The Bible Rewritten:

Stephen's Speech and Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation in the Second Temple Period.

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The interest in early biblical interpretation in the Second Temple period considerable growth since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[i] The interpretative traditions attested to at Qumran redirected scholarship's attention afresh to the corpus of post-biblical Jewish literature compiled in the so-called Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha. With few exceptions[ii] the New Testament has lacked equal attention. The preservation of these interpretative traditions in the gospels, the book of Acts, and other New Testament material is relatively still in the beginning stages. Furthermore, Jewish exegesis, that is the method in which Jews in antiquity interpreted scripture, as witnessed in the rabbinic corpus and at Qumran has yet to find permanent residence in New Testament scholarship. Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether the methods of exegesis as utilized by the New Testament authors, its source(s), or the figures mentioned therein, are similar to what we know of Jewish exegesis in late antiquity. Stephen's speech in the book of Acts 7:1-53 affords us such an opportunity to explore both the attestation of Second Temple interpretive traditions, as well as, in some cases, methods of exegesis, thereby, giving us the opportunity to suggest some implications regarding Scripture in late antiquity. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, it will be impractical to provide an exhaustive analysis of Stephen's speech, which covers over 50 verses. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to a brief survey of explicit traditions and where they appear elsewhere in post-biblical Jewish literature, as well as examples of subtle methods of Jewish interpretation.

Before continuing we should clarify what we mean by "interpretation". Unlike today's modern commentaries, ancient interpreters did not find it necessary to write lemmatized commentaries, that is to say, a commentary that clearly distinguishes between the authoritative text (i.e. lemma) and comment, with the notable exception of

the Qumran *p^{e}sharim,* which differentiate between text and comment with the Hebrew *pishro* (it's interpretation). More commonly, however, authors would fuse the biblical text with comment into a smooth running narrative of expanded material, indistinguishable to the untrained eye. For example, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, though in Aramaic, is composed as a running narrative interweaving both the biblical text, in some cases, direct quotations, with interpretations and narrative expansions. These expansions also add descriptive elements to biblical figures that are missing from their Hebrew base texts. One of the best examples, which has been discussed today by Dr. Byron, is the figure of Abel of whom it is said in the Second Temple period and later *Targumim* is "righteous," though this appellation is lacking from Genesis. Therefore, the possibility increases greatly that an added detail, however minute, derives from an interpretation when this detail is missing in the original account. Additionally, exegetical methodology is equally crucial to our understanding of early biblical interpretation. An example of this in the gospels has been recently elucidated by Steven Notley in his "Jesus' Hermeneutical Method in the Synagogue at Nazareth." There it is convincingly argued that Jesus fuses two Isaianic passages based on the unique occurrence of the Hebrew "*ratson l'adonai*." This exegetical method is more commonly known as *gezerah shavah*, one of the rules of exegesis accorded the first century sage Hillel. In its earliest stages this principle fused together different passages based on exact word form. Therefore, it is only natural to explore Stephen's speech for both examples of interpretation, viz., the interpretative traditions, as well as interpretive methodology.

Stephen's speech begins by speaking of Abraham as "our father" (τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν) in verse 2. While speaking of Abraham as such seems completely appropriate in

light of the description accorded to him in Genesis as a *father of a multitude of nations* (אַב־הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם, Gen 17:4), such precise language does not appear regarding the patriarch in the Hebrew Bible. Referring to Abraham as "our father" seems to become a more common refrain in the Second Temple period, appearing in *Jubilees* (25:5), the *Testament of Levi* (6:9; 18:15), *4Macc* (16:20), and elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt 3:9; Jas 2:29). Interestingly, the only time we find the term אבינו (our father) being utilized in *Mishnah Avot* is referring to Abraham (3:11, 5:3, 6, 19), while the other patriarchs of whom the same can be said (cf. *Jub* 10:32) is lacking. Undoubtedly, at some point in the Second Temple period it became common practice to refer to Abraham as "our father," over the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob and Stephen is a witness to this tradition.

The next portion of verse 2 that God's appearance to Abraham occurred "*before* he lived in Haran" is yet another exegetical tradition. If we follow the order of Genesis it is when Abraham is *in* Haran that God appears to him, not prior. Kugel notes, "If this account follows chronological order then when God speaks to Abraham in Gen 12:1…Abraham must be already living in Haran. But if so, why does God say to him then, 'Go forth *from your country* and *from your kindred* and your father's house'—Ur was Abraham's country and the place of his extended family, not Haran."[iii] Kugel goes on to note that ancient interpreter's offered various solutions. Josephus, and the author's of *Judith* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*, follow the biblical account, viz., that God appeared to Abraham in Haran. Philo, on the other hand, in his commentary *On Abraham* (62) is of the opinion that Abraham was in Ur when God appeared to him.[iv] Kugel is of the opinion that Stephen, prior to being martyred goes out of his way to take a position on this exegetical problem.[v] More simply, one might argue that Stephen is simply

knowledgeable and accepting of a contemporary tradition regarding God's appearance to Abraham, specifically that God appeared to Abraham *before* he lived in Haran.

