

Ours is a Saturday work. I suggest that, before this irascible One embedded in this elusive text, all our reading is Saturday reading.

Lis von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990). Von Balthasar characterizes the three days as 1. "Going to the Cross," 2. "Going to the Dead," and 3. "Going to the Father."

The Emergence of Jewish Biblical Theologies

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At one time, not too long ago, writing on "Jewish biblical theology" would have been considered unthinkable. It was a truism that Jews don't do theology, and the long roster of distinguished Jewish theologians of the twentieth century, Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Mordechai Kaplan, and Emanuel Levinas (to name only the most prominent), did nothing to dispel this axiomatic understanding. Somehow, each of these theologians was considered an aberration and, at any event, more a "philosopher" than a "theologian." Jews, after all, didn't do theology.

As strange as the concept of Jewish theology may have seemed, at least there were some writers who wrote "Jewish philosophy." The enterprise made some sort of sense, and the negative Jewish reaction to the concept of Jewish theology was mostly an issue about the definition of "theology." Theology was narrowly understood as the study of God, and writing about God was not considered a Jewish activity. But Jews did write about the religious dimensions of life and had a long history of serious contemplation of the universe, life, and humanity. Most Jews preferred to call such contemplation "Jewish philosophy" or even *haskamah*, "Israel's thinking," but there was a tradition of reflection on such issues. On the other hand, Jewish biblical theology was simply incomprehensible. The Bible was simply not the axis around which "Israel's thinking" revolved.

The Bible plays an enormous role in Jewish ritual life. Many psalms from the book of Psalms have been incorporated into the synagogue liturgy, forming an essential component of the regular daily, Sabbath, and festival services. A group of Psalms forms the core of the special service for Sabbath eve (*Shema Yisrael*), and another group of Psalms is the core of the additional celebration on festivals and new moons (the *Shema*). On Jewish festivals, entire books of the Bible are read aloud as part of the service: the Song of Songs on Passover, Ruth on Pentecost, Lamentations on the Ninth of Ab, Jonah on the Day of Atonement, Ecclesiastes on Tabernacles, and Esther on Purim.

But the main ceremonial use of the Bible in Jewish worship involves the Torah (the Pentateuch), for the Torah is at the ritual center of the Sabbath morning prayer service. The architecture of a synagogue entails an

"ark," an ornamental, ceremonial cupboard at the front of each synagogue, on the eastern wall, usually upon a raised platform. This ark houses at least one Torah scroll, a scroll that contains the first five books of the Bible, carefully inscribed on parchment with a quill pen. Every Saturday morning, the Torah is taken out of the ark and promenade around the synagogue, touched and kissed and loved by the congregation. The Torah is then "undressed," for the scroll normally wears a velvet cloak, with a silver breastplate over the cloak. Even the wooden poles around which the scroll is wrapped are ornamented, for they wear either a crown around the two or individual caplets, *korot* (pomegranates), on each pole. After the procession and the unveiling, the Torah is ready to be read. Individual members of the congregation receive the honor of being "given an *aliyah*," being called up to the Torah to bless God for granting the Torah to Israel. A portion of the Torah is then chanted aloud. In traditional services, seven such honors will be awarded. The portions to be read are consecutive, so that each year the entire Torah will be read aloud from Gen 1:1 to Deut 34:12. An alternate tradition allows three years for the reading of the entire Torah, but in this tradition also, the entire Torah is chanted from start to finish. When each Torah reading is complete, the individual being granted the honor will once again offer blessings of thanksgiving. After the seven readings, a companion piece is chanted. This piece, called the *haftarah*, is a selection from the prophetic books that tradition decrees complements the Torah portion. When the readings are finished, the Torah is dressed and adorned once more and is conveyed back to the ark in ritual procession. A minor version of this service takes place on Monday and Thursday mornings. At that time, three people are called up, only the first section of the week's portion is read, and there is no *haftarah*. A macro version of the Torah service takes place once a year, on the festival of Simhat Torah, "Rejoicing in the Torah." All the Torahs in the ark are taken out for procession; there are seven processions; each procession is an occasion for dancing and song; and most of the people present take turns dancing with the Torah scrolls. On this holiday, everyone in the congregation is given the honor of being called up for the blessings of thanksgiving. Some congregations call the people up to the Torah in seven groups; other congregations call each person up, one by one, for as long as it takes. In this latter case, in order to speed up the action, several people may chant from different Torah scrolls simultaneously. The final section of the Torah is read, and then the Torah is begun again with a special ceremonial chanting of Gen 1.

