Prologue

As a Jewish scholar who has been engaged in the study and teaching of Jewish–Christian relations for over twelve years, I have thought a great deal about the past history of Jewish–Christian relations, especially in relation to the Bible. During that time I have noticed increasing interest being shown in scholarly and religious circles to both the Jewish context of the New Testament as well as to the influence of Jewish biblical interpretation on the formation and development of Christianity.

For understandable reasons, it has generally been assumed that Judaism influenced Christianity but relatively little attention has been given to the other side of the same coin: the question of the influence of Christianity upon Judaism. Did Christian teaching and interpretation influence the Jewish commentators? The purpose of this book is to consider this relatively unexplored question, to ask whether this influence developed into a two-way encounter and to investigate to what extent Jews and Christians are bound by the Bible. On the basis of a study of the Binding of Isaac, I examine whether there was some kind of a meeting or interaction between Jewish and Christian interpreters during the first six centuries CE and what this may tell us about relations between Jews and Christians in late antiquity.

The background to this book is a reawakening among scholars to the Jewish origins of Christianity, a trend that became noticeable in the first half of the twentieth century. Figures such as Travers Herford (1860–1950) from the UK and George Foot Moore (1851–1931) from the USA produced important works, and their studies shed light on the vitality of Judaism in the first few centuries of the Common Era. This, it became more and more apparent, was essential for a proper understanding of the development of the early church. Their works challenged and overcame the misconceptions and prejudices of the majority of their contemporaries, who were influenced by the enlightening but nevertheless partial writings of scholars such as Emil Schürer and Julius Wellhausen. The latter argued coherently, but

inaccurately, that rabbinic Judaism was a form of barren legalism, which was simply rejected by Jesus and replaced by Christianity. In their view, rabbinic Judaism represented a decaying religion. Thankfully, Herford and Moore pointed out the errors and preconceptions of their German colleagues and expressed a hitherto unheard-of appreciation of rabbinic Judaism. They taught their students, and a new generation of scholars, that the Judaism that was contemporaneous with Jesus and the early church not only showed vibrancy and vigour but also had a positive influence on Jesus and the development of the early church.

In more recent years, Geza Vermes and E. P. Sanders, among others, contributed to this process and, as a result, their writings increased our understanding of relations during this period. Both scholars have produced important studies on the New Testament, which highlighted the close relationship between Jesus and his fellow Jews, especially the Pharisees. They were not alone, and scholarly awareness of first-century Judaism, in all its varieties, is greater than ever before.

The ramifications are manifold. We are now taught that Jesus, his family and his followers were Jewish. The Jewish background to Christianity is now stressed. The rediscovery of the Jewishness of the origins of Christianity has not only led to a greater awareness of the Jewish context but also to the realization that too often Christians have pictured Torah as a burden rather than as a delight. It is now appreciated more than ever before that Jesus was a faithful Jew and that Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew; that the first Christians were Jews; that the New Testament is, for the most part, a Jewish work.

This development has significance for Jews as well as for Christians. In the early twentieth century European Jewish scholars, such as Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and Claude Montefiore, produced important works. Like Moore and Parkes they were pioneers, ahead of their time, who strove to overcome occasional hostility but more often a lack of interest in Christianity among Jews. They began a move towards a positive reassessment of Christianity and reminded Jews that Jesus was a fellow Jew (their 'great brother' as Martin Buber described him). In the second half of the twentieth century up until the present day Jewish scholars have increased their presence in New Testament studies. The comments of Samuel Sandmel, Professor of New Testament at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, illustrates:

> Two hundred years ago Christians and Jews and Roman Catholics and Protestants seldom read each other's books, and almost never met together to exchange views and opinions on academic matters related to religious documents. Even a hundred

years ago such cross-fertilization or meeting was rare. In our ninety-seventh meeting we take it as a norm for us to read each other's writings and to meet together, debate with each other, and agree or disagree with each other in small or large matters of scholarship. The legacy from past centuries, of misunderstanding and even animosity, has all but been dissolved in the framework of our organization.[1]

Today, Jewish scholars are building on his legacy and making a significant contribution to New Testament studies and related subjects, especially in the USA.[2] For example, both Alan Segal and Daniel Boyarin have authored important studies on Paul,[3] Amy-Jill Levine and Adele Reinhartz have contributed significantly to the study of the Gospels of Matthew and John respectively.[4] Jewish scholars have also contributed to the study of early Christian liturgy such as Jacob Petuchowski's work on The Lord's Prayer[5] and Lawrence Hoffman's collaborative studies with Paul Bradshaw.[6] This list could doubtless be expanded.

