Introduction

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I. PREFACE

No other book has exerted the depth and range of influence that the Bible has. Judaism and Christianity both claim the Bible in different forms as their own, but other religious sources – most notably the Qur'an – as well as literary works from Chaucer to Dostoyevski develop much of its force and content. The Bible tells the story of God's people, shapes their identity through prophecy, and informs their understanding with a rich variety of writings. The Torah (or "Law"), the Prophets, and the Writings are the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Christians recognize as the Bible not only the Scriptures of Israel but also twenty-seven documents that describe or that derive from the persons and events that gave rise to faith in Jesus. Christians designate this second group as "the New Testament" and refer to Israel's writings as "the Old Testament."

In addition to the writings included in the canons of the Bible, there are a number of writings that some communities, past and present, have regarded as of equal value, or as essential supplements to the biblical sources. The Wisdom of Solomon and 1 and 2 Maccabees, for example, appear in some Christian Bibles, and the *Book of Enoch* acquired the authority of a sacred text at Qumran. Many early churches used Gospels other than the four now found in the New Testament. In this new edition of the *Companion to the Bible* we shall examine the writings widely accepted as authoritative, but also look at a number of the texts associated with the Bible within Judaism and Christianity. An awareness of this penumbra of literatures around official canons helps us to appreciate the diversity of belief and practice within Judaism and Christianity, and to see the links between the biblical tradition and the religions of antiquity.

Biblical influence on other literatures, on views of human history and society, and on personal and social ethical norms, has been profound, especially – although by no means uniquely – in Western culture. Accordingly, study of the Bible has typically involved historians, archaeologists, philologists, theologians, and ethicists, as well as philosophers, experts in interpretation, and literary critics of various kinds. Since the biblical writings were written in several different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) across the better part of two millennia and in a variety of circumstances, this

COVENANT/TESTAMENT

The Hebrew word *berit* is used for formal agreements reached between two parties, each of whom assumes certain obligations. In the Scriptures of Israel and in documents from the ancient Near East, such contracts are instanced between nations, between rulers and their subjects, and between individuals (e.g., Genesis 31:43–54; 2 Samuel 5:3; 1 Kings 5:26). Antecedents for the covenant between Yahweh and the twelve clans at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–24) include God's covenant with Abraham, in which God promises Abraham many descendants and vast territory (Genesis 15). Initially, God puts no conditions on Abraham, but obligations became apparent (Genesis 17, 22), and the same is true of God's covenant with David, which promises him an unending line of successors to the throne of Israel (2 Samuel 7). When divine judgment on God's people drives them from the Promised Land and places them under foreign rule, the prophet Jeremiah voices the assurance of a "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31–4) by which the people of Israel will be inwardly transformed and their knowledge of God will become personal and direct. It is this expectation that is taken up in the early Christian tradition and is seen as in the process of fulfillment through Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23–5; also in some manuscripts and in ancient versions of Mark 14:24).

The Greek word *diatheke*, which means "contract" or "compact" and thus matches the Hebrew term well, was also widely used for "last will and testament." Hence it came to be translated in the early Latin versions of the New Testament as *testamentum*. When the phrase "New Covenant" was used as the title of the whole collection of early Christian writings, with the implicit claim that Jesus had fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, it too was translated into Latin as "Novum Testamentum" and thus into English as "New Testament."

wide range of approaches has proven crucial to appreciating the rich variety of literatures that the Bible presents.

In view of the complexity of the Bible itself, and the variety of approaches to its study, informed readers will wish to orient themselves with an awareness of how biblical texts were produced. Understanding that generative process reveals how the Bible grew and evolved over many centuries within different historical contexts. The distinctive keys and strains of biblical language and thought emerge, as do patterns of influence from one biblical community to another.

The cumulative effect of these different communities, each distinctive and vibrant, produced the Bible. Multiple constituencies – sometimes at odds with one another, sometimes forging compromises, sometimes influencing or replying to competitors, and sometimes building on each other, but also willing to set off in new directions – generated the world's most influential book. However we might interpret these texts today, from whatever theological, philosophical, or literary perspectives, an appreciation of the people and of the processes and social worlds that lie behind the documents is indispensable to informed reading.

