways.'"<sup>6</sup>

These sayings of Jesus have a strong claim to be regarded as genuine, for while they are thoroughly Jewish in form and content they are preserved in Greek books by Christians to whom the Jewish form was gradually becoming meaningless. And yet they are not simply Jewish. They must be understood in the wider context of all Jesus' sayings. And it must be remembered that there is a striking difference between the underlying eschatological emphasis of Jesus' mission and the rabbis' concentration upon the Law. He looks forward for his inspiration; they look back. Their task has been well described by George Foot Moore in these words:

To discover, elucidate, and apply what God ... teaches and enjoins [in the Law] is the task of the scholar as interpreter of scripture. Together with the principle that in God's revelation no word is without significance this conception of scripture leads to an atomistic exegesis, which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words, independently of the context or the historical occasion, as divine oracles; combines them with other similarly detached utterances; and makes large use of analogy of expressions, often by purely verbal association.'

In form this is sometimes the exegetical method of Jesus, but both he and rabbinic exegetes often transcend it.

In summary we may say that while often the form and sometimes the content of the sayings of Jesus is very similar to that of contemporary rabbis, his underlying outlook is somewhat different from theirs. In the first place, he does not hesitate to criticize scripture and to interpret it in relation to its own highest utterances, which are words of God. (Hillel did the same.) Love of God and love of neighbor are the two great commandments in whose light the rest must be regarded. In the second place, he frequently points to the fulfillment of the prophecies of scripture in his mission. The messianic interpretation of scripture is not novel. We find something closely resembling it in the Dead Sea Scrolls, with their interpretations of prophetic passages as referring to the Teacher of Righteousness. What is novel is Jesus' proclamation that the reign of God is at hand and is being inaugurated in his own work.

Indeed, the story of the paradoxical "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem seems to show that Jesus was consciously fulfilling the prophecy of Zech. 9:9: "Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass." Neither Mark nor Luke refers to the prophecy of the peaceable king; Matthew (21:4) says that the entry took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled; and John (12: 16) states that "his disciples did not know these things at first, but when Jesus had been glorified they then remembered that these things had been written of him and that people had done these things for him." Scholars have often suspected that the literary evidence shows that the relating of Zechariah to the entry was the creation of the early church. The evidence suggests just as strongly that the relating was the church's discovery of the real intention of Jesus.

At this point there is a difference between ancient and modern understandings of Jesus' mission. An ancient Christian would conclude that Jesus was simply indicating, in a veiled manner, that he was the king whose coming was predicted by the prophet. Modern students of the gospels might go on to consider the events which, according to Mark and Matthew, follow the entry. They might be impressed by the relation of the cleansing of the temple to the prediction of cleansing in Zech. 14:21. They might find the saying

about the casting of “this mountain” into the sea (Mark 11:23) related to the prediction of Zech.14:4 that the Mount of Olives would be split “toward the east and toward the west” (in Hebrew, “toward the sea”). They could then suggest that as Jesus fulfilled one part of the prophecy, either he or his disciples, or both, expected that the rest of the events predicted would take place: since the events did not take place, and the fig tree did not bear fruit out of season, Jesus realized that the cup of suffering was not to be taken away from him (Mark 14:36) and that his way could be only the way of the cross. Such a picture of Jesus’ attitude toward prophecy remains conjectural, but it cannot be excluded on dogmatic grounds. For “of that day or that hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). With ancient theologians, modern students of the gospels have to accept what the New Testament tells them of the humanity of Jesus.

The saying in Matt. 13:52 about the Christian scribe, as Klostermann pointed out,<sup>8</sup> can well be applied to Jesus himself: “Every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure-chest things new and things old.”

## 3

## Paul and the Old Testament

At the end of the nineteenth century it was customary for critics to distinguish sharply between ‘the religion of Jesus’ and ‘the religion about Jesus.’ The first was the highest form of Judaism; the second was Christianity. Sometimes the question was asked, Jesus or Paul?—for Paul was the founder of the Christian faith. More recent study has come to reject this dichotomy, and to insist on the continuity between Jesus and his greatest apostle. This continuity is evident in the attitudes of Jesus and of Paul towards the interpretation of the Old Testament.