In all these liturgical ceremonies, the Torah is the central icon of the long relationship between God and Israel and a visual symbol of the regal nature of God the king. Through participation in these rituals, Jewish worshipers receive a deep sense of the awe and the joy of the

Torah. At the same time, this centrality of the Torah is more symbolic than real, more celebrated than maintained. The liturgical and symbolic centrality of the Torah functions strongly on an emotional level. But in many respects, the Torah, and indeed the whole Bible has been marginalized in Judaism. Symbolically central to the faith, the Bible has been placed on a pedestal in Judaism. But being placed on a pedestal has its negative aspect, for it entails a certain degree of isolation: the Bible is not directly involved in matters of halakah, Jewish practice and law. Authority in halakah lies in a chain of tradition that begins with the rabbis of the Talmud. The Bible is the source of halakic authority, but it does not function on its own and is not an independent source of authority in traditional Judaism. A new reading of the Bible has never had the power to upset rabbinic laws or attitudes. The rabbis turn to biblical passages to legitimate and give great weight to rabbinic concepts or provisions. The Bible is of paramount importance as a source of legitimation. But it does not have the power to delegitimize or to invalidate rabbinic provisions. One cannot argue that the rabbinic reading of a biblical passage is misguided and expect that this argument will uproot the practices that were based on that rabbinic reading. New readings of the Bible do not change old customs. In traditional Judaism, the Torah, regal as it is, is not sovereign. It is yoked to a rabbinic system that it serves. In effect, the Torah was (and is, in most traditional circles) a king or queen in captivity. It is well known that the Christian church was explicitly "supersessionist." It showed honor to and interest in the Hebrew Bible and claimed it as its heritage, but it considered the New Testament as its foundational Scripture and drew its behavioral conclusions from there. Judaism was almost equally supersessionist, but it did not make its supersessionism apparent. It behaved ritually as if the Torah was the central facet of Judaism, but it dictated the way that the Torah should be read. In effect, Jewish tradition subordinated and domesticated the Bible. Rabbinic readings declare the sense of Scripture. These rabbinic readings of biblical passages are rarely judged wrong or misguided. They have so much weight in tradition that new readings are not only extraneous and irrelevant—they are practically unthinkable or inconceivable. The traditional readings overlay the biblical text so extensively that they obscure the readers' view of it. The Queen on her pedestal is hidden by veils.

This domestication of the Bible had ramifications in the way the Bible was taught and was in turn reinforced by Jewish religious pedagogy. The Bible was taught as an entry-level book. Little children learned their Bible, mostly concentrating on the Torah. But children would "graduate" from the Bible to higher forms of Jewish learning. By the time they were eight or ten, they would be studying the Mishnah, a Jewish law book that was produced around 200 C.E. When a little older, they would enter the world of

Talmud study, which they would continue to study in adulthood, later perhaps also studying mystical or philosophical literature. Grown-up children did not come back to the Bible with more sophisticated eyes. They had learned their Bible and were expected to know it. But the Bible they had learned remained the text of their childhood and of ritual.