For that reason, this *Companion* does not engage in a discussion of methods of interpretation, which may be approached in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* edited by John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Regardless of the approach one develops – in accordance with recent trends or on one's own, from the standpoint of religious faith or from an atheist perspective – critical reading involves developing both an awareness of the content of the Bible and an appreciation of

how its various documents took shape. For that reason, the contributors to this *Companion* have devoted their attention to that preliminary but indispensable task.

II. PURPOSE

Information on the changing circumstances in which the biblical writers and their original readers lived guides critical, informed reading. This *Companion to the Bible* seeks to provide basic knowledge of the cultural contexts in which the biblical books were produced, including the history, languages, and religious beliefs and philosophical insights of the writers, the people they wrote about, and the audiences for whom they wrote. The *Companion* is largely chronological in its organization, moving from the earliest historical and cultural circumstances depicted in the biblical accounts, through the changing conditions of the history of Israel, down to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman armies under Titus in 70 C.E., and on to Christianity's emergence out of its Jewish matrix and its development into the second century C.E. The biblical writings, broadly defined, are examined in their respective contexts. Maps, images, and descriptions of the various lands and peoples of the Bible are designed to help the reader understand the geographical contexts involved. Illustrations feature cultural contexts; boxes throughout provide definitions of terms and descriptions of individuals, movements, and practices of basic importance to the biblical writers, as well as chronological orientation. Indexes of subjects and of references to the biblical and related writings enable the reader to trace themes, to locate passages relevant to particular lines of inquiry, and to correlate features of the biblical writings with their specific contexts.

This book is written mostly in the form of continuous narratives, in which the successive stages of the biblical writings and their context are described with an eye on the present order of the Bible. In this regard the editors have compromised the principle of following the chronological development of the texts. Had they followed that principle strictly, they would, for example, have begun with Judges, by common agreement the biblical book composed at the earliest stage of Israel's history. There is much to be said for tracing the phases of the biblical literatures rigorously through their generative development, but the *Companion*'s purpose would not be served if readers could not easily follow the sequence of the books in their printed Bibles, similarly, we have kept familiar translations in view, while introducing our own for the sake of accuracy.

In the analysis of the biblical texts, which constitutes the major portion of this book, we move through the literature by two coordinated modes of organization: (1) chronological sequence, and (2) type of literature. Within each part there is a balance between the descriptions of the successive epochs in which these documents were produced, and the various aims

and literary styles of the documents. The documents analyzed include not only those writings recognized today as authoritative by various religious traditions but also associated works that have been regarded as "biblical" by some religious groups. The examination of these documents of disputed authority enables us to see concretely the diversity of the biblical traditions and the special interests that led certain groups to include these works on their authoritative lists. Following a convention of long standing, titles of noncanonical works are printed in italics. Readers seeking information about a particular book, concept, or event might consult the indexes.

III. THE CONCEPT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

A. Who Are God's People? How Does God Speak to Them?

Ram in a thicket. Found in a cemetery at Ur, on the Euphrates River midway between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf, and dating to 2600 B.C.E., this image of a ram eating leaves recalls the story of Abraham finding a ram caught in a thicket by its horns (Genesis 22:13). (BiblePlaces.com)

Those who contributed to the Bible, whether in writing or in the oral traditions that eventually achieved written form, shared two convictions: that God speaks to his people in particular circumstances of human experience, and that the divine message, though spoken through individuals, concerns the identity and welfare of the members of the whole community. Even when reports are given of some private disclosure by God to an individual, the communication is not intended for that person alone. Rather, it is addressed to the group of which this single intermediary between God and his people is a representative.

The conviction that God addresses his people in the circumstances of their common history permeates the biblical tradition and requires the reader of the Bible to give careful attention to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it is claimed that the word of God was heard by his people. Throughout the whole range of the biblical writings, however, those who saw themselves as God's people lived in circumstances that changed, sometimes radically. The changes occured in both the inner structures of the group (its values and goals) and the social and cultural conditions in which it lived.

