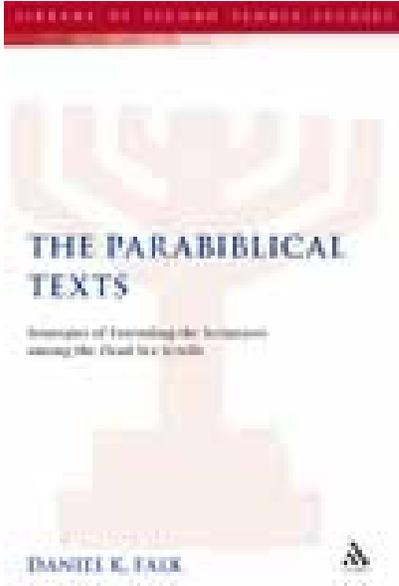


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Falk, Daniel K.

The Parabiblical Texts: Strategies for Extending the Scriptures among the Dead Sea Scrolls

Companion to the Qumran Scrolls 8; Library of Second Temple Studies 63

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Daniel Falk has produced a well-written and highly relevant volume that deals with some of the more important contemporary issues related to the function of nonbiblical literature of Second Temple Judaism. While the book focuses only on Jewish religious texts, the subject matter is relevant for canonical formation not only in early Judaism but also in early Christianity. Falk is acutely aware of the limitations of contemporary language to describe late Second Temple Jewish religious texts. He explores that challenge by comparing what he calls “parabiblical” texts to canonical texts; specifically, he compares the Genesis Apocryphon, the 4QRewritten Pentateuch, and the 4QCommentary on Genesis with the canonical Genesis. He also shows parallels with other ancient Jewish literature (especially Jubilees and 1 Enoch) and focuses on how those writings functioned among the Jews at Qumran. He claims that this Qumranic literature “extends” scripture, but he does not clearly distinguish it from scripture. Regardless, he selects the three examples above for a careful study, giving the lion’s share of his inquiry to the Genesis Apocryphon.

Chapter 1. Falk’s introduction is a careful discussion of classification and genre of ancient religious literature as well as the notions of Scripture and canon. He carefully discusses the complex matter of distinguishing between scripture and commentary on scripture,

observing that there is a need for an additional category because of the difficulty in identifying what scripture is. He concludes the chapter by showing how definition affects interpretation of these ancient texts. His examples of contemporary scholarship highlight a variety of contemporary attempts at describing what we now call noncanonical writings shedding light on the weaknesses of the contemporary categories imposed on ancient literature. He rightly shows the difficulty of drawing a neat boundary between “biblical” texts and other texts regularly identified as “noncanonical texts.”

While he calls his three examples “parabiblical” literature, he acknowledges that the distinctions between biblical and parabiblical are not always clear. In some cases, some of the Dead Sea Scrolls texts appear to be commentary on the biblical texts, but in others this is not as obvious, as in the case of the Genesis Apocryphon, which is often called “rewritten Bible,” a designation that originated with Geza Vermes (1973). H. L. Ginsberg coined the term “parabiblical” for such writings that appear to be something of a paraphrase and/or supplement to biblical literature, but Falk asks what criteria distinguishes interpretive texts from biblical texts? The reader may tire of the more than sufficient number of examples he cites to illustrate the difficulty of distinguishing genres in antiquity, but he makes the point that the distinctions are not as sharp as readers may prefer. His examples also highlight the contemporary difficulty that biblical scholars have in identifying, classifying, and even describing ancient Jewish literature from the Judean Desert. He prefers something like “rewritten Scriptures” over “rewritten Bible” (17) since the latter assumes a fixed canon of scriptures that cannot be detected when religious Jewish communities in the Judean Desert existed. Falk uses the terms “parascriptural” and “rewritten scripture” as “an umbrella term for a broad class of texts that in various ways extend the authority of Scripture by imitation and interpretation,” but not as a genre (17).

The difficulty with finding adequate terminology to describe ancient Second Temple Jewish literature is compounded by the fact that there was no biblical or textual canon as such in that period and the textual pluriformity found at Qumran demonstrates the difficulty of finding an *Urtext* for biblical books on which subsequent copiers depended. Although the Torah was well established as the supreme authoritative scripture in the Qumran community, other texts are not so clearly identified (Jubilees and 1 Enoch), and some that eventually were not included in the rabbinic Bible often functioned more authoritatively than some of the writings that did. This, of course, as Falk carefully explains, shows the dynamic nature of the scriptural texts among the Jews of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.

For Falk, “Scripture always implies and includes its complex set of inter-relationships involving its function, use, and interpretations in a particular community,” and he rightly

observes that the terms *Bible* or *Scripture* are only meaningful in particular religious communities that “value certain texts in various ways as sacred” (21).

Chapter 2. In his longest chapter (which constitutes just over half of the volume), Falk focuses on the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen), an interesting text that is “structured around two stories, the “Noah cycle” and “an Abram cycle” (Gen 5:18–15:5) that has significant parallels with Jubilees and 1 Enoch. While the first chapter is needful to understand what he is attempting to show, this chapter is the heart of Falk’s argument. Not only does its author add to the stories of Noah and Abraham from the two sources above, but he also offers his own take on these stories, at times even contradicting both the book of Genesis and Jubilees, as in 1QapGen 12:10 (e.g., 53, 105–6). Attention is also given to the well-known additions in columns 19–20 to the story of Sarah in Egypt that have parallels to later rabbinic interpretations (81–89).