Paul was acquainted with collections of sayings of the Lord,<sup>9</sup> and through these he was aware of what Jesus had taught in regard to the Old Testament. The new covenant of the Lord had fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 11:25). Moreover, the early church before Paul had contributed its own interpretations of the suffering and victory of Christ. His death for our sins and his resurrection on the third day took place “according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3f.). It is difficult for us to determine how much of his exegetical theory Paul owes to his predecessors in the Christian faith. In any event, the general interpretation of the Old Testament in terms of Christ is due to them.

In the rejection of legalism, Paul’s thought resembles the teaching of Jesus. He knows that the Law as a book of legal ordinances was our enemy. It brought a curse even to those who tried to keep its commandments, for in Deut. 27:26 it says, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide in all the things written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3: 10). Paul takes the Christian understanding of the Law from Jesus. It is summed up in a single sentence: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:9).

Both to Jesus and to Paul, the Old Testament is a book of hope.

But Paul, who lives after the death and resurrection of Jesus, is able to discover many messianic allusions which could hardly have been found earlier. For example, his interpretation of Christ as the second Adam is not given him by Jesus himself, but by a combination of current Jewish speculation with Christian awareness of the significance of redemption. The experience of the church, the body of Christ, was also prefigured in the story of Israel. The fathers were “baptized” in the cloud and in the sea at the Exodus, and they ate “spiritual” food and drank “spiritual” drink in the desert. These were foreshadowings of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:2ff.).

There are striking differences between the exegetical thought of Jesus and of Paul. Paul lives after the crucifixion. He sees the tragedy of legalism. Christ himself had become “a curse” for us when he was crucified; for the Law says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). While Jesus criticized the Law he did not carry his criticism to the point of absolute rejection. Again, Jesus is not a theologian but the despair of theologians. No systematic treatment can do justice to the richness and variety of his thought. Paul, on the other hand, has a naturally theological mind. His is not our type of theology, to be sure. More often than not, his mind moves allusively, intuitively, by verbal association rather than by any obvious logical process. He was not a Greek, trained in a Platonic or Stoic school, though he probably studied rhetoric; he was a Jew, brought up at Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). “Philosophy” for him means only “vain deceit” (Col. 2:8).

There are several passages in his letters where Paul makes some effort to express systematically his conceptions of exegesis. In the first place, we may consider the words which he uses in setting forth the relation between the history contained in the Old Testament and the history of new Israel, the church. The word “type,” which he employs several times, ordinarily means simply **example**; in 1 Thess. 1:7 the church at Thessalonica is described as “an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaëa,” while in 2 Thess. 3:9 the apostle himself is an example for them to imitate. In 1 Cor. 10:6 the word is used in what was to become a **semitechnical** expression. The whole story of the Exodus took place on behalf of us who are Christians; “these things were our types, so that

we should not be desirers of evil.” In an earlier passage the same thought is expressed without the use of the word. “In the law of Moses it is written: Thou shalt not muzzle the ploughing ox. Does God care for oxen? or does he speak, doubtless, on our account? For us it was written” (1 Cor. 9:9f.). Here the idea is not so much of an obvious example, or type, as of a hidden mystery, which might almost be called **allegory**.<sup>2</sup> In Rom. 5: 14 Adam is called “a type of one to come.” He is not simply an example, for he corresponds to Christ not only by resemblance but also by difference. In many instances Christ comes to reverse his work; Paul emphasizes this relationship in 1 Corinthians 15.

Another word lies close to Greek rather than to Jewish exegetical theory, and yet when we examine Paul’s use of the expression, we see that it lies within the limits of Judaism. He employs the word in his letter to the Galatians:

It is written, Abraham had two sons, one from the slave girl and one from the free [Gen. 16: 15]. The one from the slave girl was born according to the flesh, but the one from the free, through the promise. These things are **meant allegorically**: for they are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai in Arabia; but it is parallel to the present Jerusalem, for it is in slavery with its own children. But the Jerusalem above is free; which is our mother [Gal. 4:22–26].