The quotation of Gen 12:1 in verse 3 of the speech, "Go from your land and from your family, and ***go*** in to the land that I will show you," appears to be a non-LXX interpretation. Stephen's speech here omits *from your father's house* of Gen 12 and adds the Greek interjection δεῦρο, 'come.' The process of additions and omissions can often indicate an interpretive tradition as witnessed in the later *Targumim* and other places in the LXX. The LXX's translation of Gen 12:1, however, is pretty much a literal rendering, so it is unlikely that Stephen's speech is based on it. This same translative tendency to expand Gen 12:1 precisely where the speech has is witnessed in the Palestinian Targum *Pseudo-Yonatan*, which reads: "Go (אזל) to the land that I will show you…"[vi] and is nearly identical to Stephen's "Come (δεῦρο) in to the land that I will show you."

From there, according to verse 4, God has Abraham to move from Haran "after his father" dies. Following the Masoretic text, however, Abraham is born when Terah is 70, Abraham is seventy-five when he leaves his father in Haran, and Terah is said to live until 205. Thus, it appears that Terah lives for another sixty years *after* Abraham departs. As noted by Fitzmyer and other commentators, the Samaritan text of Genesis reads that Terah lived 145 years, which agrees that Abraham's departure occurred after Terah's death. As already noted by Marshall, Philo also follows this tradition in his *On the Migration of Abraham*. In some regards, this tradition seems to stem from the paradox that appears in Genesis, namely, the mention of Terah's death in 11:32 prior to Abraham's call in 12:1, coupled with the number of years Terah lives (205), which places

his death *after* Abraham departs. The Samaritan Penteuch's version of Genesis apparently noticed the paradox and amended Terah's age to 145 in order to harmonize the discrepancy. The rabbis answer the discrepancy in a different way:

> Now what preceded this passage [i.e. Abraham's calling]? "*And Terah died in Haran,*" [which is followed by] "Now the Lord said to Abraham: Get thee (לֶךְ־לְךָ)." Rabbi Isaac said: From the point of view of chronology a period of 65 years is still required. But first you may learn that the wicked even during their lifetime are called dead. For Abraham was afraid, saying, 'Shall I go out and bring dishonor upon the Divine Name, as people will say, 'He left his father in his old age and departed'? Therefore the Holy One, blessed be he, reassured him: I exempt thee (לְךָ) from the duty of honoring your parents though I exempt no one else from this duty. Moreover, I will record his death before your departure. Hence, *and Terah died in Haran* is stated first, and then*, Now the Lord said unto Abraham*.[vii]

In the continuing paraphrase of Genesis, the speech's exegetical nuance becomes more sophisticated. Verse 5, "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground…" contains an allusion and exegetical fusion of two separate passages from the Pentateuch. Abraham's so called lack of an inheritance is here aligned with the unmistakable Deuteronomic formulation "not even a foot of ground" (2:5). The question to the reader of the speech is why has Deut been suddenly inserted in this paraphrase of Genesis. This text in Deuteronomy involves the portions of the land that will not be given to the Israelites when the enter Canaan. Interestingly, in this portion of Deuteronomy it states, "Not a man among these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I

have sworn to give to their fathers…" Instead the inheritance of the land is given to Israel through Caleb and Joshua, which is, in a sense, a rewriting of Numbers 14:26-30. It seems that contextually, the loss of the inheritance of the land by a previous generation of Israelites, fit well with Abraham's lack of one—a concept heard elsewhere in the New Testament.

The next two verses, 6 & 7, account for Genesis 15:13 and 14 with a subtle allusion to Exodus. Stephen's paraphrase of Gen 15 includes a minor addition, "they will come out and serve me." The addition appears to be related to Exodus 10:3. Both these passages account for the only two occasions in the Hebrew bible where the verb ענה, "to humiliate or be afflicted," appears in collocation with the verb עבד, "to work" or "to worship." The conflation of the two passages seems to be based on the occurrence of this unique language.

