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Israel and the Nations

We think of the Bible as a book. It begins at the beginning, with Genesis, and it proceeds to its closing—2 Chronicles for Jews, Revelation for Christians—tucked neatly between two covers. But the Greek term that stands behind the modern English equivalent—*ta biblia*, "the books"—conveys more accurately the manifold nature of these ancient texts. This collection comprises a multitude of individual writings, whose period of composition stretches for well over a millennium. And its discrete writings are themselves composite documents, containing within their seeming unity a diachronic multitude of voices, literary genres, religious and political visions, local oral traditions—the work of countless now-lost authors, editors, and scribes. The Bible is not a book: it is a library.

No one in Paul's period would ever have seen a "Bible." Individual texts or discrete collections (such as Psalms, or Proverbs, or various prophets) were bound together as separate scrolls. The scriptural texts in themselves, further, were unstable: Qumran's library of twenty-one Isaiah manuscripts, for example, preserves over 1,000 individual textual variants. Other books, noncanonical now but authoritative for different Jewish communities then, recast, updated, or expanded the earlier biblical stories. (Jubilees, an extremely important apocryphon from the second century B.C.E., retells in accents peculiar to itself the older stories from Genesis and Exodus; other important traditions, associated with the

figure of Enoch, retail visions of fallen angels, of an apocalyptic Jerusalem, and of the coming judgment of a heavenly "Son of Man."[1]) Finally, significant differences and textual variations measure the distance between Hebrew texts and Hellenistic-period Greek versions. Our modern ideas of "book" or of "canon" or of "*the* Bible" simply do not capture this fluid aspect of ancient textuality.[2]

In the crucible of apocalyptic hope, in the course of the late Second Temple period to the high Roman Empire (roughly 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.), the documentary montage preserved in these scriptures achieved, for some Jews, a new kind of notional unity. Their many different elements, themes, and traditions coalesced to support various master narratives of Israel's impending redemption. This genre of master narrative—"apocalyptic eschatology," in academic parlance[3]—filled a gap perceived between lived experience and the promises, covenants, and hopes that shaped Jewish scriptures.[4] Apocalyptic eschatology corrects history. It promises a speedy resolution of history's moral dissonances: good triumphs over evil, peace over war, life over death.

Apocalyptic hope, the vibrant matrix of Jesus's mission to Israel, is also the interpretive context for understanding the gentile mission of Paul. Tracing its development—and Paul's understanding of his own role in realizing its promises—means tracing as well the dynamic interactions between Jewish scriptures and Jewish history that would have shaped both these biblical traditions and the sensibilities of their first-century readers and hearers. In the chapter that follows, I will comment from time to time on issues of redaction (that is, how a given segment of scripture might have been edited into the story as it now stands) and of historical provenance (when such a piece of tradition, generated by what historical context, might have entered into the biblical text). But I am not interested in biblical criticism as such. Rather, I want to survey the stories in the Jewish Bible, attending to both its Hebrew and its Greek voices, in order to trace the themes shaping Roman-period hopes for the coming of God's Kingdom. Understanding that story of redemption requires having a grasp of the characters of its three chief dramatis personae: God, the nations, and Israel.

BEGINNINGS

God and Cosmos

Without explanation, without introduction, evidently unaccompanied, the god of Genesis simply appears "in the beginning." He commands light and darkness, shapes order out of chaos, and in six days makes the heavens, the earth, and everything in them, including, finally, humanity "both male and female" (Gen 1.1–30). A special intimacy connects this god with his human creatures: them he makes after his own "image and likeness," and he grants them dominion over the earth (1.28–30). Finishing his work, God himself then rests on the seventh day, the Sabbath, and blesses it (2.1–4).

This god is a solitary and universal deity, these elegant verses imply. Yet Creation conceals complications: who are the others whom God addresses once he proposes to create humanity (Gen 1.26)? The text does not say.[5] Another complication of this god's unique and universal status is his resting on the seventh day (2.2–3): by writing the Sabbath and the divine observance of it into the very structure of the universe, these same verses render this god "Jewish": keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week will eventually unite this god with his people Israel (Exod 31.13–17).[6] How Jewish, then, is God? Different ancient authors, commenting on these verses, answered this question differently. But as we will see, Paul himself affirms this ethnic identification. His god is the universal deity, superior to all other divine personalities; the god of all humanity, "the god of the nations also" (Rom 3.29). Yet at the same time and in particular ways he is also the god specifically of Israel, the god of "the forefathers" (that is, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Rom 15.8), the god of Jewish history, the "father" both of Israel and of its messiah (Rom 9.4–5 and passim). The universal high god's "Jewishness," and his fidelity to those promises that he makes (later on in the book of Genesis) to the patriarchs of Israel, is the pivot upon which Paul's vision of universal redemption will turn.

(Divine ethnicity may seem a strange idea; but gods in antiquity tended to share in the ethnicity of the peoples who worshiped them. The Jewish god was no exception: Roman gods were particularly invested in

the future and the well-being of Rome: Athena in Athens, Aphrodite in Aphrodisias, and so on. And ancient gods and humans—we will see how in the next chapter—tended to cluster in family groups. In this regard, then, the biblical god's "Jewishness" simply marks him as an ancient deity. What *was* odd, in the perspective of their non-Jewish contemporaries, was the Jews' insistence that their particular god was *also* the universal, highest god—a claim that Paul himself affirms, but a claim that later gentile interpreters of Paul, as we shall see, will deny.)