The word **meant allegorically (allegoroumena)** is from a verb commonly used by Greek interpreters, especially by Stoics who interpreted allegorically and explained away the myths concerning the gods. According to these exegetes, some of whom were Paul’s contemporaries, “saying one thing and signifying something other than what is said is called **allegory**.”<sup>3</sup> They proceeded to interpret Homer, for example, as if it were an allegory. They looked for hidden mysteries under the outward forms. Similarly Paul goes far beyond the literal or historical understanding of the story in Genesis when he finds in it prefigured the enslaved Israel and the free. He is reading into it a theory which the story cannot literally bear. But his interpretation is not quite the same as allegorization. He does not deny the reality of the Old Testament history. Moreover, there is a sense in which the figures of the Old Testament were actually intended to be examples, and if it is proper to look for such

examples in Exodus or Deuteronomy, it is also proper to find them in the story of Abraham's two sons. Paul's theory is not entirely forced.<sup>4</sup>

Our understanding of Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament does not depend merely on the words which he uses in setting it forth. More important is the content which he is able to find in scripture. His exegesis is Christocentric. To him Jesus is the promised Messiah, and not only the passages which explicitly foretell his coming, but the scriptures as a whole, are full of references to him. We have already seen that Paul finds the death and resurrection of Christ pretypified in scripture. He does not say where the types are to be found, but we may suspect that in Isaiah 53 he found the death of Christ, and in Hos. 7:2 (or perhaps in the book of Jonah) he found his resurrection.

For Paul, as for ancient Christians generally, the meaning of Christ was not to be understood apart from the history of God's plan of redemption which, beginning with the old Israel, found its culminating point in the creation of a new Israel, the church. Paul shares with other Christians an understanding of the mystery of God's working in history. This understanding is both based on and largely responsible for his exegesis. In the light of his experience of the crisis of human history which confronted him in Christ, he finds other crises in the history of Israel, and believes that they are types which prefigure the events of his own day. The first crisis is that of Adam's fall, by which sin and death entered the world (Rom. 5:12). The second crisis is the faithfulness of Abraham, which was "reckoned to him for righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). The third crisis is the giving of the Law through angels to Moses, "because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19). The fourth crisis is the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Each of these crises is meaningful for us, for each took place on behalf of us who are Christians. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:22). The promise of blessing which God made to Abraham and to his seed applies to Christ, and therefore to Christians (Gal. 3:16). Christ has redeemed us from the Law (Gal. 3:13); "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). And the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ point forward to our own death and resurrection with him (Rom. 6:3f.; Col. 3:1ff.).<sup>5</sup>

A significant example of Paul's rabbinic exegesis is to be found in one of the proofs which he gives for his interpretation of the biblical history:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, And to seeds, as in the case of many, but, as in the case of one, And to thy seed—who is Christ [Gal. 3:16].

In Gen. 13:15(17:19) the word "seed" is of course a collective noun. It refers to the heirs of Abraham considered as a whole. By insisting on a rigorous literalism which he elsewhere ignores (2 Cor. 11:22), Paul is able to interpret the word in reference to Christ. How can he do so? He is not considering Christ merely as an individual, but as constituting a body with all the righteous who live by faith in him. The blessing of Abraham does not come down to Christ alone, but to us. It might almost be said that "Christ" is a collective noun as well as "seed." While the form of Paul's exegesis is rabbinic and verbal, its underlying thought is more profound.<sup>6</sup>

Another interesting example is set forth in 1 Corinthians 10:1ff., where the experience of the children of Israel at the Exodus is understood as an example for Christians. In the verse from Galatians cited above, Paul relies on a completely literal and verbal exegesis; in this passage from 1 Corinthians, his interpretation is very free and his quotation of the Old Testament is not exact:

I want you to notice, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized in Moses' name in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