There is a form of Bible study that continues into adulthood in traditional Judaism, a semiritual form of study in which the portion of the Torah read aloud that week is studied as a devotional activity. In this study, the Torah portion is augmented by the comments that medieval teachers wrote about it. Of these commentators, the most important was Rashi, who lived in the eleventh century. He was a master educator with an important goal he wanted to enable people to continue to study the Bible. To this end, he distilled the bewildering array of postbiblical study of the Bible and the legends attached to it into a simple line-by-line commentary. Rashi's eyes became the lens by which Jews read the Bible. His commentary became so authoritative that Jews often did not distinguish between what the Bible says and Rashi's interpretation. Later readers and commentators built new ideas and commentaries on top of the foundation that Rashi laid, but they very rarely went beneath his commentary into the biblical text to find alternate readings.

As time went on, the "Rashi lens" with which Jews looked at the Bible was joined by a translation lens. Most Jews read the Bible in English, or French or German, alongside their Hebrew. But all translation is interpretation, and modern translations are in the tradition of the great translations of the Renaissance/Reformation, in which one of the goals of the translation was to remove ambiguity from the text in the interests of opening the Bible to the masses. Like Rashi, the translators streamline and simplify the Bible to make it easier to read. With two such lenses "helping" the reader to see the Bible, the actual text could easily be simplified and amplified into almost total invisibility. The Queen on the pedestal had even more veils.

Things have changed. The many discoveries of modernism have had an enormous impact on our knowledge of Judaism. They have revealed the existence of many different streams of Judaism in antiquity and later, thus removing the impression that rabbinic choices were the only possible Jewish choices. There have also been enormous changes in the way we read the Bible. The modern disciplines of biblical studies have increased our knowledge of biblical Hebrew and have led to approaches to biblical ideas that are at least partially independent of the classic traditional ways of reading the Bible. Ancient Near Eastern studies and Assyriology have given us perspectives on the Bible that come from times prior to the Bible and contemporary with it. These and other avenues of approach to the Bible have been added to the traditional "vertical" approach that descended chronologically to the Bible through the layers of later tradition

At the same time, the modern development of Jewish studies has led to an explosion of our knowledge of ancient texts from Qumran and from the Cairo Geniza. Ancient Jewish magical texts have been discovered, and there has been a reawakening of interest in Kabbalah. All of these discoveries and methodologies have multiplied our resources for the study of Bible. The growth of contemporary philosophy and literary theory have also given Jews a new appreciation for the plurifold approach of midrash, which declared that there were seventy facets to the Torah and that everything could be found in it. Perhaps the most significant impact of biblical and Judaic studies has been the creation of a core of highly educated Jewish scholars who have not "moved on" from Bible to Talmud but have remained focused on the Bible, applying their reading of the Bible to everything else they learn.

These modern developments were not always caused by modernism itself. Modernism challenged the validity of certain biblical claims, often juxtaposing biblical claims with scientific knowledge. But it very rarely looked to see whether the "biblical claims" it challenged were actually the Bible's claims. In fact, modernism often increased the simplified approach to the Bible that tradition generated. The trajectory of reading in the modern period has been to achieve a single authoritative reading of the biblical text. Modernism, with its belief in univocal objective truth, intensified the expectation that there could be ever more exactness in the one true reading. Early biblical scholarship, imbued with the attitudes of modernism, sought to use philology, historical criticism, and scientific data in order to achieve ever more precision in reading. With scientific precision, modern scholars "corrected" old readings and challenged the authority of traditional commentators by undermining faith in the accuracy of their traditional readings. But the modernist scholars shared with the medieval commentators the effort to determine a clear and unequivocal reading of Scripture that could command the allegiance and submission of its readers. Authority demands submission, but one must know to what one is expected to submit. So authority must present a clear, unambiguous statement to which allegiance is required. The text cannot be allowed to have a rich texture of multiple meanings, or how would people know to what meaning one is required to submit? Modern biblical scholarship displaced the source of authority from the traditional clergy and medieval traditions to the scholar and the new modern traditions. But the approach of scholarship, like the approach of the religious traditions, was to claim authoritative readings and understandings. A new approach to reading the Bible, and a new understanding of its theological significance, had to wait for the collapse of the authority of the same modernism that had itself challenged the authority of the old approaches.