Moving from Abraham into Joseph, Stephen refers to "the twelve patriarchs" (τοὺς δώδεκα πατριάρχας). While it remains to be determined when this terminology develops, one thing is clear: this is *not* language utilized for Jacob's sons in the Hebrew Bible.[viii] Furthermore, neither the Hebrew *avot* nor Greek *pateras* are associated with Jacob's son. In fact, the earliest witness we have of this title is in the *Test of Benjamin* 12:4 and 4Macc 16:25 (though without *dwdeka*). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to here along with the so-called "other patriarchs." This indicates that Stephen's speech and the *Testament of Benjamin* are the earliest extant witnesses to referring to Jacob sons as the "twelve patriarchs."

Further into the speech, verse 10, Joseph is described as being given "favor and wisdom" in the sight of Pharaoh. No such description of Joseph, however, is found in

literature prior to the Second Temple Period. *Jubilees*' rewriting of the Joseph narrative preserves a similar statement, "And the Lord gave Joseph favor and mercy in the eyes of Pharaoh," with one major difference; 'mercy' in *Jubilees* is replaced with 'wisdom' in Acts. Interestingly, 'wisdom' is never associated with Joseph in the Hebrew Bible. On of our earliest witnesses to this phenomenon is in 4QAramLevi[a]. Stone and Greenfield reconstructed a portion of this document, based on a Genizah manuscript, to read, "[my brother Joseph who had studied reading and the teach]ing of wisdom for honor and for majesty…".[ix] Joseph's wisdom is probably related to his ability to interpret dreams, especially when we consider what is said of Daniel, the other well-known interpreter of dreams in the Hebrew bible, "God gave them [Daniel and his friends] knowledge and intelligence in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel understood every vision and dream." Another reason that seemed to associate Joseph with "wisdom" was his refusal to succumb to Potipher's wife's advances. 4 Macc reads, "This, certainly, is why we praise the virtuous Joseph, because by his Reason, with a mental effort, he checked the carnal impulse, For he, a young man at the age when physical desire is strong, by his Reason quenched the impulse of his passions. And Reason is proved to subdue the impulse not only of sexual desire, but of all sorts of covetings… (2:2-4)." Both traditions regarding Joseph's "wisdom" and "reason" are preserved in the pseudepigraphic work *Joseph and Aseneth*, "Joseph is a man that worships God: *he* is discriminating, and a virgin (as you are to-day), and a man of great wisdom and knowledge, and the spirit of God is upon him, and the grace of the Lord *is* with him. (4:9)"[x] Undoubtedly, referring to Stephen as "wise" is an interpretive development that arises in the Second Temple Period.

Regarding the burial of Joseph, in verse 16, Acts seems to conflate two different traditions. Stephen's speech reads, "they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem." The Hebrew bible, in contrast, states that Abraham bought a burial site, the cave of Machpelah, from Ephron the Hittite. While Genesis reports that Joseph bought a different plot of land from the sons of Hamor in Shechem (Josh 24:32). Marshall has already provided a lengthy survey of the manner in which scholars have attempted to address the confusion, or conflation, of traditions[xi] but some additional matters need to be considered. In the Second Temple period, there is a contemporary tradition that Joseph was buried with his ancestors in Hebron, where the double cave of Machpelah lies. The *Testament of Joseph* reads, "And when the children of Israel went out of Egypt, they took with them the bones of Joseph, and *they buried him in Hebron with his fathers*, and the years of his life were one hundred and ten years" (20:6). Josephus remains silent regarding the place of Joseph's burial, except to say that his body was taken to the land of Canaan (*Ant* 1:299). The assumption, of course, was that Joseph would be gathered to his family. Furthermore, when Jacob first purchases the field at Shechem there is no indication that it was intended to be a burial site; Jacob purchases the site and establishes an altar on it. It is not until the book of Joshua that we read, "Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons" (24:32). The one matter that should really concern us with this text, is the addition of Abraham, which simply indicates the concern to bury Joseph among his forefathers, which seems to be the reason

Joseph is said to be buried in Hebron in the *Testament* which bares his name. We should also note that the two places in Genesis that mention the buying of field are the purchases in Hebron by Abraham and in Shechem by Jacob. The melding of two things, viz., Joseph being buried with his forefathers and the unique occurrence of purchasing a field in Genesis, makes sense of this apparent conflation.