The impact of these changes extends beyond university classrooms and has begun to influence the curriculum in seminaries and in other educational institutions. A number that focus on the Jewish–Christian encounter have been established in recent years in both Europe and the United States. For example, the Centre for Jewish–Christian Relations founded in Cambridge in 1998 has developed innovative multi-disciplinary curricula, which are being implemented at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.[7] It is also worth mentioning the International Council of Christians and Jews, established in 1947, which serves as an umbrella organization of thirty-eight national Jewish–Christian dialogue bodies representing thirty-two different countries. As a result, the study of Jewish–Christian relations is being transformed. Most Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church now teach their seminarians that there was a close relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees. Until recently, this subject was limited to the consideration of a few, but more and more are now learning that, according

[1] Sandmel 1961: 13. [2] Cf. Bowe 2002. [3] Boyarin 1994, Segal 1990.
[4] Levine 1988, Reinhartz 2001. [5] Petuchowski 1978.
[6] See the series entitled *Two Liturgical Traditions* published by University of Notre Dame Press.
[7] In Europe, as well as the Centre for Jewish–Christian Relations in Cambridge, these include the Institute for Jewish–Christian Research at the University of Lucerne and the Institute of the Church and Jewish People in Berlin. In the USA, the most significant educational centres are: the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago; the Center for Catholic–Jewish Studies at Saint Leo University in Florida; the Center for Christian–Jewish Learning at Boston College in Massachusetts; the Center for Christian–Jewish Studies and Relations at the General Theological Seminary in New York; the Center for Christian–Jewish Understanding at the Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut; the Institute of Judaeo–Christian Studies at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey; the Jay Phillips Center for Jewish–Christian Learning at the University of St Thomas, St Paul, Minnesota. For a more detailed list see http://www.jcrelations.net.

to the Roman Catholic teaching, Jesus 'had very close relations' with the Pharisees to whom 'he was very near'.[8]

There is also increasing awareness in theological circles of the perils of relying on the literal text of the New Testament and that the final text of the Gospels was edited long after the events described; that the authors were concerned with denigrating those Jews who did not follow Jesus; that they were concerned with vindicating the Romans, whose goodwill they were seeking. This was acknowledged by the Vatican's 1985 document on the teaching of Judaism, which stated that, 'some references hostile or less than favourable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian–Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus.'[9]

Since 1985, there is also increasing interest being shown in the significance of post-biblical writings, notably the rabbinic literature. In 2001, for example, the Pontifical Biblical Commission published a document entitled *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. It called for greater collaboration between Jewish and Christian biblical scholars and noted that 'the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures . . . a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion'.[10] The World Lutheran Federation issued a statement three years earlier, which stated, 'Christians also need to learn of the rich and varied history of Judaism since New Testament times, and of the Jewish people as a diverse, living community of faith today. Such an encounter with living and faithful Judaism can be profoundly enriching for Christian self-understanding.'[11]

On the Jewish side there have been stirrings of a new interest in Christianity. In September 2000 a statement entitled *Dabru Emet* ('Speak Truth') was published. Prepared by four Jewish theologians it was signed by over 250 Jewish leaders and scholars, which gave it an unusual amount of authority. It consists of a cross-denominational Jewish statement on relations with Christianity and asserts that

> Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book – the Bible (what Jews call 'Tanakh' and Christians call the 'Old Testament'). Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away

[8] 'Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church' (1985) http://www.jcrelations.net/stmnts/vatican5-85.htm.
[9] Ibid.
[10] 'The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible' (2002) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html.
[11] 'Guidelines for Lutheran–Jewish Relations' (1998) http://www.jcrelations.net/stmnts/elca2.htm.

similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people of Israel, God's revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole world.[12]

These statements, issued on behalf of Christianity and Judaism, provide a modern context to an age-old problem: are Jews and Christians bound together by the Bible? The question is not simply of academic interest, shedding light on events many hundreds of years ago. It has significance today because the Bible and its varied interpretations continue to influence the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Modern Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation is partly based on (or perhaps it is more accurate to say, is a reaction to) interpretations developed in the formative period – in other words, the first 600 years of the Common Era. As we shall see later in this book, interpretations of Scripture, which originated long ago, still play an important role in the Christian–Jewish relationship. The uncovering of an exegetical encounter, therefore, not only tells us about historic relations between Christians and Jews but also informs us about the contemporary encounter.