The earliest traditions of the origins of the people Israel portray them as a group of clans joined in a loose association based on common ancestry and identification with the religious experience of their ancestor Abraham. The migration to Egypt in a time of threatening famine led to their enslavement by the pharaoh. They discerned direct divine intervention in their successful flight from Egypt and in being led through the wilderness of Sinai to the borders of Canaan, the Promised Land. On arrival they were once more a confederacy of clans, sharing (in addition to their common ancestry) the belief that their God was in their midst, present in the portable shrine (the ark of the covenant) that they brought with them out of the wilderness. The founding principles of their group identity were given to them by revelation through Moses, their leader, at Mount Sinai. To this code they jointly committed themselves.

In the land of promise they lived more or less separate – and sometimes competing – social existences, bound by their common history and their devotion to the God who dwelt in their midst in the shrine, which on occasion was moved from place to place. Leaders arose in times of crisis to settle internal disputes or to defend tribes from external enemies. The decision to erect the Temple in Jerusalem as a permanent house for Yahweh, their God, coincided with the designation of a national leader, a king chosen from one of the clans. The monarchy lasted only a few generations and ended with two nations and two cultic centers – in Jerusalem and on Mount Gerizim in Samaria – competing for the claim to be Yahweh's residence among his people. First the northern and then the southern nation was taken off into captivity in Mesopotamia, and their shrines lay in ruins until the decision by Cyrus, the Persian ruler of the Middle East, to allow the tribes of Judah to return to their ancestral land. From the rise of the monarchy down through the period of the exile in Babylon and the return, certain figures came forth in Israel to utter predictions and protests and to call the ruler and the people to account before God. These were the prophets of Israel. After the monarchy was gone, leadership and identity for the Jews were provided increasingly through their priests. Traditional aids for individual and group worship were brought together to form the Book of Psalms. The wisdom traditions were edited in such books as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Mount Gerizim, looking east with Mount Ebal to the left. Mounts Gerizim and Ebal are on opposite sides of the valley where Shechem and Jacob's well were located, in what came to be known as Samaria. When the northern clans broke with the southern, Judean tribes, they not only formed a separate monarchy but also, both then and after the Samaritans were allowed to return from exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E., built altars that competed with the Temple in Jerusalem. (BiblePlaces.com)