The last twenty years have witnessed a collapse of all the old certainties, the demise of modernist ideas about objectivity and even about rationality.

Much more attention is now paid to the impact of the researcher in science, the interpreter in history, the reader in literature. Contemporary students of texts or events know that the texts and events acquire much of their meaning through the interaction of events, objects, or written documents with the person studying them. The interests and agenda of those doing the reading always affect the results of their reading process, sometimes unconsciously and sometimes with full intention. This new attention to the mutable and subjective nature of knowledge pervades much contemporary thinking. But it is especially strong in biblical scholarship, which has not only learned these contemporary principles from contemporary theory, but has also come to realize them empirically through the inclusion in dialogue about the Bible of groups who had been on the margins. This dialogue revealed that different groups had different readings of the text; different readings influenced by the presuppositions and agendas of those who were doing the reading. Jews had their traditional authoritative readings that were sometimes quite different from traditional Christian readings. The poor read with their own experiences in mind, the Third World readers with their own experience of marginalization and colonization, and groups of women in turn read the Bible with eyes conditioned by their own experiences. Dialogue among these groups began to highlight the great amount of interpretive content that lay underneath interpretations that masqueraded as simple reading.

The ongoing reinterpretation of biblical texts and the dialogue about interpretation and about these texts have made it clear that there was nothing essentially "true" about the traditional religious or scholarly readings. They were "hegemonic readings," readings that depended for their authority on the hegemonic power of those doing the reading, the authority of the church or the academy. The church or academy spread their interpretations by the power of their position. At the same time, the demands of power and the interests and agenda of the readers in power helped shape the particular content of these traditional readings. The traditional readings reflected the experiences of men of power. These hegemonic readings became clear, made choices in interpretation, and other people could make other choices. Today, the hegemonic readings continue to hold their authority within authority-driven circles, but within the world of scriptural studies and more open environments, the inclusion of new voices in the wider interpretive community has created a climate in which the old hegemonic readings have collapsed.

The collapse of hegemonic authoritative readings has resulted in a liberation of the text itself. Instead of being forced into the straitjacket of the "one true truth," a biblical passage can now demonstrate its complexity and ambiguity. The contemporary babble of views has begun to reveal the multivocality of the Bible, its complexity and ambiguity. Knowing that

many different interpretations of the text have in fact existed and held authority has caused us to carefully examine the nature of biblical writing that makes multiple readings possible. We have begun to gain understanding of the literary techniques of the biblical story, in particular the technique of "gapping," the most important tool of ambiguity in the Bible, leading us to see how the biblical authors created a story that changes with different reading communities. The gapped writing of the biblical story makes the interpreter or interpretive community fill in the gaps according to their presuppositions. As presuppositions change, the way that communities fill in the gaps also changes, so that the text begins to have many different variations, allomorphs of the biblical story.

We have begun to recognize other biblical modes of complexity, other techniques that allow the biblical story to change with its readers even more than literature usually does. One such technique involves intertextual allusion. Biblical stories are often written intertextually, so that situations and key words in one story draw allusion to another story. Paying attention to intertextual allusions shows us how stories and laws relate to each other and cluster in discourses. The story or law has meaning when read by itself but adds another layer of meaning as part of a discourse that may present a whole spectrum of ideas about any given topic.

Another source of ambiguity is contained in the oracular nature of biblical rhetoric. Famous statements, long "understood," like וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּרֹאשׁ הָעֵדֻת וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי יְהוָה הוֹצִיא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם (Exod 4:13) turn out to be much more problematic than once believed. Does Rebekah's oracle declare that "the elder will serve the younger" or "the elder, the younger will serve"? Rebekah chose the first reading and acted to make it so. But is that understanding required by the oracle? And Moses' statement is translated "send someone else." But the words mean, "Send by whomever you send." Moses has learned to speak as cryptically as God, and God gives him his own prophet, Aaron, to interpret him.