The story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac is one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. It has been an important passage for Judaism and Christianity from an early period. For Jews, from at least as early as the third century CE, the passage, known as the Akedah or Binding of Isaac, has been read on Rosh ha-Shana, the Jewish New Year. For Christians from around the same period, the story, commonly titled the Sacrifice of Isaac, is mentioned in the Eucharist prayers and read in the period leading up to Easter.

The focus of the biblical story concerns Abraham's relationship with God and how his faith in and commitment to God was demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his long-awaited son at God's command. Little attention was given to Isaac. Both the rabbis and the church fathers reflect a great deal on the story. Indeed, it is the central thesis of this book that neither Jewish nor Christian interpretations can be understood properly without reference to the other.

The primary purpose of this study is not to describe rabbinic or patristic interpretations. Nor is it to make moral judgements on texts of dispute and polemic. Rather, its goal is to explore Christian influence on Jewish exegesis (and vice versa) and consider whether Jewish interpreters interacted with Christian interpreters (and vice versa). In other words, I ask to what extent

[12] 'Dabru Emet' (2000) http://www.icjs.org/what/njsp/dabruemet.html.

it is possible to demonstrate that a two-way encounter took place between interpreters of the Bible.

Bound by the Bible assumes that Jews and Christians share a sacred text. It asks whether they also share a common exegetical tradition. One might argue against the existence of a shared sacred text because the Jewish canon consists of the twofold Torah (the Written and the Oral Torah). The rabbinic writings, alongside the Hebrew Scriptures (and especially the Pentateuch), make up this canon while the two Testaments make up the Christian canon.[13] Is it possible to study a common exegetical tradition if no shared text exists? Yet, although Jews and Christians developed distinct and separate literary traditions, a significant overlap existed and continues to exist, most notably in the area of biblical texts and common biblical stories such as Genesis 22. It is this overlap that provides an opportunity to ask whether and to what extent Jews and Christians encountered each other on the level of biblical interpretation.

Nevertheless, one must be aware of the limitations of an overlap. For instance, it is likely that a Jew would have little understanding of Christological debates, which took place at the Council of Nicea and elsewhere. On the other side of the same coin, it is also unlikely that a Christian in third-century Galilee would possess an appreciation of the halakhic sensibilities of rabbinic Judaism. However, the extent to which Jews and Christians exhibited knowledge of each other's biblical interpretations appears a fruitful area of exploration because the biblical narrative is important to and is shared by both religions. *Bound by the Bible* challenges the assumption that a rabbinic Jew might not have understood some of the biblical interpretations found in the *Catena* of the sixth-century Palestinian Christian Procopius, as well as the homilies of Origen. Similarly, it challenges the assumption that a contemporary Christian could not have understood some of the rabbinic interpretations found in the midrashim. In other words, the possibility of an exegetical encounter exists because Jews and Christians share a similar and somewhat overlapping heritage.

In the history of Jewish–Christian relations, arguments over this heritage have led to fierce dispute. Even today Jews and Christians cannot agree on a title for this heritage, although it seems that the term 'Hebrew Bible' is becoming more commonly used in scholarly and theological writings. The reason for this is clear: for Christians, the Hebrew Bible is understood with reference to the life and death of Christ, whereas for Jews it is generally read alongside traditional Jewish writings such as the rabbinic literature.

[13] Neusner 1987:114–45.

Even though Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible are put to different uses, some interpretations may offer examples of mutual awareness, influence and even encounter. The Binding of Isaac provides us with a text that is of significance for both Judaism and Christianity. In the following chapters we will discover whether exegetical encounters took place in the first six centuries CE and consider to what extent echoes may still be heard and how they continue to influence the Jewish–Christian relationship today.

Introduction

Did an exegetical encounter take place in Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 22.1–14 over many hundreds of years? By the term 'exegetical encounter' I mean that a Jewish interpretation either influenced, or was influenced by, a Christian interpretation and vice versa. The term does not imply that Jewish and Christian exegetes met to discuss their interpretations (although this might not be ruled out); rather, an exegetical encounter indicates awareness by one exegete of the exegetical tradition of another, revealed in the interpretations.

In my view, the existence (or non-existence) of an exegetical encounter sheds light on the extent of interaction between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity. It may also have relevance for the contemporary Christian–Jewish relationship because the study of the Bible as well as Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation is becoming increasingly popular in the present dialogue between Christians and Jews.