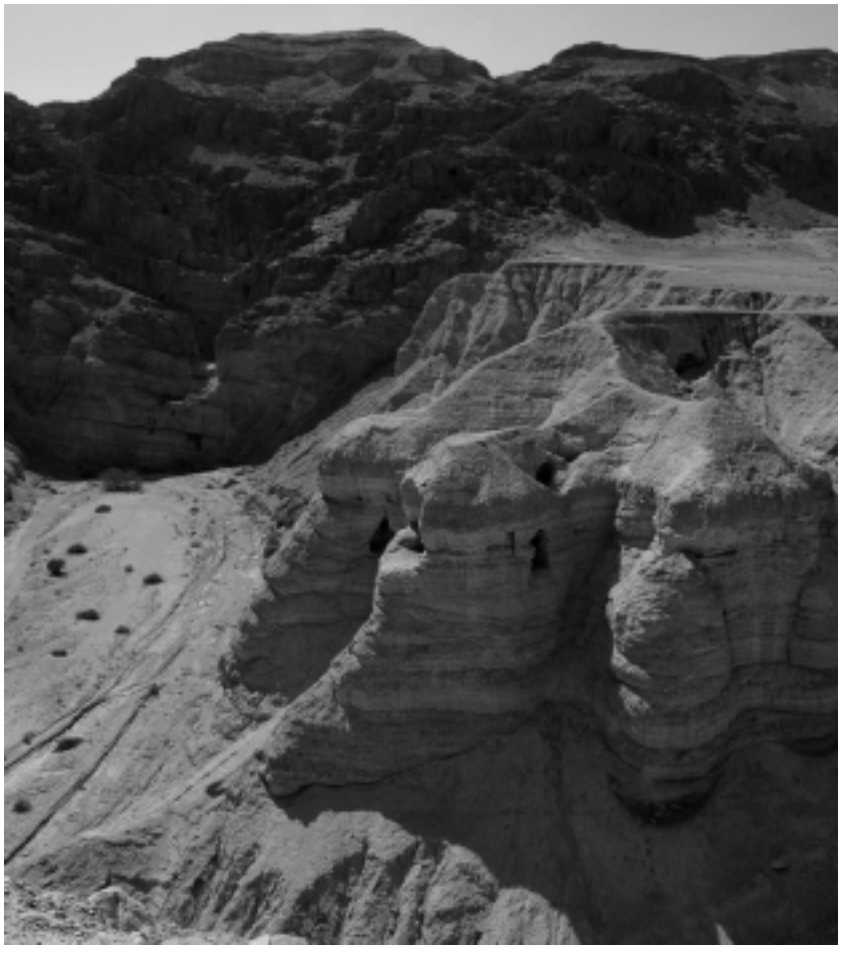
HELLENISTIC

From the Greek word meaning "Greek" – *Hellen* – came the verb "to hellenize," or to convert to Greek culture and style of life. Alexander the Great and his successors as rulers of the Middle East – especially the Ptolemaic monarchs in Egypt and the Seleucid rulers in Syria – saw this process of "Greek-izing" as a central goal of their rule over these non-Greek territories. They thought of themselves as bringing true culture to benighted peoples. In addition to rebuilding the cities in the Greek style, they promoted Greek education and culture, and devotion to the Greek gods among their subjects. The term "Hellenistic" has been applied by historians to the period lasting from the rise of Alexander during the fourth century B.C.E. to the time of the coming of the Romans to the eastern Mediterranean in the mid-first century B.C.E.

With the takeover of the land by Alexander the Great and his Hellenistic successors, the people of Judea were subjected to enormous pressures to conform to Greek-style culture. Their resistance was led by a priestly family, the Maccabees (or Hasmoneans), and resulted in the establishment of a dynasty that became increasingly objectionable to many Jews because its kings were from the priestly line rather than descended from David, the model king whose dynasty had been a covenantal mandate. Further, the Hasmonean rulers became increasingly secular and harsh. As a result, there arose various Jewish groups whose members sought fulfillment of their sense of unique relationship with God outside the frameworks provided by either the Temple priesthood or the political establishment. In this context movements emerged from within Judaism that were to have such profound importance for the subsequent history of biblical religion: the Pharisees, the Essenes (or Dead Sea community), and the Christians. In all these changing circumstances the twin convictions remained that God addressed his people through chosen instruments and that it was obligatory for his people to confirm their special relationship to God.

Closely linked with the changing context of revelation was the constant modification of what historical communities understood to be the nature of their relationship to the God who spoke to them about his

Relief from a sarcophagus from the late fourth century B.C.E. This probably depicts Alexander's most important battle, when his defeat of the Persian army at Issus, in a narrow stretch of land in southern Turkey, gave him access to all the lands to the east, including Syria and Mesopotamia, and as far as India. (BiblePlaces.com)



Cliffs overlooking Qumran. After local Bedouins discovered the first of the scrolls in a cave overlooking the Dead Sea in 1947, other manuscripts were found here and in nearby sites, and the ruins of a community center were excavated. The oldest extant copies of the Hebrew Scriptures and related writings, as well as previously unknown texts in Hebrew and Aramaic, have been found preserved in the caves. (BiblePlaces.com)

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY

Khirbet Qumran is the modern name for the ruins at the site of the Jewish community that withdrew in the first century B.C.E. from life in Jerusalem and the mainstream of Jewish society to live together in what their anonymous founder and his followers were convinced was the pure life of devotion to God, until – as they were convinced – God would intervene in their behalf and grant them the priestly role in a renewed Temple in Jerusalem.

The community was located on a bluff overlooking the northwestern end of the Dead Sea. The Wadi Qumran ("wadi" refers to the rocky bed of a seasonal stream), just below their sacred site, provides a runoff for water from the Temple site in Jerusalem.

According to Ezekiel 47, through this channel a mighty stream would flow from the renewed Temple and would transform the salty Dead Sea into a freshwater lake. The community had a central building where they gathered to study, to prepare copies of their writings, and to eat common meals. There are also ruins of other structures, including pools (possibly for baptisms), caves where some members appear to have lived, and tombs for their deceased. The Dead Sea community lived on this site awaiting the divine renewal of God's people, of Jerusalem and the Temple (with themselves in charge), and of the land of Israel.