Here we notice not only the use of Christian terms to describe the spiritual experience of Israel, but also the use of nonbiblical elements in the story. In the Bible there is no rock which follows the Israelites. But the theory that such a rock existed is easy to explain on the basis of the biblical accounts. According to the three accounts of the miraculous gift of water (Exodus 17; Num. 20; 21:16ff.) the water was given at three different places. What could be more natural than to suppose, therefore, that the miracle was still more miraculous? The rock followed the Israelites. And so we find the story told in the **Targum** of Pseudo-Jonathan.<sup>7</sup> But the

rock did not merely follow the Israelites; the rock was Christ. This idea has two possible sources. In the first place, to Paul Christ was the preexistent Wisdom of God, described in the Old Testament, which was God's instrument in the creation and providential care of the world. Now, according to **Philo** of Alexandria, the rock which gave forth water to the Israelites was to be identified with Wisdom. In the second place, in the Last Supper Christ gave spiritual food and drink to his disciples; this spiritual food and drink in his own body and blood; therefore the rock which gives spiritual drink must be identified with him. Is this exegesis arbitrary? The religious experience of Christians in their redemption from sin and death can be interpreted symbolically in terms of the saving of Israel from Egypt. And if the language of religion is naturally symbolic, we may find Paul's exegesis confirmed, not indeed by logic, but by the imaginative understanding which comes from faith.

With the mention of faith we come to what is perhaps the most important aspect of Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament. Why is it, he asks, that the Jews, to whom God originally gave the scriptures, cannot understand them as Christians do? Why do they not see the types and allegories which lie before them? His answer is set forth in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. It is based on an Old Testament example. After Moses had spoken with God on Mount Sinai, his face shone so brightly that it was necessary for him to wear a veil with the children of Israel (Exodus 34):

Until this very day the same veil remains, not taken away, in the reading of the Old Covenant; it is done away in Christ. Even to this day when Moses is read the veil lies on their heart; "but when he returns to the Lord, the veil will be taken off" [Exod. 34:34]. Now "the Lord" means the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom [2 Cor. 3:14ff.].

Here Moses is not only a type of the Old Testament but also a type of the unbelieving Israelite, who must return to the Lord as Moses did. Who is the Lord? He is the Spirit, who interprets the scriptures to the Christian heart, without a veil. The Spirit brings us freedom from the letter of the Old Testament. God has made us

ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive [2 Cor. 3:6].

The letter is not the Old Testament as such; it is the Old Testament

as a legal document, as the unconverted Israelites interpret it. By the aid of the Spirit we are able to understand the Old Testament as a spiritual book.'

The reason that others cannot thus understand the Old Testament is simply that they have not received the gift of the Spirit. They have been blinded, indeed blinded by Satan:

If our gospel is hidden, it is hidden for those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, cannot shine [2 Cor. 4:3f.].

Here is the ultimate basis of Pauline exegesis. The true understanding of the Old Testament comes from God. Those who do not possess this **true** understanding have been blinded. Argument is possible, even argument on purely rational grounds (2 Cor. 4:2; cf. Rom. 2:15); but it can never convince those who do not share the gift of faith.

What shall we say of the form of Paul's exegesis? We have seen that its governing principles make it Christian; everything is finally determined by its reference to Christ. But in its outward aspects his interpretation of the Old Testament is not unlike the interpretation of some of his rabbinic contemporaries. Such similarities are what we should expect to find when we recall the statement in the Acts (22:3) that Paul was educated "at the feet of Gamaliel." And the analysis provided by the best modern scholars confirms this statement. Here we shall give only a few examples.

In the first place, Paul takes great liberties with the original meaning of passages he cites. The context means very little to him. Consider the quotation of Ps. 69:9 in Romans 15:3:

Let each one of us please his neighbor for good, for edification; for even Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

In the Gospel of John another part of the same verse is interpreted in reference to Christ: "Zeal for your house has consumed me" (John 2:17). While to us this may appear an improper use of a single verse out of a psalm which does not seem to be messianic, the early church found many messianic predictions in the psalms. And the rabbis often interpreted them in the same way. To one who knew the story of Christ's ministry, such exegesis would not seem

**arbitrary.** And Paul goes on to justify his interpretation in the next verse of his letter:

Whatever things were previously written were written for our instruction, in order that through patience and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

This rabbinic principle is cited in order to justify characteristic **rabbinic** exegesis.

Another example of exegesis which is Christocentric in content and rabbinic in form is to be found in the first chapter of **Colossians**. Of Christ, Paul says:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for **in** him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, thrones, lordships, principalities, powers; all things were created **through** him and *for* him; and he is **before** all things, and all things have their consistency in him; and he is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning ... [Col. 1:15ff.].