The Bible begins with an enigmatic construction: אֵלֶּיךָ מִצְרָיִם. The traditional translation, "in the beginning," ignores the ungrammatical nature of this phrase. The word מִצְרָיִם is a noun in construct, "the beginning of," and a construct should be followed by a noun: "the beginning of something." Rashi emends the vowels, reading אֵלֶיךָ מִצְרָיִם, "at the beginning of God's creating." But the text says, "At the beginning of—he created." Assyriologists point to the Akkadian *awāt iqbt*, a grammatical construction in which a construct is followed by a verb. *Awāt iqbt*, which literally means "the word of—he spoke," is a way of forming a relative clause with the meaning "the word that he spoke." Thus perhaps אֵלֶיךָ מִצְרָיִם should be translated as "when God began to create (the heaven and the earth)." In support of such an understanding, the two major Babylonian creation myths both begin with a "when" clause. The *Enuma Elish* begins "When on high

the heavens had not yet been formed," and the Atrahasis Epic begins "When the Gods, like men, (had to work)." There are enormous theological implications to such a change in translation. "In the beginning" speaks of the beginning of all things, the start of God's activity. Earth and humanity are the first entities that God created. In this translation, the Bible is profoundly geocentric and anthropocentric. Nothing existed before our own cosmos, God did nothing before God created us. A translation, "when God began to create," on the other hand, says nothing about the beginnings of God's activities, nothing about events before the six days of creation, nothing about the primacy of our world. There is time before the creation of our space, space before our own. In this translation, the Bible is picking up the story at the beginning of our universe, but in *medias res* in the story of God, and says nothing about the beginning of time or the primacy of this or other worlds. For these reasons, I prefer this translation. But it is not certain. אָוֶרֶת אֱלֹהִים is not exactly an *awāt iqbtā* formation. This formation occurs once in the Bible, בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרֵאשִׁית ("When God began to speak to Hosea," Hos 1:2). The true *awāt iqbtā* formation in Gen 1:1 would be אֵלֶּיךָ אֱלֹהִים. Why does it have an extra אֵלֶּיךָ (*bed*)? And as for Mesopotamian parallels, the few Sumerian tales about creation start with the words, *u-ri-a*, or *u-ri-la*, meaning *in illo tempore*, "at that time," in other words, "in the beginning."

The composers of the first chapter of Genesis knew Hebrew at least as well as I do. They could say something clearly when they wanted to. Moreover, the beautiful litany is carefully, poetically constructed. They were not being sloppy or racing for deadline when they wrote אָוֶרֶת אֱלֹהִים. The ambiguity of the phrase must be purposeful. The two possible translations reflect our own uncertainty and lack of clarity about our role in the wider cosmos. An intentionally ambiguous phrase mirrors the mystery of creation. People who do not know whether eternally preexists creation and creation preexists terra can refrain from writing in such a way that would reflect a certainty that is not there. The ambiguity is also a foreshadowing and a tip-off about things to come in the Bible. The world the Bible considers is complex, and the text reflects the world: different voices compete and clash, claim and disclaim.

It is difficult to talk about the intentionality of authors, divine or human, but the more we look at the Torah, the more oracular it seems, and the more Delphic in its oracularity. The very word *torah*, after all, means "divine instruction." It is related to the Akkadian term *terru*, divine instruction by means of oracles, a word that ultimately became specialized as a technical term for instruction through liver omens, the chief way in which the Babylonians received their divine instruction. In Israel, the term *torah* originally referred to a specific teaching. By the time of Ezra, the people sought divine instruction within the written tradition of Israel, and

Torah became the term for the entire collected Pentateuch. People could "seek out" revelation within the book precisely because the book is complex, ambiguous, and difficult. Like the world itself, like historical events, the book in which divine instruction was sought was full of riddles wrapped in enigmas.