In particular, I consider the writings of the Greek church fathers and the Palestinian rabbis before the Islamic conquest of Palestine, so chosen because writings after this period possess the additional and complicating factor of the possible influence of Islam. Although I refer to the writings of the Latin fathers as well as to the Syriac writings, and also make reference to the Babylonian Talmud, the focus is primarily on the Palestinian tradition and the works of the Greek fathers. The reason for this is that, if examples of an exegetical encounter are to be discovered, evidence will be found in these writings. This in turn is because many of the Jews who produced the Palestinian writings either inhabited the same cities as Christians or visited areas in which there was a significant Christian presence. Palestinian rabbis are often portrayed as being in discussion with the *minim* (heretics), a term that sometimes refers to Christians, and

it is usual for these discussions to revolve around the interpretation of Scripture.[1]

The use of biblical interpretation in the study of Jewish–Christian relations demands careful attention to methodology. Stemberger has warned against the use of exegesis in the study of early Jewish–Christian relations because, he argues, whilst Jews and Christians shared a common Bible, a number of problems exist in demonstrating exegetical contact. These include the particular interest of Jews and Christians in different books of the Bible, such as Christian interest in the prophetical writings in contrast to Jewish interest in the Pentateuch. For example, Christian commentators more commonly cited verses from Isaiah than Jews and Jewish commentators more commonly cited verses from Leviticus than Christians.

Jews and Christians also possessed different texts of the Bible and consequently Christian interpretation depended on the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation from the second century BCE, while the rabbis relied on the Hebrew Masoretic Text.[2] The LXX was used originally by Jews living in the Diaspora but was taken over by the early church.

There is also a danger of an over-reliance on parallels, which can be both vague and misleading. The existence of parallels between rabbinic and patristic interpretations provides the basis for the modern study of the Jewish–Christian encounter in late antiquity, which began in the late nineteenth century. Scholarship at that time was almost wholly dependent upon uncovering parallels in the writings of the church fathers and the rabbis. As a result of their demonstration of the existence of parallels, scholars argued that interaction between Christianity and Judaism was common. The propensity to rely on parallels to a certain extent continues in contemporary scholarship and, as we shall shortly note, can be noted in recent works. However, parallels do not, in themselves, prove the existence of an exegetical encounter in the writings of the church fathers and rabbis because they might have resulted from earlier writings, such as those of Philo and Josephus, or might be found in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Parallels might also have arisen as a result of similar methods and presuppositions in the interpretation of the same biblical text. Sandmel has warned against 'parallelomania', which he defines as an 'extravagance among scholars, which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages

[1] According to Kalmin (1996:288–9) these exegetical writings are primarily Palestinian because non-Jewish awareness of Scripture in Babylonia was limited.
[2] Stemberger 1996a:571–3.

and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing from an inevitable or predetermined direction'.[3]

Another difficulty is the issue of dating. The historical background of a text – primarily, but not only, the rabbinic text – is often unknown, as a consequence of a complicated process of redaction as well as censorship.[4] The unreliability of dating interpretations undermines a dependency on parallels and has resulted in unsuccessful attempts at identifying the historical sequence of interpretations. Thus, for example, many of the previous studies of Genesis 22.1–14 have focused on whether certain rabbinic interpretations were in existence before or after the lifetime of Jesus in order to determine whether they might have influenced Jesus and the formation of Christianity. In fact, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to have any certainty – one way, or the other.

In response to these problems I develop a series of criteria, based upon a study of biblical interpretation, which identify occurrences of an exegetical encounter. Although individually none of the criteria conclusively proves its existence, their occurrence, at the very least, suggests its possibility. Indeed, as the number of criteria fulfilled increases, the likelihood of an exegetical encounter likewise increases.

The criteria are not dependent on the existence of parallels in the writings of the Palestinian rabbis and the Greek church fathers, or on the dating of the interpretations. In addition, they are applied to interpretations of a text that is not only of significant interest to both Jews and Christians, but that is also very similar in the LXX translation as well as in the Masoretic Text. *Bound by the Bible*, therefore, sheds light on a question that has troubled scholars of Jewish–Christian relations in late antiquity: to what extent, if at all, did there exist an exegetical relationship between Judaism and Christianity?

PREVIOUS APPROACHES

Three approaches can be observed in previous studies of Jewish–Christian relations in late antiquity. Each tackles a different aspect of the Jewish–Christian encounter – polemic, proselytism and studies of individual church fathers – and each has failed to produce a consensus.

[3] Sandmel 1961:1. Although he directs these comments to studies of rabbinic literature, the New Testament, Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls, the same lesson applies to the (mis)use of parallels in the patristic and rabbinic writings.

[4] For a summary of the complexities of dating rabbinic texts, see the articles by Schäfer (1986, 1989) and Milikowsky (1988).