The god of the Bible does not long remain in the magnificent isolation of this creational week. Jewish scriptures teem with other supernatural personalities. The "sons of God" who mate with human women seem to have some sort of superhuman status (Gen 6.1–4; cf. Job 1.6): according to Enoch, they were fallen angels, their progeny evil spirits.[7] God avails himself of divine intermediaries (Exod 3.2, 14.19); he converses with Satan (Zech 3.1–2; Job); he is attended by cherubim (Ps 80.1; Ezek 10.20) and seraphim (Isa 6.2–6); he presides over a heavenly angelic court (1 Kgs 22.19; Job 1.6). According to Jubilees, the two highest orders of angels in God's presence were circumcised (15.27), and they keep the Sabbath with him (2.17–20). All of these divine entities are elevated, superhuman powers. In the biblical narratives, however, they are also clearly God's subordinates.

But another category of supernatural beings, more independent than subordinate, also populates ancient Israelite scriptures: other *elohim*, "gods." Sometimes Israel's god battles (and bests) these forces, or he "executes judgment" on them (Exod 12.12); at other points he takes these gods captive (Jer 43.12), or punishes them (46.25), or sends them into exile (49.3). Sometimes these gods are mentioned as matter-of-fact: "All the peoples walk, each in the name of its god," observes the prophet Micah, "but we will walk in the name of the Lord *our* god forever and ever" (Mic 4.5). "God stands in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he gives judgment" (Ps 82.1). At other times, these gods are overpowered by Israel's god (as Ps 82.6–8, asserting God's "international" or transethnic power and authority), or they are scorned because of the worship that foreign peoples tender to their images (Ps 95.5, 97.7; Isa 44.6–20). Often, they serve as the inferior contrast to Israel's god. ("Who is like you, O Lord,

among the gods?" sings Moses, Exod 15.11; "All gods bow down before him," Ps 97.7.) The point to note for now, however, is that some passages of scripture speak simply of these other gods: they *are*.[8]

Scriptures' acknowledgment of other gods can come as a surprise to modern readers. Were ancient Jews not "monotheists"? Yes and no. Earlier scholarship came up with the term "henotheism" as a way to accommodate the Bible's other divinities. "Henotheism" means the worship of only one god, without denying the existence of other gods; "monotheism" indicates the conviction that only one god exists. Henotheism was supposedly a prior developmental stage along the evolutionary road to monotheism: eventually, monotheism triumphs. The Bible, according to this way of thinking, preserves traces of the "more primitive" phase (multiple gods, with one god supreme) within an essentially monotheistic (one god only) text.[9]

The problem with all of this terminological finesse is the way that it obscures a simple historical observation: in antiquity, "monotheists" were polytheists. That is to say, no matter how fiercely loyal to their own chief deity ancient Jews and, eventually, Christians might have been, their world view still left scope for many other gods. As we will see, Paul himself speaks of these gods, complains about their activities, bemoans their effects, and predicts their coming destruction or defeat or submission to the returning, triumphant Christ; but their existence is a given. Well into the fifth century C.E., in *City of God*, Augustine will sound much the same way. The difference between pagans and Christians, he notes there, is not their respective beliefs in the existence or in the powers of these other divine entities, but what they *name* them. Christians call these gods "demons"; pagans call these demons "gods" (*City of God* 9.23). This distinction between "gods" and "demons" will be introduced, as we will see, once Hebrew scripture transitions to Greek; but it is not a distinction native to these ancient Hebrew writings themselves. In antiquity, "monotheism" is a species of polytheism.[10]

Eventually, what are now extrabiblical traditions will fill in perceived gaps in the biblical narrative, explaining how these other gods—errant angels? heavenly rebels?—came to be. But before we can further frame this issue of other gods, we need to consider the humans who honored

them. Where did the nations who honored these other gods come from, and what is their relation to Israel, and to Israel's god?

God and Humanity

The stately creational days of Genesis 1 yield abruptly to a different (and probably older) story of beginnings in Genesis 2. Here, human history unwinds as a tale of disobedience and punishment, striving and failure. The first couple defies the divine command, bringing pain, hard labor, and death into the world (Gen 2–3). Cain kills his younger brother Abel in humanity's second generation (4.1–13). Within ten generations, human wickedness is so great, corruption and violence so rampant, that the Lord regrets having created them at all ("And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind upon the earth, and it grieved him to his heart," 6.6). Unleashing the waters of chaos that he had pent up on Creation's second day (1.6–8), God obliterates life from the earth, saving only one family, that of Noah, "a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (6.9). "I am going . . . to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which there is the breath of life," God tells Noah, "but I will establish my covenant [*brit*] with you" (6.17–18; cf. 8.21–9.17, for its terms). The waters come and consume all life. "Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark" (7.23).