The God of the Bible is not easily known. First Genesis, then the penitential narrative in Exodus through Numbers and the narratives that follow in the historical books trace a trajectory in which the God who once walked the garden in Gen 3 and actively spoke to Abraham removes the divine presence from human affairs. God remains to be sought in sacred space and time and in the sacred word. But God remains to be sought, not confronted simply and unambiguously. Even the high priest in the holiest section of the holiest place, on the holiest day of the year, could not confront God directly. He experienced a God who was doubly veiled, obscured first by the cloud in which God hovers, then by the cloud of incense the priest created, a cloud of incense that prevented him from even glimpsing the divine cloud. God is experienced through veils, experienced through visions and glimpsed through events. And God's presence can be felt through the writings that record these experiences and consider these events. But these writings cannot be simpler or more obvious than the God they represent.

The complexity and multivocality of Scripture need not deter those who read it. Nobody has to understand the full meanings of the text: indeed, the text, like life, can be so multivocal and complex that only the mind of God can fully comprehend it. There is no obligation to understand, no demand to spend one's life looking for fuller, deeper, more comprehensive meaning. One can live, Deuteronomy tells us, with only the simple truths: that God made us God's people and that we owe God the behavior appropriate to God's people. A life lived in accord with a simple truth is a simple life, and there is great ease, beauty, and peace in a simple life. When our lives become more complex, we may react by longing for simple truths and simple lives, or we may be led to look for more complex truths, to seek fuller meanings and more understanding. It is then that we begin to "seek" the text, and when we do, we find that the simple truths no longer look as true or as simple.

There are yet other reasons that the Bible was written with such complexity and ambiguity. First, the Bible is a text, a written document, and written documents from the ancient world were not "records" in our present sense of the word. A text was a witness to an event, not a complete or accurate recording of events or ideas. The very *sight* of the stela, or tablet, or scroll, as much as their content, served as witness to the reasons they were written. Even as a witness, the text was limited: it could not be entered as evidence in a law dispute unless there were witnesses to attest

to what was on it. The text could not stand by itself. To use it in law, you had to have witnesses; to use it in study, you had to have interpreters. The texts are written laconically and often need explanation. In the Near Eastern and biblical law collections, two cases will differ from each other by at least two variables. Oral discussion is needed to discuss which variable is determinative and what the result will be if only one change takes place. The written text will never replace the interpreter. And the rights of interpreters depend on their authority, their ability to convince others to listen and be convinced by their interpretation.

The authority of interpreters depends on their power, but the vagaries of history, not the logic of inevitability, determine who will have such power over the text. The biblical text does not itself determine who will be the authorized leaders. In fact, the Bible finds its final shaping under the impact of the collapse of all biblical systems of authority. Judah had a monarchy that claimed divine election and privilege. There had been anti-monarchic forces in Israel, which claimed that with God as king, there was no need for the apparatus of state. But the book of Judges invalidates the antimonarchic point of view even as it presents it, arranging the stories to show the utter collapse of premonarchic society. The book of Kings does not like the monarchy of the northern kingdom of Israel, holding it tainted by the religious and political acts of the first king Jeroboam, foundational acts that determined the nature of the kingdom. But the book of Kings ultimately loses faith in the Davidic dynasty of Judah as well and blames its kings for the destruction of the kingdom. Even the other basic tenet of Judah, the Jerusalem ideology that considered Jerusalem God's inviolate city, lost its power as God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed. The Davidic promise and its ideology were destroyed along with the Judahite state. Much later, the Davidic king and Jerusalem became the centers of messianic and eschatological hopes, and that language is still used today. But that development came later. The disillusionment at the destruction of Judah was so great that, Haggai's wishes to the contrary, the monarchy was not restored when Israel was returned to its land.