The retelling of Moses' story in the speech provides us, in this brief survey, with three interpretive traditions. 1) Moses is said to be educated in "all the wisdom of the Egyptians" in verse 22. Yet, no such information is provided for us in the Hebrew Bible. Josephus, however, tells us that Moses was "educated with great care" (*Ant* 2:236) by Thermuthis, Pharaoh's daughter. So great was his education that the Israelites gained hope, and Egyptians grew concerned (v. 237). Kugel notes Philo's statement, "Arithmetic, geometry, the lore of meter, rhythm, and harmony, and the whole subject of music…were imparted to him by learned Egyptians."[xii] 2) Moses is said to be "mighty in words and deeds" in the same verse. Perhaps, Josephus once again clarifies where this tradition develops,

> Now when the multitude had heard God himself giving those precepts which Moses had discoursed of, they rejoiced at what was said…Accordingly he appointed such laws, and afterwards informed them in what manner they should act in all cases.

In other words, Moses is described as having explicated the words of God as spoken from Mount Sinai, and the manner in which the Israelites should act. Thus, it would make more sense to translate the adjective δυνατός used here in Acts as 'capable' rather than 'mighty,' reordering the understanding of the text that Moses was 'capable' in words, i.e.

the explication of the Law, and deeds, i.e. the way those laws should be live out. 3) Moses is said to be forty in verse 22 when he decided to visit the Israelites. In Rabbinic literature, Moses' life is split into three forty-year cycles. As *Genesis Rabbah* reads, "Moses spends forty years in Pharaoh's palace, forty years in Midian, and served Israel forty years."[xiii] The reference of Moses' first forty years in *Genesis Rabbah* agrees here with Stephen's speech, as well as the next two references made vv. 30 and 36.

Yet another tradition attested to in Stephen's speech is the participation of angels in the giving of the Law. In two verses 38, and 53, angels are accredited as having an integral role in the giving of the Law. In Exodus there is no indication that angelic figures take part in the Sinai experience. After the Babylonian exile, angels begin to play a more integral role in Judaism and one of those roles, as noted by Hindy Najman, are their presence at Sinai. As we read in *Jubilees*:

> 27 And He said to the angel of the presence: Write for Moses from the beginning of creation till My sanctuary has been built among them for all eternity. 28 And the Lord will appear to the eyes of all, and all shall know that I am the God of Israel and the Father of all the children of Jacob, and King on Mount Zion for all eternity. And Zion and Jerusalem shall be holy.' 29 And the angel of the presence who went before the camp of Israel took the tablets… (Jub 1:27-29)

Elsewhere in the New Testament, specifically the book of Galatians (3:29-20) and Hebrews (2:2-3), we read of angelic figures being an integral part of the giving of the law, which is clearly a Second Temple development.

The following portions of Stephen's speech, which concern this survey, verses 41-51, contain a sophisticated exegetical complex of prophetic passages aimed at the

corruption of the Temple, its leadership, and the danger facing the Temple's destruction. The first prophetic passage quoted in the speech is Amos 5:25-26. The sectarian community at Qumran utilized this passage to address the corruption of the people as well as its leadership in Jerusalem. The speech continues that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made of hands" (v. 48), which shares similar language to the accusation leveled against Jesus in the gospel of Mark, "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" Flusser has noted that the Markan passage resembles the *Temple Scroll*[xiv] and its vision of a future sanctuary, "I shall sanctify My [te]mple with My glory, for I will cause My glory to dwell upon it until the Day of Creation, when I Myself will create My temple" (11QT 29:9-10). Stephen's speech seems to touch on this same concept, viz., that the Temple has been corrupted and is in need to being purified and rebuilt by God. The inclusion of Isaiah 66:1 in vv 49-50 of the speech seems exegetically appropriate, specifically in the juxtaposition between what God has created and the connotation that humanity is unable to build a sufficient Temple. Furthermore, lying behind this interpretive block are linguistic indicators alluding to Ezekiel 44 and Jeremiah 7. Verses 25-26 of Jer 7, "Yet they did not obey or incline their **ear**, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil **heart**, and went backward and not forward. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their **ear**, but **stiffened their neck**; **they did more evil than their fathers**" is similar to Stephen's "You men who are **stiff-necked** and uncircumcised in **heart and ears**…**you are doing just as your fathers did**." Moreover, the language "uncircumcised in heart" is not terminology frequently utilized in Scripture but appears in Ezekiel 44, regarding those who have defiled the Temple, and also the sons of Zadok,

who stayed faithful to God when Israel went astray. The sectarians utilize this passage to justify their own separation from Jerusalem and the Temple's corruption, since the "sons of Zadok," which some in the Qumran congregation believed themselves to be, remained faithful when the rest went astray. The Jeremiah 7 text is of special interest, as verse 11 of this chapter, appears in the gospel accounts of the Cleansing of the Temple. Scholars have already noted that Jesus' message is directed not at the Temple but at the Temple authorities. The same can be said here of the speech's exegesis in that the passages alluded to seem to be directed at the priests and not the Temple itself. The criticism of the Temple is due to a corrupt priesthood, and not the result of anything inherently wrong with the Temple system. This motif criticizing the priests, as well as the prophecies regarding its destruction are prevalent in this period.