Once the waters recede, God has an insight about the creature that he made in his own image (an idea recalled in Gen 9.6): "the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (8.21). Vowing never again to annihilate all life because of humanity's moral failures, God sets a rainbow in the sky to remind both him and them of their covenant (9.15). Humanity now begins again with the families of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet, and the children and grandchildren born to them after the flood: in Jewish tradition, some seventy different "nations" (Hebrew *goyim*, Greek *ethnē*; 10.1–32). All humanity descends from Adam and Eve; but more precisely, all humanity—seventy nations by this count—descend from Noah.[11]

The "Table of Nations" in Genesis 10, and the primacy of Noah, express a foundational biblical concept, the idea of the totality of the

family of man. The word *goyim*, "nations," occurs for the first time in the Hebrew Bible here. The three founding kinship units—those of Shem, Ham, and Japhet—are listed according to "their genealogies, their languages, their lands, and their nations" (on Shem, 10.31; cf. 10.5 on Japhet and 10.20 on Ham). These ethnic identifiers—kinship group (shared "blood"), language, and locality ("land")—quite commonly cluster in ancient writings. The Greek historian Herodotus, famously, will define "Greekness" (*to hellēnikon*) in much the same terms (see below, p. 35). Conspicuous by its absence in the Table of Nations, however, is one of the most important and basic of ancient ethnic identifiers: Genesis does *not* say, "according to their gods" (though cf. Deut 32.8). The gods of the nations are not listed with this first tabulation. Other gods *qua* narrative characters have yet to appear in the story.[12]

For now, it is enough to note that this way of saying "all humanity," referring to the plenum of nations descended from Noah, will reverberate throughout scripture, echoing in the prophets, especially Isaiah; in later Second Temple writings (Jubilees, Qumran texts, the Sibylline Oracles); continuing on in Josephus, the rabbis, and the later Aramaic Targumim.[13] Paul too will think with this idea, alluding to the Table of Nations at the crescendo of his argument in Romans 11:25–26. All human families look back to Noah, in this tradition; thus all human families, later Jewish traditions will say, likewise look back to Noah's covenant with God.[14]

God and Israel

The god of the Bible makes the universe by divine fiat. He preserves Noah because of Noah's righteousness (Gen 6.9), giving humanity its second chance to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (9.1). But God creates Israel by an unexplained choice,[15] over time, through a promise:

> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go out from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the Land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation [*goy gadol*], and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. (Gen 12.1–3)

The promise of coming into the land—*the* Land, in biblical narrative; the Land of Israel—combined with the promise of progeny/"nationhood" and of universal blessing for all the earth's families, exerts a gravitational pull over the rest of Abram/Abraham's story and, indeed, over the rest of the book of Genesis. God subsequently makes a covenant with Abraham, again pledging the Land (15.12–21) and foretelling Abraham and Sarah's status as progenitors of "many nations" (17.5–6, 15–16). More signally, Abraham and Sarah will produce Isaac, whose children will inherit the Land "for a perpetual holding; and I will be their god" (17.8). Abraham for his part must "walk before [God] and be blameless" (17.1; cf. 18.19), circumcising all the males of his house as "a sign of the covenant between me and you throughout your generations . . . an everlasting covenant" (17.10–14, esp. 17.12, which specifies circumcision "on the eighth day"). From Abraham through Isaac to Jacob (named "Israel," 32.28) and thence to Jacob's sons and grandsons, the eponymous fathers of Israel's twelve tribes, this covenant is affirmed and repeated. Joseph, dying in Egypt, surrounded by his brothers, closes the book of Genesis by recalling God's promise: "God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the Land that he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (50.24). When Paul speaks in Romans of "the promises given to the fathers" (Rom 15.8), it is passages like these that he has in mind.

The next four books of the Torah, from Exodus through Deuteronomy, narrate the stages through which God shapes the children of Israel into the foretold *goy gadol*, a great nation. Liberating them from Pharaoh with great signs and wonders, contesting against the gods of Egypt, leading the people out into the wilderness of Sinai, God reveals his plan to Moses:

> Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell to the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exod 19.4–6)

Thereafter, an enormous body of legislation fills the rest of these "five books of Moses." Cultic and ethical instruction; agricultural regulations and statutes protecting the poor; sacrificial protocols and rules for animal

husbandry; food ways, sexual codes, criminal and property law and torts; rules for distinguishing between pure and impure; the establishment of community holy days and especially rules for observing the Sabbath; measurements for the sanctuary and specifications for everything from priestly garments to curtain rings: God's commandments comprise the content of his *torah*, his "instruction" or "teaching" to Israel, setting the terms of their covenant.[16] Part of the reason for God's mandating these practices is specifically to set Israel apart from other peoples ("You shall faithfully observe all my laws and all my regulations. . . . I, the Lord, am your god, who has set you apart from other peoples," Lev 20.22, 24). And included in this revelation are prescriptions for repairing the relationship between God and the individual Israelite when, whether deliberately or inadvertently, the human partner to the covenant erred (e.g., Lev 26.41–42). To the whole nation, further, God gives a "fast of atonement," Yom Kippur (16.1–34), "an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the people of Israel once a year for all their sins." God builds a relationship meant to last.

Fundamental to this god's covenant, emphasized repeatedly, are his twin demands for exclusive and aniconic worship. No other gods, and no images. (These are the first two of the Ten Commandments, Exod 20.3–5; Deut 5.7–8.) Accustomed as we are to these two provisos, we can easily fail to see how odd they were in their historical context. In cultures where all gods exist—a social reality that Israel's god does not deny—worshiping only one god to the *exclusion* of others can seem at least incautious, if not downright impious. By definition, any god is more powerful than any human; and gods as a group tended to be sensitive to human slights, and quick to let their displeasure be known. (The humans who worshiped them were no less sensitive. Later Greek and Latin ethnographers, as we shall see, will complain about Jewish "atheism," that is, the Jews' refusal to honor the gods of the majority.) But Israel's god was particularly adamant on these two points: his people may not worship him by making an image (e.g., Deut 4.15–16), nor may they make and bow down to an image of any humans, birds, or animals (4.16–18; the story of the Golden Calf, Exod 32, provided a standing cautionary tale). What about worshiping objects not made by human hands, such as natural phenomena? Other

nations worship stars and planets; Israel may not (Deut 4.19). More: when they come into the Land, Israel must eradicate the peoples who dwell there, because they have practiced linked abominations: idol-worship and infanticide.