The other sources of authority in Israel, the priests and the prophets, also lost their authoritative aura and their hegemonic power by the time of the destruction. The longstanding prophetic critique of the priesthood and its sacrificial system was compounded by the priestly failure to ensure that God continued to dwell in the temple. Nor was prophecy the answer. The ability of the prophets to determine policy was always somewhat problematic. The prophet Elisha was active in instigating the revolt of Jehu against the Omride dynasty—but the prophet Hosea clearly disliked Jehu's actions. The biggest problem with prophecy is the veracity of the prophets and their reliability. Whom can you believe? Deuteronomy demands that the people listen to prophets and insists that signs and wonders are not a

good indicator—Deuteronomy claims that God might send prophets with signs in order to test the steadfastness of the people. The true indicator, says Deuteronomy, is the content of the message: the prophet must be telling hearers/readers to stay faithful to God (13:2-6). But this standard is only helpful when the false prophet advises abandoning God: when the issues are subtle and complex, how can the people know what action constitutes staying faithful? Deuteronomy considers this problem, "And if you question in your heart, 'How will I recognize the matter which YHWH has not spoken to him?', the prophet who speaks in the name of YHWH and the matter does not come to pass—that is the matter which YHWH did not speak to him" (Deut 18:21-22). But history cannot be the test of a true prophet. It cannot determine what to believe now, only what should have been believed then. Moreover, the book of Jonah argues that the best result a true prophet can hope for is to have his prediction made false by inspiring repentance. During Jeremiah's blasphemy hearing, elders recalled that in the days of Hezekiah, Micah prophesied that Zion and the temple would be destroyed, but Hezekiah feared YHWH and YHWH relented and did not destroy the city (Jer 26:17-19). At that time, those who prophesied the Isaurian message, peace on Jerusalem, were proved right. But Jeremiah denounced as false prophets those who delivered that message in his day—and the destruction proved him right.

The Bible relates stories that illustrate the danger of following a false prophet and the great difficulty in understanding when a prophet is false. Even a prophet cannot always tell. At the time of Jeroboam's revolt, a Judahite prophet went to Bethel on a mission to denounce Jeroboam's religious innovations. As he returned home, an elderly prophet invited him to eat and drink. The traveling prophet declared that God had demanded that he fast till he get home, but the other prophet replied, "I too am a prophet, like you," relating that an angel instructed him to have the first prophet eat. But when the first prophet sat to eat, the word of YHWH informed him that he had disobeyed and as a result would not receive proper burial. A lion then dismembered him on his way home (1 Kgs 13:11-25). The old prophet was not evil; when he heard what had happened he buried the remains of the traveling prophet and asked to be buried with him. The old prophet may not even have known that he was inducing a prophet to rebel against God's word; he may have believed his own prophecy about his duty to show him hospitality. This is the core problem with prophetic authority: even prophets do not know when they are not speaking a true prophecy. The story of Micah's vision (1 Kgs 22:2-26) dramatically illustrates this problem. King Ahab wants Jehoshaphat king of Judah to join him in battle for Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat wants a prophecy, and Ahab brings out four hundred court prophets who predict victory. Jehoshaphat wants still another prophet, and

Ahab sends for Micaiah even though "he never prophesies good about me." Micaiah comes and tells Ahab to go, but Ahab is suspicious and demands that he tell him only truth. Micaiah then prophesies doom and relates his vision: he has seen the heavenly court, with God on his throne asking for someone to entice Ahab to battle so that he can die in battle. A spirit volunteered. When God asked how the spirit would do this, the spirit declared, "I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets," and God sent him to do so. Zedekiah, the head of the court prophets, is horrified at this story; he strikes Micaiah on the cheek, declaring, "How is it that the spirit of God passed from me to speak to you?" Zedekiah is convinced that he is a true prophet; Micaiah is convinced that God has deceived Zedekiah. In the face of such deception, nobody can tell what to believe. By the time of Ezekiel, the people have lost faith in prophets, and Ezekiel records a proverb, "the days are prolonged and every vision fails" (Ezek 12:22).