At first sight this passage appears to be a rhapsodic description of the preexistent Christ. But it is actually a typical result of rabbinic exegesis, with its underlying presuppositions stated only in part. Paul begins by recognizing Christ prefigured in Prov. 8:22, where Wisdom describes God's use of her in creation. Since Christ, the Wisdom of God, is God's agent in creation, we must naturally look for further light on his meaning in the creation story of Genesis. There it is stated that "in the beginning God made heaven and earth" (Gen. 1: 1). The well-trained rabbinic interpreter will endeavor to define more closely the meaning of the preposition "in." Is it merely locative? Or does it not rather define the agency of creation? By comparing Prov. 8:22 we can see that it must describe the agency used by God, and we can express this still more clearly by replacing "in" with other prepositions, all of which seem to be applicable. "Through" this "beginning" and "for" him God made heaven and earth; he is "before" them and "with" them. One further deduction can be made from scripture: since in Paul's native tongue the same word means **beginning** and **head**, there is clearly pretypified the Christ who is not only the beginning of creation but head of his body, the **Church**.<sup>9</sup>

We may wonder at the way in which so imposing a structure is

raised on what to us may seem so slight a foundation; and yet, given the general rule of Christocentric interpretation, as well as the rabbinic principle of the value of every word in scripture, the demonstration proceeds logically.

Perhaps the most instructive example of Christocentric interpretation, combined with verbal exegesis, is to be found in Rom. 10:5–10. Here, in the light of Paul's certitude of salvation by faith, he does not hesitate to analyze a passage of the Old Testament in which salvation by works is set forth, and to conclude that it proves salvation by faith! Moses writes (Lev. 18:5) that the man who does the righteousness which is of the Law shall live by it (Rom. 10:5). There is another passage in the Law which states that the performance of the Law is not impossible, or even difficult; and since this passage is contrary to Paul's own view (Romans 7) he finds that he must explain it away. The passage in Deuteronomy (30:11ff.) is as follows:

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it? But the word is very near to thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it.

For the legal righteousness of the old covenant, Paul substitutes the righteousness of faith of the new covenant, and in true rabbinic fashion glosses each phrase to make it conform with his own thought.

But the righteousness which is of faith speaks thus: Do not say in your heart, Who shall go up to heaven (**that is, to bring Christ down**) or, Who shall go down into the deep (**that is, to bring Christ up from the dead**)? But what does it say? The word is near thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart (**that is, the word of faith which we preach**). For if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved; for the heart's belief results in righteousness, and the mouth's confession results in salvation.

Paul believes that unless the Old Testament writer had Christ in

mind, his expressions would be meaningless. For it is Christ who came down from heaven, who rose from the dead, who brought the gift of salvation. We may compare a similar exposition of Ps. 68:18 in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. In neither case are the *gestu Christi* obviously in the text; and as Bonsirven observes, "The strangest thing for us is that they (the examples of exegesis) take the form of a **demonstration**."<sup>10</sup>

These examples must suffice to show us the rabbinic form of Paul's exegesis of the Old Testament. The most striking feature of it is its verbalism, its emphasis on single words at the expense of contexts. And yet, as we have said, once we admit the **Christocentric** reference of the Old Testament we can understand it sympathetically. In the light of historical interpretation we should hesitate to insist on the permanent validity of the way in which Paul works out his interpretations. But for Christians the Old Testament is not a self-sufficient book. Its message is not complete. It looks forward beyond its own time to the coming of one who we believe came in Jesus.

When we have examined instances of Christian rabbinism in Paul's letters we have not finished our task. It is obvious that there is a striking difference between their work and his. He writes in Greek. The significance of this fact must not be overvalued; there was much Greek in Jewish Palestine; and Greek philosophical thought persistently influenced Judaism. We should, however, compare Paul's exegesis with that of another Jew who wrote in the Greek language. And we shall find a few remarkable similarities between the exegetical work of Paul and that of **Philo** of Alexandria.