> When the Lord *your* god has cut off before you the nations whom you are about to enter to dispossess them, when you have dispossessed them and live in their land, take care that you are not snared into imitating them, after they have been destroyed before you. Do not inquire concerning *their* gods, saying, "How did these nations worship their gods? I also want to do the same." You must not do the same for the Lord your god, because every abhorrent thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods. They would even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. (Deut 12.29–31)

Closing with blessings and with curses—blessings if Israel keeps the covenant, curses if they do not; punishment promised for waywardness, compassion and forgiveness for rededication—Deuteronomy brings the five books of the Law to its close (Deut 30–33). Moses dies. The twelve tribes stand on the east bank of the Jordan River, poised to come into the Land; ready, finally, to realize God's ancient promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

KINGDOM AND EXILE

David's House, and God's

Once settled in the land of Canaan, the different tribes worshiped at various altars scattered throughout the countryside. Priests and judges regulated cultic and social life. Persisting in this way for several centuries, this loose confederacy of tribes and clans eventually reorganized under a monarch, first Saul (c. 1020–1000 B.C.E.), and after him, David (c. 1000–961) and then David's son, Solomon (c. 961–922).

Both in his own lifetime and later, in the perspective of biblical tradition, David was the key figure. He united the tribes and defeated local enemies (such as the Philistines). He shut down regional sanctuaries. And he consolidated both political and military power and traditional cult in his capital city, Jerusalem. Biblical tradition voiced ambivalence about

these arrangements, (retrospectively) warning the tribes in the wilderness about some of the questionable consequences of kingship (Deut 17.14–19; cf. 1 Sam 8.10–18). But these same scriptures also embraced and endorsed David and his dynasty, asserting that God himself had loved the king and promised eternal dominion to the sons of his line:

> The Lord declares to you [David] that the Lord *will make you a house.* When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you . . . and I will establish his kingdom. *He shall build a house for my name,* and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. *I will be a father to him, and he will be my son.* When he commits iniquity, I will punish him . . . but I will not take my steadfast love away from him. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. *Your throne will be established forever.* (2 Sam 7.11–17)

In the ancient world, divinity localized in two prime ways: it attached to places (sacred groves, mountains, altars, temples) and it attached to peoples (hence the idea of gods' ethnicities, mentioned above). The dynamics of the story that stretches from Genesis through Deuteronomy articulate the Jewish refractions of this idea in continually asserting the binding relationship between Israel's god, his people, and the Land. And the people's relationship with God is frequently expressed in the language of family descent: "Israel is my first-born son," God declares in Exodus 4.22, and this image of Israel's sonship, thus of God's "paternity," recurs throughout Jewish scriptures (e.g., Jer 31.9, 20; Paul repeats this idea of Israel's sonship in Rom 9.4). God, further, dwells *with* his people (as do other gods with theirs), and God's proximity is one of the reasons for and requirements of Israel's dedication to "holiness," that is, separateness. (When Paul calls his gentiles away from their gods to his own, he too will insist on their "separation" or "sanctity," *hagiasmos.*)

The messianic-Davidic traditions about these two houses, however—the genealogical-biological house (David's) and the sanctified house of the temple (God's)—intensified for Israel these two ways of expressing divinity's locality, in people and in places. God remains Israel's "father"; but in a special way he is father to the kings of David's line. "You are my

son; today I have begotten you," God says on the coronation day of an Israelite king (Ps 2.7). "I have found David, my servant," sings the Psalmist; "With my holy oil I have anointed him; . . . He shall cry to me, 'You are my father'" (Ps 89.20, 26). "I will be a father to him," God through the prophet Samuel tells David about David's son (2 Sam 7.14, cited above). And since kings are "crowned" in Israelite tradition by being anointed with oil, this means that the "anointed one" (Hebrew *mashiach*, Greek *christos*), David's heir, is in this special way God's "son" (cf. Rom 1.3). This idea would have a long future in later Christianity.

The divine aspect of Davidic royalty, unlike Egyptian or Greek or Roman expressions of this idea, did not imply literal divine descent. David's offspring are normally human. Individual kings are mortal; it is their *succession* that is immortal. The messiah's divine sonship in these Hebrew texts articulated a special relationship with God; it did not mean that the messiah himself (unlike Pharaoh, or Alexander the Great, or the emperors of Rome) was a god in his own right. The message that formed around the memory and mission of Jesus of Nazareth will draw on all of these themes while enlarging them; eventually, Jesus's messianic "sonship" will indeed imply a divine status, one that Paul himself will affirm and articulate. Those developments lie off in the late Second Temple period, however; the ancient scriptural texts seem to distinguish between Davidic descent and actual divinity.

What about that other aspect of ancient, localized divinity, the sanctity of God's "house"—that is, of the temple in Jerusalem—that David's son would build? Israel's god, Jews insisted, was the lord of the whole universe, the god of all other gods, the "god of the nations also" (Paul again, Rom 3.29). "The heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to the Lord your god," God tells Israel in the wilderness, "the earth and all that is on it" (Deut 10.14). God had framed everywhere and everything, and no place was far from him. But because of David's consolidation of the cult in Jerusalem, and especially because of Solomon's construction of a temple and an altar on *har bayit-Adonai*, "the mountain of the Lord's House" (Isa 2.2), God was thought to "live" particularly in Jerusalem, within his *mishkan*, his "dwelling place." (Paul repeats this idea too, Romans 9.4; so too Jesus in the gospel of Matthew 23.31.)