The destruction discredits all the old systems of authority. As Zephaniah says (3:3-4), "Her princes in her midst are raging lions, her judges are wolves . . . her prophets are reckless men of treachery and her priests have polluted the holy and turned the Torah into lawlessness." It is no wonder that people seek the will of God in a book rather than turn to their leaders. But even the law is somewhat problematic. Allegiance to laws of debt and debt slavery, declared Amos, is *עֲוֹן חַוְלָה*, criminal lawlessness and brigandry, and because Israel collects debts and holds debt-slaves, they are worthy of destruction. Jeremiah shows us that the child sacrificers in the Valley of Hinnom really believed that God had commanded them to sacrifice their children. To Jeremiah, God says, "I didn't command it; it didn't enter my mind" (Jer 7:31; 19:5)—but they believed they were commanded by God. Even more horrifying, Ezekiel tells us that God really did command them, that some of the laws are booby traps intended to doom the people (Ezek 20:25).

The written law depends for its authority on Moses, for it is the "Torah that Moses commanded," but Moses himself is subtly undermined by the narrator on at least two occasions. In one, the people are at Sinai, and the narrator shows us two dialogues: God's command to Moses to tell the people to prepare for revelation, and Moses' charge to the people. There is a significant difference between them, for when Moses commands the people, he adds, "Do not approach a woman," a command never given by God (Exod 19:15). Moses, on his own, without God's command, has introduced the separation of sex from sanctity into Israel's law and gender inequality into Israel's congregation. And the narrator, the anonymous voice of Torah, shows the reader that God never commanded this. Another story is equally serious. The people have angered God by attacking themselves to Baal Peor, God has brought a devastating plague, and God now commands Moses to "take all the leaders of the people and impale them

for YHWH before the sun" in order to stop the plague (Num 25:4). But Moses never relays this message; instead he tells the leaders to search out and punish the guilty parties. Moses has rejected the idea of the vicarious punishment of leaders and substituted individual responsibility and retribution. And the narrator has shown that that important principle of law is from Moses, not God.

If some laws are from God, but shouldn't be followed, and other laws are from Moses rather than from God, there is no room for legal positivism. Every law has to be examined on its own merits; no law can simply rest on its own authority as "God's word." The written word has no more unquestionability than the priests who teach it, the prophets who proclaim it, or the state authorities who enforce it. This lack of trust in any given authority contributes to the complex multivocality of the Bible.

The Torah was completed during a time of complexity and new horizons. The rest of the Bible was finished in yet another period of complexity, the Roman era. To deal with a complex, shifting world, we need a complex text, and the Writings and the Prophets abound in diverse opinions and contradictory thoughts. Much of the complex variety has been simplified or ignored during the eons since the composition of the Bible by authorities who have claimed hegemonic power to determine the interpretation of Scripture. Now, however, the world is once again exploding with new horizons, and the old hegemonic authorities have come under suspicion. Indeed, the very idea of hegemonic power clashes with some of our contemporary approaches to reality. The gentle and genius of indeterminacy have come out of the bottle, and the multiple facets of the Bible are once again compelling attention. Indeed, in our contemporary world, this very negotiating between voices gives the Bible a new centrality in Jewish religious thinking. The new interpretations of the Bible show that the rabbinic interpreters made choices and that other choices can be made. By presenting alternative voices in the central iconic text in Judaism, the study of the Bible helps undermine the authority of any single biblical voice, any one particular biblical reading. Biblical theology presents an alternative source of authority to rabbinic thinking and creates a very fertile opportunity for dialogue between biblical and rabbinic ideas. The Bible offers us an ability to triangulate our contemporary sensibility with two major systems of our past. Above all, the Bible offers us a model of how to react to the collapse of old hegemonies. It shows us that we need not fit into a new absolutism or to nihilistic despair, but should proceed with a determination to keep faith and an understanding that revelation and sacrality do not lie in any particular written word, but in the very process of sifting and negotiating and wrestling. This is the process of Torah.