Paul's emphasis on the singular "seed" in Gal. 3:16 finds a parallel in **Philo's** stress on the singular "child" in Gen. 17:16 (*De mut. nom.* 145); again, both Paul and **Philo** find hidden meanings in names, especially the names of persons important in biblical history. Both Paul and **Philo** allegorize the name of Hagar (*Galatians* 4; *Leg. ulleg.* 3.244). A more important example is to be found in Paul's identification of the miraculous rock with Christ; **Philo** identifies it with Wisdom or the Logos (*Leg. alleg.* 2.86; *Quod det. pot.* 118).

Perhaps we may not agree with Michel's conclusion that in spite

of differences the exegesis of **Philo** is closer to that of Paul than is that of the rabbis. But we can make his suggestion our own, that both **Philo** and Paul are dependent on the exegetical tradition of the Hellenistic synagogue.<sup>11</sup> Both differ from the rabbinic exegetical tradition, however, in their outlook. For both **Philo** and Paul are apostles to the gentiles. Both **Philo** and Paul make use of the terminology of Greek rhetoric.

Yet Paul cannot be explained merely in terms of his Jewish and Greek sources. His whole personality was changed by his experience of conversion. It is possible that like other converts he somewhat exaggerated the extent of the change; but, it is **true**, especially in regard to his view of the Old Testament, that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who lives in him (*Gal. 2:20*). He has died to the Law, through the Law, that he may live to God (*Gal. 2:19*). His interpretation of scripture cannot possibly be what it was in his pre-Christian life. The Old Testament remains scripture; but it is no longer letter, but Spirit; no longer Law, but a ministry of grace. And in it everywhere is Christ; for Christ is the end of the Law (*Rom. 10:4*) and we now serve in newness of the Spirit, and not in oldness of the letter (*Rom. 7:6*). A specifically Christian interpretation of the Old Testament has come into existence.

## 4

## The Old Testament in the New

We have observed the way in which the apostle Paul develops his Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament. But the Pauline epistles do not present it in its final form. The examples of exegesis which we find in them have an air of freedom. We cannot be sure that if Paul had interpreted the same passage twice he would have interpreted it the same way. He makes use of ad hoc interpretations. In the epistle to the Hebrews, on the other hand, there is a carefully worked out, allusive type of exegesis which takes a passage of scripture and is not content to rest until the last subtlety of meaning has been extracted from it.

One reason for this difference is to be found in the character of the audience to which the epistle is addressed. It is not intended for recent enthusiastic converts; it is written for those who have been Christians for a long time and are tiring of the effort. They know their Old Testament. It is possible that they know it too well. The epistle opens with a magnificent rhetorical statement of the inadequacy and incompleteness of the revelation in the Old Testament, and of the finality of the revelation in God's Son (Heb. 1:1-3). Then the author turns abruptly to a series of prooftexts designed to show on the one hand the superiority of the Son to the angels, and on the other hand their inferiority to him. Why is this necessary? The answer seems to lie in the fact that the eighth psalm was taken messianically, with reference to Christ. And while it says, "Thou has set everything under his feet"—this is the line quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:27—it also says of the "son of man," "Thou has made him a little lower than the angels." Psalm readers, especially those familiar with angelologies like the one favored at Qumran, might easily conclude that Jesus was inferior to the angels. The author of Hebrews opposes such an idea, first by

giving a series of proofs from scripture which show that Jesus is superior to the angels (Heb. 1:5–13) and second by carefully examining Psalm 8, stressing the phrases which point to Jesus' glorification and emphasizing the transitoriness of his subjection (2:5–10). From this example alone we can conclude with Scott that the author's method of exegesis

consists not so much in *attenuating* the letter of scripture as in *emphasising it-examining it*, so to speak, under the microscope, in order to ascertain its full implication.'

In the manner of the Qumran sectarians he begins by applying an Old Testament passage directly to the new situation. He goes further than they did, however. Ultimately, the complete reality of the Old Testament is denied in Hebrews; the Law had only a shadow of the good things to come, not the living image of them (Heb. 10:1). It is faith which provides them with substance (11:1).