Jerusalem thus became the pilgrimage center for the three annual holidays that had been introduced as part of the covenant during Israel's period of wandering in the desert: Sukkot (in the fall, eventually commemorating the desert wandering), Passover/Unleavened Bread (in early spring, commemorating the redemption from Egypt), and Shavuot (in late spring/early summer, eventually associated with the Sinai revelation). The laws pertaining to sacrifices, framed in biblical narrative as relating to the mobile tabernacle, were "transposed" to this regal new setting. The temple and Jerusalem, God's presence therein, the eternal dominion of David's line: these aspects of David's consolidation of authority and of military and political power entered into Israel's construction of covenant. The city and the temple, too, pronounced prophets and psalms, would abide forever.

But David's throne and God's temple in fact did not abide. History battered Israelite prophecy. After Solomon's death (c. 922 B.C.E.?), the kingdom split in two, ten tribes living in the northern region ("Israel") and two tribes in the south ("Judah"). Regional cultic sites again sprang up, while the old indigenous deities once again made their presence felt. Within two centuries, the north capitulated to Assyrian expansion (c. 722 B.C.E.). Some of its people were deported, scattered, and resettled within the Assyrian empire: these ten "lost" tribes would forever after haunt Jewish memory.[17] Once Assyria fell to Babylon, the newer imperial power consolidated its control over the southern kingdom of Judah. But in 586 B.C.E., following an ill-advised rebellion, Judah too fell. The temple was destroyed, the city laid waste; and the king Zedekiah, blinded and battered, was taken into exile in Babylon with many of his people (2 Kgs 25.1–12).

Only after Babylon fell in its turn to the growing power of Persia were the Judean exiles allowed to go home (c. 538 B.C.E.; 2 Chr 36.22–23). Those who returned rebuilt the temple, but it was a small and humble affair compared to the remembered grandeur of Solomon's. Governors and high priests who reported to Persia served in the stead of defunct Davidic kings. The trickle of returning Judeans nonetheless made a tremendous effort at reconsolidation. They were helped in this effort by a vital legacy: the traditions of their prophets.

Prophecy and Promise

Our English word *prophet* rests on the Greek *prophētēs*. A Greek *prophētēs* (*pro-*, for; *phanai*, to speak) was someone who spoke for a god, interpreting an oracle. Since the question taken to the god usually concerned the course of the future, a prophet functioned as the seer who foresaw and elusively described its course. The god would inspire the oracle, which the prophet would tender to the pilgrim questioner.[18]

For Hebrew, "prophet" translates both *ro'e* (seer) and *nav'i* (speaker). The Hebrew prophets were God's spokesmen. Growing up as an institution together with the monarchy, prophets not only foretold the future; they also commented tellingly on the present. In particular, they criticized Israel, both kings and commoners, for wandering from the covenant—worshiping images, paying cult to other gods, compromising the exclusive relationship between Israel and its god. Sometimes, the perceived breach might be what we would consider ethical, not cultic (such as defrauding the poor or not providing for the vulnerable, e.g., Isa 4.14–15, 10.1–2); but these two domains—distinct in our categories, not theirs—were both conditions of keeping the covenant.

Prophetic literature, no less than the other genres of literature encompassed within the vast collection that is the Hebrew Bible, presents to the modern scholarly view a stratigraphic record of traditions: writings about or attributed to these prophets actually span lifetimes of accumulated sayings, legends, warnings, curses, oracles, affirmations, consolations, visions and revisions, and experiences to either side of the events that they (whether notionally or actually) presage. Given the fluidity of oral tradition and of manuscript culture in antiquity, prophecies could be continuously sharpened, modified, or updated, the better to speak to current circumstances. And *the* circumstance, the event that more than any other left its mark on ancient Jewish prophecy and history, was the experience of the Exile under Nebuchadnezzar.

Many essential elements of biblical tradition, of course, substantially predate 586–538 B.C.E., the years of the Babylonian captivity. That particular experience was defining, however, because of its traumatic clarity.

Exile challenged Israelite identity in fundamental ways, undermining the constitutive ideas of covenant and promise, of peoplehood and Land; denying the clustered concepts of Jerusalem, temple, and messiah/Davidic dynast; calling into question the power, the loyalty, and the constancy of Israel's god. With the threat of the loss of the Northern Kingdom and, once that was realized, the threat to and loss of Judea in the south, the covenant could have seemed canceled, its agreements annulled.

Prophetic traditions urged otherwise. There was no question, they insisted, of Israel's god having been defeated by foreign gods; rather, Israel's god was using the nations for his own purposes, to discipline and to punish his own people. God's wrath was indeed dreadful, admonished the prophets; his patience with waywardness expired, his afflictions extreme. Speaking for God, the prophets heaped harrowing curses upon errant Israel: "I will dash [the residents of Jerusalem] one against the other, fathers and sons together, says the Lord. I will not pity or spare or have compassion. . . . I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled which shall burn forever" (Jer 13.14, 15.14). Enumerating the terrible sufferings that would devour Jerusalem, Ezekiel voiced the Lord's rage: "Because you . . . have not walked in my statutes or kept my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations round about you . . . I will do what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. Fathers shall eat their sons in the midst of you, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survives I will scatter to all the winds" (Ezek 5.7–10). And the experience of Exile cast a giant shadow "backward," into the period of Israel's foundational history, because of post-Exilic traditions redacted into the earlier text. Thus Moses himself "spoke" of the Exile: if the people are not true to the terms of the covenant, he warned, God would "take delight in bringing ruin upon you and in destroying you; and you shall be plucked off the Land" (Deut 28.63).