The documents found there include the oldest surviving copies of the Jewish Scriptures, in addition to commentaries on the Prophets of Israel, predicting the imminent fulfillment of the prophecies for and through this community. Basic writings describing the origins, organization, rules, and destiny of the community were also found, of which the most revealing is the *Scroll of the Rule*.

purpose and their destiny. At the same time, the perception of who the human instrument was through whom God had addressed them – a king, a clan leader, a prophet, a priest, someone especially gifted to interpret the tradition – varied dramatically from time to time and place to place. There is no uniform pattern of divine communication in the biblical writings, nor is there a single view of how one was to define the people of God addressed by him. The two persistent themes running throughout the biblical writings are that (1) there is a people of God, and (2) they have been spoken to by God. The content of the message and the community context in which it was heard changed throughout the centuries of the biblical period. But in every case, the authority of what was uttered is traced to God. The responsibility for and the consequences of the response rested with those who, by various criteria, saw themselves as God's people.

B. The Biblical Writings and the Cultural Setting

As the social and political setting of the covenant people changed over the centuries, so did both the linguistic and the literary styles of scriptures. The oldest Hebrew literary traditions included in the Bible, which consist of epic accounts of the origins of the people Israel, seem to have originated from earlier, oral traditions in about the year 1200 B.C.E. During or after the exile of 587 B.C.E., they were incorporated with later materials into what we know as the Pentateuch. The oldest surviving inscriptions and documents in the Hebrew language – which is akin to Akkadian (the language spoken in ancient Babylonia) but is even more closely related to the Semitic languages spoken in Palestine (Canaanite and Phoenician) – date from around the tenth century B.C.E. By the eighth century B.C.E., however, Aramaic (which was spoken by a Semitic group that invaded Palestine and Syria from Mesopotamia) had become the major language of the Middle East. In the sixth century B.C.E. the Persians made Aramaic the official language of their empire, which included the land of Israel. Hebrew continued as the traditional religious language of Israel, but Aramaic was increasingly used by the Israelites for oral and written communication. Parts of Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic, and it later became necessary to provide translations and paraphrases of the Scriptures of Israel in Aramaic in order for readers and worshippers to understand them. By the fifth century C.E., the Aramaic versions were officially recognized by the Rabbinic leaders as suitable for religious and devotional purposes. Meanwhile, a revived form of Hebrew also served the rabbis, along with Aramaic, in the works known as the Mishnah and the Talmud, which were written in the period from the second to the sixth centuries C.E.

The biblical writers used the literary styles and forms that were employed in their own era as media for communicating to their contemporaries. In many cases, these literary patterns were adapted or modified, but the

PENTATEUCH

Taken literally, the term "pentateuch" indicates any book in five parts, and is widely used in biblical scholarship to refer to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books have been traditionally attributed to Moses. In Jewish usage, these writings are often referred to as Torah ("instruction"), or the Law of Moses. It seems likely that the Pentateuch is the end product of a period of development and modification that extended from the second millennium B.C.E. to as late as the fifth century B.C.E. Details of this development and analyses of the contents of the Pentateuch are presented in Part 1 of the *Companion*.

underlying structures and strategies used by other religions and cultures remain readily recognizable. Epic narratives were an important feature of the literatures of various ethnic and cultural groups in the ancient Middle East. The biblical writers used this genre for their own purposes, both in the Pentateuch (especially in Genesis) and in the historical writings. Forms of poetry, and especially of hymns and liturgical passages, are also similar to those found in other ancient Semitic literatures of comparable periods. The biblical legal codes have their counterparts in contemporary legal traditions of other societies. In various ways, the wisdom traditions of Israel resemble the proverbs and oracles of contemporary cultures. Similarly, the prophetic oracles have their rough equivalents in other Semitic cultures.