Chapter 3. This chapter focuses on the Rewritten Pentateuch (RP) or 4QRP = 4Q158, 4Q364–367, and observes that in its original condition this work was three times longer than the scroll of Isaiah (1QIsa^a), and probably not written by the same hand (107–19). Falk correctly notes that it is not a sectarian document and likely was not composed at Qumran. He shows that the RP is often similar to the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) but also the Masoretic Text (MT) and is something like an extended Pentateuch similar to the SP. Falk is not clear on whether the RP was ever intended to be read as sacred scripture, but it is possible that it was understood to be something like a divinely inspired revelatory commentary. Falk is cautious about calling RP scripture, but he is not as clear on what distinguishes it from scripture. He suggests that RP may have been written for educational use to flesh out and update the author’s version of the Pentateuch (119). There is much that is not yet clear about the RP; consequently, further investigation of it may bring more light to this question.

Chapter 4. Falk’s third example (120–39) focuses particularly on the Commentary on Genesis (4QCommGenA = 4Q252; 4QCommGenB = 4Q253; 4QCommGenC = 4Q254; and 4QCommGenD = 4Q254a). The text of this commentary may rely on a Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX (125). It is likely a sectarian text since it refers to “men of the Yahad” (see 4Q252 5.5 and 4Q254 4 4; p. 121). According to Falk, this commentary, primarily on Gen 6–49, dates probably from later Hasmonean or early Herodian times (120–21), and the most significant alterations it makes have to do with the calendar of events in the story of Noah but also in other activities. Whether this commentary was used for more than educational purposes is not clear, but its author was especially seeking to make what he believed were needed changes to the text to clarify issues related to the Jewish calendar, but also to the difficulties in the text of Genesis, and he drew on several sources available to him (138–39). This text makes the fewest changes or alterations to the text of Genesis,

but the changes it makes seems to support the sectarian views of the Qumran community (139).

Chapter 5 (140–53). In his “Synthesis,” Falk assesses his previous examination of the three major Qumran texts that he examines (Genesis Apocryphon, Rewritten Pentateuch, and Genesis Commentary) in light of the evidence he provides. He prefers the term “extending scripture” to describe the various practices in these texts, with the author of the Genesis Apocryphon being most free in the use of the book of Genesis. He observes that the Commentary on Genesis A–D is the most restricted in its use of the canonical text. In the former, he shows that the notion of a fixed sacred text was not paramount in the author’s focus, but rather he exercises a free and creative use of the text of Genesis that represents a “flexible attitude to the scriptural text” (140). The Reworked Pentateuch shows more restraint in regard to the text—its modifications to the text are mostly for harmonistic and clarification purposes—but the Commentary on Genesis has the fewest changes to the text, and they are concerned chiefly with chronological and calendrical issues related to the stories in Genesis. Falk claims, however, that none of these texts “assume an ideology of a strictly immutable text of Scripture” (141).

Falk concludes by acknowledging that it is often difficult to categorize Qumran literature and asks whether it is simply commentary on the biblical texts or more often reflective of various stages of “extending scriptures”? The answer is a bit elusive, since the texts themselves were placed alongside biblical texts, with no easy way to distinguish them. The manner in which their authors modify, change, or clarify the biblical texts suggests that the notion of an inviolable scripture was not yet a part of the beliefs of the Qumran community. Falk acknowledges that his study is incomplete (150), but it is carefully prepared and clarifies the views of Scripture at Qumran. In other words, the community was still on the way toward a canon of scripture and an inviolable text, but it was not yet there.

One could wish for more discussion of a number of similar texts at Qumran, especially the Temple Scroll, 1 Enoch, the Commentary on Habakkuk (which is seen by its author to be inspired revelation), and several other texts discovered there, but Falk has initiated what one hopes will be the first of several discussions of this literature. He has shown a number of important comparisons and contrasts with Jubilees and 1 Enoch especially, but each of these needs much more focus than was possible here. Falk’s volume nevertheless opens up the possibility of looking more seriously at the notion of scripture and canon at Qumran and its importance in the later canon formation for the Jews. He has focused on a stage in the history of Second Temple Judaism when textual fluidity was common. The New Testament’s use of the Old Testament is also a witness to the dynamic status of Scripture at roughly the same time. Falk has provided a useful and informative discussion

of the role of scripture at Qumran at a critical time in early Judaism and at the formative stages of early Christianity. He is to be commended for choosing “rewritten Scripture” rather than “rewritten Bible” to describe the phenomena he observes (17), and he recognizes the anachronistic bias conveyed by “Bible” when the three ancient texts were produced. His careful examination of the texts he has selected makes his point even if other texts could have been examined more extensively in his study that would have further enhanced his conclusions. I commend Falk’s useful study of scripture in late Second Temple Judaism to scholars and students alike and anticipate further investigations to emerge as a result of his perceptive study.