These dire admonitions (and retrospective descriptions) framed prophetic discourse. But they did not exhaust it. Against history's disconfirmations of the covenant, the prophets also juxtaposed incandescent affirmations of the eternity of God's bond with Israel, the constancy of his love, the surety of his promise.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your god.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her
That her time of service is ended, that her
iniquity is pardoned,
That she received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins. (Isa 40.1–2)

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob,
He who formed you, O Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters I will be with you,
And through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you;
When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
And the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your god,
The Holy One of Israel, your savior. . . .
Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east,
And from the west I will gather you.
I will say to the north, Give up,
And to the south, Do not withhold.
Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the end of the earth,
Every one who is called by my name,
Whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isa 43.1–7)

For this is like the days of Noah to me:
As I swore that the waters of Noah
Should no more go over the earth
So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you. . . .
For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed,
But my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
And my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
Says the Lord, who has compassion on you. (Isa 54.9–10)

Suffering was not rejection, insisted the prophets. Rather, it was punishment; and punishment was itself a token of election: "Only you [Israel] have I chosen from among all the nations," warned the prophet Amos, "and *therefore* I will punish you for your sins" (Amos 3.2). By configuring Israel's suffering as punishment, in other words, the prophets reaffirmed God's and Israel's ongoing relationship. Punishment was redemptive: it

had as its goal Israel's (re)turn to God. "You have rejected me," said Jeremiah, speaking for God to Jerusalem, "so I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you. . . . *If* you turn, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me" (Jer 15.6, 19).

In these ways, the historical experience of Exile and Return came in prophetic idiom to express as well a moral dialectic of sin/punishment and of repentance/forgiveness. Repentance/returning to God would lead to redemption/return to the Land. "When all these things come upon you," Moses again "prophesied" in Deuteronomy, ". . . and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your god has driven you, and you return to the Lord your god, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you this day . . . then the Lord your god will restore your fortunes, and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your god has scattered you . . . and will bring you into the Land which your fathers possessed, that you may possess it" (Deut 30.1–5).

As these traditions develop, the meanings of homecoming deepen. To this end, the same (post-Exilic) passage in Deuteronomy cited above also mobilizes the fundamental sign of the covenant between God and Abraham—that is, circumcision—to serve as a moral metaphor, the "circumcision of the heart": "And the Lord your god will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your god with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut 30.6). Jeremiah speaks of this deepening commitment as having God's *torah* written upon the heart. When God effects his covenant with Israel in this way, "I shall be their god, and they shall be my people . . . and I will remember their sins no more" (Jer 31.31–32). "Harken to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my *torah*," Isaiah calls out. "Fear not the reproach of men, be not dismayed by their revilings. . . . [M]y deliverance will be forever, and my salvation for all generations" (Isa 51.7–8).

Hopes for the restoration of David's house, as for God's house, likewise swell in these prophecies of consolation. "The days are surely coming," says the Lord through Jeremiah, when "I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute righteousness and

justice in the Land. . . . David will never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings and . . . to make sacrifices forever" (Jer 33.14–18; cf. 23.5). The covenants with David's house and with the temple and its priesthood are as steady and certain as are God's covenants with day and night, with heaven and earth—as sure, in other words, as God's bond with creation itself (Jer 33.19–26).

Isaiah thinks even bigger. "A shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse," David's father, he proclaims (Isa 11.10; cf. Rom 15.12). He will be a righteous king, slaying the wicked and judging justly. Even the animal kingdoms—wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion—will live in peace with one another (11.2–8). In those days, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (11.9). Scattered Israel—even those who in the distant past, in the days of Moses, stayed in Egypt; even those tribes lost centuries earlier, in Assyria—will reassemble. But even more is envisaged: the *goyim* too, the other nations, will also seek out this Davidic king (11.10–16; cf. 27.12–13, 2.2–4). "I am coming to gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory," Isaiah prophesies (66.18; "all nations and tongues" echoes the Table of Nations tradition in Gen 10). Assembling on "this mountain," the mountain of the Lord's house in Jerusalem, all of these peoples, both Israel and the nations, will feast together on a meal made by God himself (25.6). God will wipe away every tear (25.8). He will "swallow up death for ever" (25.7). He will raise the dead (26.19).

New themes thus begin to sound as prophecy develops. The idea of redemption itself enlarges, growing in dimension from a spatial or locative image to also a moral and an eschatological one: redemption from slavery (the Egyptian paradigm) or from Exile (the Babylonian paradigm); redemption from sin and/or from its effects (divine anger not least); redemption, finally, from want, from war, from death itself. And the scope of this redemption enlarges. What had begun as an affirmation within normal history of Israel's particular relationship with their god—the patriarchal promises, the Law and the covenants, the messiah/David's dynasty, the temple and its cult (unique privileges still praised by Paul centuries later, Rom 9.4–5)—now expands to assertions of absolute divine prerogative. Not only does the remnant of Israel return to the Land; so do

all twelve tribes, miraculously reassembled. Not only do all twelve tribes of Israel gather in Jerusalem; so too do all seventy nations. Not only do the living assemble, but also the dead who rise ("Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will open your graves, and I will raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the Land of Israel," Ezek 37.12). All humanity, both Israel and the nations, acknowledge Israel's god: "All flesh shall come to worship before me" (Isa 66.23).