From the late fourth century B.C.E. on, more and more Jews were reared in a Greek-speaking environment. By the third century B.C.E. thousands of Jews lived in Egypt, which accorded them welcome as mercenaries, merchants, and loyal subjects, and they were powerfully influenced by Hellenistic culture and learning. Their basic language was Greek, and they were schooled in Greek literature and philosophy. Since many of these Jews were unable to read the Bible in the original Hebrew and Aramaic, the pagan ruler of Egypt reportedly collaborated with the priestly leadership in Jerusalem to have a Greek translation made of the Pentateuch, which in subsequent centuries was followed by translations of the other books of the Bible. A legend arose about the miraculous agreement among seventy translators working independently, and the translation in its final form came to be known as the Septuagint, from the Greek word for "seventy." It was widely used throughout the Greco-Roman world, by Jews and later by Christians, becoming the basis of the Christian canon in Greek.

Books such as *4 Maccabees* not only were first written in Greek but also retell the story of Judas Maccabaeus's triumph over the idolatrous rulers in terms that show the direct influence of Greek philosophy, including the Stoic philosophical notion of virtue triumphing over adversity. The book variously known as the Wisdom of Ben Sira, Sirach, and Ecclesiasticus shows another kind of Hellenistic influence in that it counters the older biblical writings' uniform denunciation of physicians as magicians and agents of evil powers. Instead, Ben Sira honors physicians as instruments of God, reflecting Greek medicine's rise under Hippocrates and its prominence and increased respect during the Hellenistic period.

Just as in Egyptian mythology the goddess of knowledge, Ma'at, came to be seen as the instrument through whom the world was created, as well as the agent for conveying divine knowledge to the true seekers, so in Israel Wisdom became personified as the divine consort and aide in creation and the one through whom the knowledge of Yahweh is conveyed to his people. In Egypt during the Hellenistic period, the creative and revelatory role of Ma'at was transferred to Isis, who was portrayed in the mythology of the period as personally concerned for her worshippers and as revealing herself to them in mystical communion. The functions of Isis as intermediary

STOICISM

Stoicism is the philosophical school of thought that grew out of the work of Zeno of Citium (ca. 333–264 B.C.E.), who taught publicly in the porticoes – or stoa – of the marketplace in Athens. His teaching emphasized reason as the pervasive force that sustained the universe. He insisted on the material nature of the universe, as contrasted with the ideal realm of reality in the philosophy of Plato. Cleanthes (331–232 B.C.E.), who developed Zeno's ideas further, pictured God as the unseen force that gave life and purpose to the universe. The life of virtue for human beings was to live according to that law of nature. If the universal law were perceived and obeyed, human society could achieve peace and prosperity. The Stoic movement went through three phases: Old, Middle, and Later Stoicism. In the Middle period, history, philosophy, and the natural sciences were studied with the aim of discerning the connection between logic and natural law. The divine presence is described as *pneuma*, which means "spirit." Later Stoicism is represented by the Roman philosopher Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.). He discussed human suffering, which was a problem for those who stressed the divine presence and action, and depicted it as the divinely intended process by which humans were tested and purified. Epictetus (50–120 C.E.) emphasized that it was the human capacity for understanding and responding to the divine purpose – that is, conscience – that made possible human conformity to the law of nature.

between God and humans are paralleled in other writings of the Hellenistic period. This model of divine communication and relationship was taken up and transformed by the author of the Gospel according to John. Further, he assigns them to a male figure, the *Logos* (or Word), which he identifies with Jesus. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the styles for composing letters, for making speeches, for telling popular stories about religious persons and their experiences with the gods, and for writing history strongly influenced the biblical writers as well.

In at least one case – that of the Gospels – biblical writers seem to have created a new literary type. Features of the Gospels resemble contemporary literary forms, including the biography and what anthropologists call a "foundation document," that is, a writing that presents an account of the circumstances under which a religious movement began and that indicates the basic pattern of life and thought that the movement's followers are to observe. The specific forms in which these elements are combined in the Gospels produced a unique contribution to world literature.

C. The Literary Evolution of the Biblical Writings

In most cases biblical writings evolved from oral forms. Individual epics, for example, were woven into a sequential narrative. Hymns of praise and prayers of petition were over a period of time incorporated into other documents, legal or historical, or arranged into a body of liturgical material, such as the Book of Psalms. Legal materials grew from simpler to more complex forms as the circumstances of Israel's historical existence changed and its needs varied with changing cultural conditions. The same is true of prophetic oracles, which were supplemented by later material and organized into the collections in which we now read them. Similarly, the Wisdom