Generally speaking, the entirety of Stephen's speech is a prime example of Jewish exegesis. Few, however, have regarded the actual composition of the speech as exegetical. Yet, the its composition, that is, quotations of scripture, at times fused together as result of similar language or content, interspersed with seemingly minor details and narrative-commentary is attested to in other Second Temple literature. In fact, this method is not unlike the exegesis attested to in some of the non-sectarian documents at Qumran. The so-called Reworked Pentateuch, specifically 4Q158,[xv] which rewrites the Torah quoting from sections of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, while adding minor additions *is* exegetical work. Segal has most recently noted the types of exegesis present in 4Q158.[xvi] The same can be said of other documents that are part of the Reworked Pentateuch 4Q364-367, in that the move from text to interpretation is sometimes slight. Sidnie White Crawford in her *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* comments on

the Reworked Pentateuch, "these texts are the product of scribal interpretation…but with one important addition: the insertion of outside material into the text, material not found in other parts of what we now recognize as the Pentateuch".[xvii] Apart from being related to the Reworked Pentateuch, Stephen's speech also finds parallels, in style, amidst the genre known as "Rewritten Bible," a term coined by Geza Vermes over forty years ago.[xviii] Biblical text interweaved with commentary into a seamless narrative, like the speech, shares parallels not only with texts from Qumran, like 4QCommentary on Genesis (4Q252),[xix] but also *Jubilees*, as well as the later *aggadic midrashim*. The difficulty in defining Stephen's speech is that it seems to employ several layers of interpretation, which vacillate between textual quotations fused with other texts and minor translative additions, as seen in the Reworked Pentateuch, to more explanatory material, as seen in the "Rewritten Bible" and later *midrashim*.

In conclusion, it must be stated that this brief survey does not do justice to the wealth of material preserved in Stephen's speech. What this overview has hopefully shown is the necessity, in particular, to view the speech through the lens of early Jewish biblical interpretation and, in general, the manner in which these methods of interpretation and consequent traditions influence and are attested to in the New Testament. Regarding the issue of scripture in late antiquity, Stephen, or the author of the speech, whether it is Luke or his source, does not appear to be the primary exegete of this material, but simply a witness. The speech, functioning, in some regards, as a collection of both texts from the Hebrew bible and interpretive traditions, without distinguishing between the two, seems to indicate that both are authoritative, that is to say, that it was natural to put an authoritative text and interpretive tradition or expansion

on equal footing.

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[i] See especially M. Bernstein, "The Contribution of the Qumran Discoveries to the History of Early Biblical Interpretation" in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation*

[ii] See S. Notley's "Jesus' Hermeneutical Method in the Synagogue of Capernaum"; L.H.Schiffman, "Biblical Exegesis in the Passion Narratives and in the Dead Sea Scrolls" in *Biblical Interpretation in Judaism and Early Christianity*. Surge Ruzer, *Mapping the New Testament*, Leiden, Brill 2007 and portions of I. Howard Marshall, "Luke," in *A Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* eds. Carson and Beale. Unfortunately, Marshall either does not comment or notice the exegetical methodology occurring in the text.

[iii] Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 264-265.

[iv] Ibid

[v] Ibid

[vi] See I.H. Marshall, "Acts," *The New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2007)

[vii] *Midrash Rabbah*, tr. Dr. I Epstein, Socino Press, volume 1.

[viii] "Acts" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*l, eds Beale and Carson.

[ix] *DJD XXII*, fragment 11, ln. 12-13.

[x] H.F.D. Sparks, *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 1984.

[xi] Marshall, 559-561.

[xii] Kugel, *Traditions*, 509.

[xiii] Epstein, *Genesis Rabbah*, 1001.

[xiv] *The Sage from Galilee,* 132.

[xv] See G.J. Brooke, "4Q158: Reworked Pentateuch[a] or Reworked Pentateuch A?" in *DSD* 8/3 (2001)

[xvi] M. Segal, "Biblical Exegesis in 4Q158: Techniques and Genre" *Textus* 19 (1998)

[xvii] *RSSTT*, 40.

[xviii] *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies (Post Biblical Studia)* (Leiden: Brill, 1961)

[xix] See M.J. Bernstein and George Brooke's discussion on 4Q252 in *Jewish Quarterly Review*.