There are two great examples in which the author of Hebrews sees typified the person and work of Christ. These are the mysterious Melchizedek, priest-king of Salem (Gen. 14:17ff.; Hebrews 7), and the work of the Levitical priesthood as a whole (Hebrews 8—10). In the first place, contemporary Christian usage of the messianic Psalm 110 encourages our author to make his microscopic investigation of its details. Where earlier Christians had quoted only the first verse of the psalm, he now applies the fourth verse directly to Jesus: "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." After quoting part of the story of Melchizedek from Genesis, the author of Hebrews goes on to explain his significance as a type. He was king of righteousness and king of peace, for etymologically (according to our author) Melchizedek means "king of righteousness" and Salem, "peace." The meaning of these names is significant, for Isaiah has predicted that the coming Savior would be called the "prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6f.). By means of such a passage Jesus can be shown to have been foreshadowed in **Melchizedek**.<sup>2</sup>

It is not simply a question of names which is involved here, however, Melchizedek is such a mysterious figure in the Old Testament that his meaning can be investigated more fully. Unlike the other personages of the Old Testament story he has no family his-

tory. He suddenly appears and as suddenly disappears. Therefore the author of Hebrews can find in him a type of the eternal Christ, who was also “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb. 7:3). Furthermore, Melchizedek’s priesthood is of a higher rank than that of Levi; for Melchizedek blessed Abraham after tithing him. It is obvious that the inferior person is blessed by the superior (7:7). And in Abraham’s payment to Melchizedek we see a tithe paid, not to Levi or the Levitical priesthood, but by Levi, who was “in his father’s loins” (7:10). We have proved the superiority of the Melchizedekan priesthood to the Levitical. Indeed, Jesus, our great high priest, does not belong to the Levitical priesthood; there is no prophecy in the writings of Moses concerning a priest to rise from the tribe of Judah (7:14). The prophecy which he fulfills is the story of Melchizedek.

In a summary of his understanding of Jesus as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, our author concludes his portrayal of the person of Christ in the Old Testament and passes on to consider his work:

To summarize what we have said, we have such a high priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of majesty in heaven, a minister of holy things and of the true tabernacle which the Lord, not man, set up. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore it is necessary that he too have something to offer [Heb. 8:1–3].

Evidently the author has begun with the traditional Christian interpretation of Ps. 110: 1 as related to Jesus and has read on in the psalm, finding further theological relevance in the fourth verse, in which he has encountered the mysterious figure of Melchizedek. The parallels he draws do not prove anything. They simply add richness to the Christian view of the Christocentric meaning of the Old Testament, and make Melchizedek more meaningful. Such an interpretation our author calls a “parable,” or comparison (Heb. 11: 19; cf. 9:9). An additional comparison which he might well have made is between Melchizedek’s bringing forth bread and wine (Gen. 14:18) and the bringing forth of bread and wine by Jesus at the Last Supper. Perhaps he regards this as too holy to men-

tion. Perhaps, on the other hand, his interest is so completely absorbed in his other comparisons that he cannot here discuss it. As is often the case in typological exegesis, the author removes Melchizedek entirely from his historical setting. Moreover, he does not really understand the sacrificial *cultus*. But these shortcomings do not destroy the value of his work for us. We may prefer other procedures, but we should hesitate to deny the religious value of the results.

The other example is the work of the Levitical priesthood. When the author of Hebrews turns to consider the work of Jesus, he regards it as the ministry of a covenant which is eternal as well as new. The earthly ministry of the Mosaic priesthood is merely a copy of this true and heavenly ministry, for in Exod. 25:40 God instructs Moses to “make all things according to the pattern which was shown thee on the mountain.” This pattern is the heavenly prefiguration of the earthly copy. Everything in the earthly copy has special significance; but here the author is concentrating his attention only on the most important correspondences (Heb. 9:5):

Christ having come as a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [Heb. 9: 1 If.].

Under the old covenant the high priest alone went into the Holy of Holies, and only once a year. He had to offer repeated sacrifices of the blood of calves and goats. These sacrifices had to be renewed year after year. And they were made, not only for the people, but also for the sins of the high priest himself. But under the new covenant, Jesus entered once for all into the true Holy of Holies, which is heaven (Heb. 9:24). His sacrifice is his own blood, for “it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (10:4). And while he did not offer his blood as a sacrifice for his own sin, for he was without sin, he was made perfect only by his obedience which resulted in his death (4: 15; 5:9). And “by one offering he has forever perfected those who are sanctified” (10: 14). He has opened a way for them into the true Holy of Holies, heaven, through the veil, which was his flesh (10:20).

