

Lecture 24: The Hebrew Bible in Christianity.

Reading:

Oxford Companion to Christian Thought s.v. "Old Testament" (by Hugh S. Pypers);

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lecture> (somewhat technical, get the gist);

http://www.vocationnetwork.org/ask_alice/53 (very untechnical).

Some important dates:

early 30's career of Jesus

early and mid 50's letters and travels of Paul (seven genuine letters of Paul: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Romans, Philemon, 1 and 2 Corinthians)

70 Jerusalem temple destroyed by the Romans

c. 70 Gospel of Mark

80's Gospels of Matthew and Luke

ca. 90-100 gospel of John

90's the book of Revelation

ca. 100 beginnings of Christian literature that will not find its way into the NT (the "apostolic fathers" like the Epistle to the Corinthians by Clement of Rome or the Didache)

112 the Roman government takes notice of the Christians: letter of Pliny the Younger, governor of Pontus and Bithynia, to the emperor Trajan concerning Christians

ca. 120 the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, first appearance of the term "Christianity"

ca. 130 Letter of Barnabas, allegory of Torah Law

ca. 160 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, argues that OT is a Christian book

ca. 160 Marcion in Rome, who upholds the God of Love (NT) against the God of Law (OT)

ca. 178 Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies*, speaks of a New Testament similar to ours with our four gospels

ca. 200 the appearance of the Mishnah

Christianity begins as a kind of Judaism; a sect; strongly imbued with apocalyptic spirit (a sense of living at the end time).

The Jewish foundations of Christianity are evident (many of them still evident):

- Belief in the one God, creator of heaven and earth
- Denial of polytheism/paganism
- Affirmation of divine providence, including afterlife, resurrection, final judgment, messiah
- Covenantal relationship with God
- Affirmation of the truth and divine origin of the Hebrew Bible (Ten commandments, the greatest commandment), esp. the prophets
- Lection in church, lectionary cycle, juxtaposition of OT with NT
 - ♦ The biblical liturgical year, modified: Sabbath/Sunday, Easter/Passover
 - ♦ Psalms as a book of Christian liturgy

- Possession of “Jewish” books:
 - ✦ the Hebrew bible (altho Christians quickly lose Hebrew),
 - ✦ the apocryphal books (these are Jewish books but many of them not written in Hebrew or not hiding the fact of their origin in post-Persian period, hence not in Hebrew canon),
 - ✦ general Jewish literature (e.g. Philo, Josephus)
- and much else!

So, Christianity as it emerges in the second century derives from second temple Judaism, just as rabbinic Judaism does.

Rabbinic Judaism reads the Bible through the lens of midrash/Oral Torah/inherited custom/scholasticism, the Mishnah; Christianity reads the Bible through the lens of belief in Christ, the NT.

Rabbis : Mishnah :: Christians : NT.

But Christians develop quickly (by the second century CE) a not-Judaism:

In population: gentile

In theology: worship of Jesus as Lord,
cosmic dualism

In approach to the laws of the Torah: self-consciously critical

In self-identity: sense of newness; replacement (supersession) of the old.

Population: gentile. Demographic shift began in first century CE, associated primarily with Paul, story told in the book of Acts.

- Appeal to the prophecies esp. Second Isaiah, universal knowledge of God.

Theology: worship of Jesus as Lord and ultimately as (part of) God; identification of Jesus with divine figure “Son of Man” from Daniel 7 (Mark 13:24-27) or with some other divine intermediary, e.g. the Logos (John 1); cf. Christ hymn in the Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11.

[hard to find logos theology in post-70 Judaism]

Cosmic dualism: overwhelming sense of sin (Original Sin), of this world being under the control of evil forces antagonistic to God (Satan, the devil, the great dragon: Revelation 12:9), of the necessity of salvation to escape the dominion of sin and the torments of the final judgment, of a great battle with the forces of evil. This dualism good/evil, next world/this world, ultimately in Christianity becomes identified with body (bad)/spirit (good). Hard to find any of this in the Judaism that develops after 70 CE.

Self-consciously critical approach to the laws of the Torah:

Endless debate in Christianity, ancient and modern, about the status of the Old Testament (see nice survey by Pyper).

Of the four parts of the Old Testament, Christians have no trouble with narratives (histories), prophecies, or wisdom.

They have trouble with the laws (the Law) and develop various approaches:

- Laws are valid only if confirmed by NT: e.g. Paul in Romans 1 confirms Leviticus' prohibition of male homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20
- Laws are valid only if they are not suspended by the NT (e.g. Mark 7 seems to set aside food laws; Paul in Galatians sets aside circumcision)
- Laws are valid only if they are "moral," not ritual

Justin Martyr (ca. 160 CE) argues that the laws of the Torah are of three sorts:

- Those that are true and are to be observed by Christians (Love the Lord your God; Love your neighbor as yourself)
- Those that are true only in a metaphorical sense, as allegory or typology. Christians are not to observe their literal sense. (Sacrificial goat of the Day of Atonement represents Christ.)
- Those that have no moral value, were intended for the Jews solely, in recognition of their wickedness and obstinacy

Self-identity:

Sense that a new covenant has superseded the old (doctrine of supersessionism). Letter to the Hebrews 8:13, *In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete; and what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*, commenting on Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Christians sometimes see themselves in the Torah, sometimes not.

As a rule, when Israelites are sinning, Christians posit distance between themselves and the text; when the Israelites enjoy divine favor, Christians see themselves in the text.

This self-conscious newness is characteristically Christian throughout the centuries.