In short, these later prophecies project Israel's experience under Babylon, the Exile and Return, onto the entire universe: Israel's future redemption will redeem as well all of the nations. The horizon line of normal history dissolves into huge visions of a posthistorical, idealized future, when earthly kingdoms will cede—*soon*—to the Kingdom of God. We are entering the world of apocalyptic eschatology.

THE EXPECTATION OF REDEMPTION

Paul's letters, like the traditions from and about Jesus of Nazareth eventually collected in the gospels, represent points along this arc of apocalyptic hope, an arc that stretches from the later passages of the classical prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel—through the aftermath of Bar Kokhba's revolt against Rome (132–135 C.E.). Apocalyptic prophecy in this period insists with mounting urgency that the good and all-powerful god of the Bible is indeed in command of history, the seeming counterevidence of current circumstances notwithstanding. If things were bad, it could only be because God was about to intervene to put them right.

But what was "bad"? That depended on the eye of the beholder. Certainly once Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.E.) conquered Persia, Jews in historically Jewish territories faced a new challenge, "Hellenization." Greek gods, Greek urban structures, Greek culture, Greek language: all these swept over and settled variously into the lands affected by Alexander's victories, including the Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Changed and charged political realities developed as the successor dynasties of two of Alexander's generals, the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria, faced off with each other, polarizing relationships and affecting politics within Jerusalem's priestly ruling class. One result of these new circumstances was the

Hellenization of Jerusalem, and the effort of the Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes to Hellenize the temple cult.[19] Another was the successful Maccabean rebellion, and the subsequent installation of the priestly Hasmonean family as Israel's new rulers (167–37 B.C.E.). And yet a third—in many ways the varied prophetic responses to this roiled political atmosphere—was the efflorescence of apocalyptic writings: Daniel, the Dead Sea Scrolls, various pseudepigrapha.[20] The production of such texts, and the missions of various charismatic figures who left no writings—John the Baptizer, Jesus of Nazareth, Theudas, the Egyptian, and those men whom Josephus refers to collectively as the "signs prophets"—continued as Israel was caught up in Rome's bumpy transition from republic to empire, in the uncertainties of Roman hegemony (especially following Herod's rule, 37–4 B.C.E.), and ultimately in two devastating wars against Rome (68–73 C.E. and 132–35 C.E., Bar Kokhba's revolt).

We can distill from this mass of writings a general pattern of End-time events, themselves amplifications of themes shaping the older prophetic paradigm of Exile and Return. Before the End comes, the righteous will suffer persecution at the hands of the wicked. Suddenly, though, things will begin to reverse.[21] The Day of the Lord will arrive, when the world will be convulsed by celestial and terrestrial catastrophes: earthquakes, plagues, darkness at noon, falling stars. A final battle will rage between the forces of Good and Evil: the Good will be led by God himself, or by a commanding angel, or by an anointed Davidic king. The wicked—foreign kings, evil nations, apostate Jews (especially those whose views differ from those of the writer)—will be defeated and destroyed. With the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the wicked, and the vindication of the righteous, Israel will reassemble, all twelve tribes, and return to the Land. God's spirit will pour out onto "all flesh" (Joel 2.28). The redeemed will gather in Jerusalem, at a rebuilt or renewed temple. Peace unalterably established, the entire world, human and divine, will acknowledge and worship the god of Israel.[22]

Nothing in these scenarios, except the pattern of travail/bliss, is fixed. Some writings speak of a general resurrection and a final judgment, others only of a resurrection of the saints. For some, the approach of the End-time will be signaled by the temple's pollution (by a foreign idol, Dan

11.31; by priestly impurity, CD col. iii–v); for others, by the sight of foreign armies ringed round Jerusalem. Some apocalypses feature Elijah coming to anoint the messiah; others speak of two messiahs, one priestly and one military (thus Davidic); others lack a messianic figure entirely. And still others look forward to a final redeemer figure to come as the "Son of Man."[23] A breadth of speculation, in short, characterizes late Second Temple apocalyptic literatures. What unites them is not the details of their individual visions, but their sounding urgency and the conviction that marks their message: God's kingdom is *at hand*.

What place, if any, do non-Jews have in such a kingdom?

We can cluster these materials around two poles. At the negative extreme, the nations are destroyed, defeated, or in some way made subject to Israel. Foreign monarchs lick the dust at Israel's feet (Isa 49.23; Mic 7.16); gentile cities are devastated, or repopulated by Israel (Isa 54.3; Zeph 2.1–3.8); God destroys the nations and their idols (Mic 5.9, 15). "Rouse your [God's] anger and pour out your wrath; destroy the adversary and wipe out the enemy!" (Sirach 36.1–10). "All which is with the heathen shall be surrendered; the towers shall be inflamed with fire and be removed from the whole earth. They shall be thrown into the judgment of fire, and perish in wrath" (1 Enoch 91.9). "Your enemy has overtaken you, but you will soon see their destruction and will tread upon their necks. . . . Wretched will be those who afflicted you" (Baruch 4.25, 31). "The Lord's servants . . . will drive out their enemies . . . and they will see all of their judgments and all of their curses among their enemies" (Jub 23.30). The messiah "will have gentile nations serving under his yoke" (Pss Sol 7.30). "Rejoice, all you cities of Judah; keep your gates ever open, that the hosts of the nations may be brought in. Their kings shall serve you; all your oppressors shall bow down before you" (1 QM 12.10–13).