As scholars have often observed, the picture which is drawn for us in Hebrews is hardly a complete or even an accurate picture of the meaning of sacrifice in the Old Testament. But the author is not really concerned with the Old Testament as a source book for history or archaeology. He is looking for examples which will support his own theory of the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice. To his mind, the Christocentric interpretation of scripture alone gives meaning to the Old Testament. And in the eleventh chapter of his treatise he tells the story of Israel as it must be understood in the light of the revelation of Christ. The patriarchs and the prophets all looked forward to the fulfillment of its coming by the faith that was in them. Without faith the Old Testament history is no history, but a collection of fragments. By means of the key of faith the author of Hebrews finds in it a "cloud of witnesses" who like Christians look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

What is the relation of our author's exegesis to that of his predecessors? It is far more carefully worked out than that of Paul. Where the apostle to the gentiles writes with frequent offhand allusions to numerous verses of scripture which he recalls from memory, the author of Hebrews rigorously revolves a few selected texts and examines their reciprocal relations. His analysis of the high-priesthood of Jesus is ultimately based on only two texts, Psalm 110 and the description in Genesis of Melchizedek. His portrayal of Christ's work is constructed almost entirely out of the accounts of temple *cultus* in the Pentateuch. His knowledge of the Old Testament, at the same time, is somewhat superficial when it is compared with that of Paul. He does not live in the thought-world of the Old Testament as Paul does. But to him, just as to the contemporary author of 1 Peter, the human life of Jesus means a great deal. He knows the "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" which Jesus offered up (Heb. 5:7); he knows that Jesus was tempted but did not yield (4:15); he knows of his death outside the gate of Jerusalem (13:12); and he knows that he came from the tribe of Judah (7:14). Evidently there is a story which lies behind these isolated fragments. Had the author of Hebrews intended to write a gospel, we might have had a work like the Gospel of John. It would have combined historical reminiscences with

interpretations of Jesus' meaning in the light of the Old Testament and of Christian experience. But Hebrews is not a gospel; it is a detailed analysis of the Christocentric meaning of the Old Testament. The true meaning of the Old Testament is to be found only in Christ. In fact, there is no other meaning. The Law had only a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things (Heb. 10:1).

The epistle to the Hebrews played an important role in the history of exegesis. It encouraged the fancifulness of allegorists and others who sought for hidden meanings in the Old Testament. At the same time it achieved more positive results. Without the *typological* method it would have been almost impossible for the early church to retain its grasp on the Old Testament.

While the epistle to the Hebrews represents the most thorough analysis of the Old Testament in typological terms which we possess in the New Testament, there are many other examples of *typology*. As we have seen, the early church was intensely interested in the ways in which the life of Jesus was prefigured in the Old Testament. We are not surprised, therefore, to find this interest in gospel stories.

It has often been observed that the evangelist Matthew stands close to the rabbis of Palestine in his devotion to the Old Testament. The Christians for whom he writes have to be warned in Jesus' name not to let themselves be called "rabbi" (Matt. 23:8). And while we might prefer to believe that Jesus' word concerning the "fulfillment" of the Law (Matt. 5:17) refers to the completeness and finality of his ethical teaching, Matthew himself evidently takes it as a reference to Jesus' fulfillment of the prophecies of scripture. A *yodh* or a corner of a letter shall not pass away from the Law-until everything takes place (Matt. 5:18).

Almost everything in Jesus' life takes place "in order that it might be fulfilled"; the prophecies of scripture (and all scripture can be understood as prophecy) have a direct reference to him. His virginal conception fulfilled Isa. 7:14 (according to the Greek version): "Behold, a virgin shall conceive" (Matt. 1:23). He was born in Bethlehem because a combination of Mic. 5: 1 and 3, and 2 Sam. 5:2 pointed to the exaltation of Bethlehem and the birth of a shepherd king (Matt. 2:6). Hosea foretold his return from Egypt