At the positive extreme, the nations are partners in Israel's redemption. The nations will stream to Jerusalem and worship the god of Jacob together with Israel (Isa 2.2–4; Mic 4.1ff.). As the Jews leave the lands of their dispersion, gentiles will accompany them: "In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8.23, "the nations of every tongue" echoes the Table of Nations in Gen

10). Or the nations will carry the exiles back to Jerusalem themselves (Isa 49.22–23; Pss Sol 7.31–41). Burying their idols, "all people shall direct their sight to the path of uprightness" (1 Enoch 91.14). "Jerusalem will be rebuilt . . . and then the nations of the whole world will turn and worship God in truth, and they will all abandon their idols" (Tobit 14.5–6). Some gentiles, says Isaiah, will even serve in the eschatological temple as priests and as Levites (Isa 66.21)—a truly striking claim, since the status of these two clans within Israel was purely hereditary (that is, no ritual act could turn an Israelite into a priest [*cohen*] or a Levite).[24]

Apocalyptic traditions are not "doctrine," an authoritative, internally consistent, and coordinated body of teachings. Rather, they represent various and multivocal speculations, keyed to biblical themes. Nowhere are speculations more varied than on the issue of the role of gentiles at the End. Some texts, as we have seen, speak of the nations' total rejection, others speak of their full inclusion, and still others—such as Isaiah, or indeed Paul's letters—express both extremes, anticipating divine wrath falling upon idolators as well as their reform, rehabilitation, and ultimate redemption. No single paradigm controls the genre.

Jesus of Nazareth, intriguingly, and despite his commitment to the impending proximity of God's Kingdom, seems not to have engaged these ethnically inclusivist apocalyptic traditions: at least, none figures in the material that has come down to us. Nor, on the evidence, were many of his hearers pagans. The New Testament gospels present him as confining his mission for the most part to fellow Jews. Matthew's Jesus, indeed, restricts even his disciples' activity exclusively to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10.5; cf. 15.24). Gentiles must wait until after his resurrection to be named by Matthew's Christ as a goal of the gospel message ("Go and make disciples of all nations," Mt 28.19–20). In Lucan narrative, heaven has to prod Peter to baptize a pagan centurion in Joppa (Acts 10.1–48). Luke foreshadows the gospel's spreading beyond Israel (Lk 2.32, when Simeon, holding the infant Jesus, praises God's "salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the nations"; cf. Lk 24.47, also Acts 9.15, on Paul's future role). Deliberate outreach to pagans as such, however, gets under way only in chapter 11 of Acts, once the mission had spread out from Jerusalem to Antioch in the Diaspora.

Yet within only a few years of Jesus's execution, on the evidence of Paul's letter to the Galatians, the gospel had already reached as far as Damascus (Gal 1.15–17). The mission there seems already to have involved pagans; and indeed within twenty-odd years of Jesus's death, multiple and competing gentile missions in Christ's name seem to be well established. Not only Paul but (much to his fury) other Jewish Christ-followers also strive to bring the good news of the coming Kingdom to non-Jews (Gal passim; 2 Cor 11.22–23; cf. Phil 3.2–6). And as Paul's anger and arguments in Galatians especially evince, the very success of this messianic message among diaspora gentiles threatened to fracture the new movement. Evidently no one, confronted with the unexpected and surprising success of this very Jewish message among non-Jews, knew quite what to do.

The confusions and conflicts of this first generation allow us to infer two things about the historical Jesus of Nazareth. First, Jesus himself seems to have left no instructions on the integration of gentiles, nor did he in his own mission model such "outreach" for his disciples. Perhaps he assumed—along with the ancient scriptural paradigm—that gentiles would enter into God's Kingdom as a divinely initiated final event. In any case, gentiles as such seem not to have been his concern.[25] Yet, second, Jesus himself nonetheless must have at some point alluded to the nations' anticipated turning to the god of Israel at the End, because after his death his followers, faced with active gentile interest and commitment, readily (though variously) incorporated them into the movement. The inclusion of gentiles as ex-pagan pagans, in other words, seems to have occurred as a natural extension of the gospel message itself.

Jewish apocalyptic traditions focus on the redemption of Israel, thus on the integrity of the biblical god's moral character and, by extension, on the surety of his promises. (Paul's letter to the Romans, especially chapters 9 through 11 and 15.1–13, is paradigmatic in this regard.) Gentile participation in Israel's redemption, as we have seen, was simply one item among many in the various prophecies and descriptions of events anticipated at the End. Yet for what would eventually become Christianity, that gentile participation looms large: by the mid-second century, for some gentile Christians, the turning of the nations to Israel's god through the preaching

of the gospel served as paramount proof that Jesus was indeed the messiah of a new, non-Jewish Israel.[26]

What accounts for this shift of accent and emphasis? Why, in this story of Israel's redemption, do the nations ultimately come to assume such a high profile? To understand the answer, we have to turn our gaze from Hebrew-language biblical traditions, and from events (such as Jesus's mission) specific to Jews in the Land of Israel, and look out toward the reaches of Alexander's empire, to the Greek-speaking Jews of the western Diaspora.