

(ii) The Basic Story

The foundation story of Judaism, to which all other stories were subsidiary, was of course the story in the Bible. Israel had told this story, one way or another, pretty much as long as she had been Israel. As the biblical tradition grew and developed, the stories it contained, and the single story which holds them all together, grew with it, and the different elements interacted upon one another in a multitude of ways.² Seen from the perspective of a first-century Jew, innocent of critical questionings about the origins of the different traditions, the basic story concerned the creator god and the world, and focused upon Israel's place as the covenant people of the former placed in the midst of the latter.

Thus, the call of the patriarchs was set against the backcloth of creation and fall. As we shall see in the next chapter, Abraham was seen as the divine answer to the problem of Adam. The descent into Egypt and the dramatic rescue under the leadership of Moses formed the initial climax of the story, setting the theme of liberation as one of the major motifs for the whole, and posing a puzzle which later Jews would reflect on in new ways: if Israel was liberated from Egypt, and placed in her own land, why is everything not now perfect? The conquest of the land, and the period of the Judges, then formed the backcloth to and preparation for the next climax, the establishment of the monarchy, and particularly of the house of David. David was the new Abraham, the new Moses, through whom Israel's god would complete what was begun earlier. Again came the puzzle: David's successors were (mostly) a bad lot, the kingdom was divided, the prophets went unheeded, and Judah eventually went into exile.³ Promises of a new exodus arose naturally in such a context, and led to the ambiguous new beginnings (or were they false dawns?) under the Davidic ruler Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, and under Ezra and Nehemiah.⁴ The biblical period (normally so-called) runs out without a sense of an ending, except one projected into the future. This story still needs to be completed.

The point can be made graphically by considering the juxtaposition of two of the great story-telling psalms (remembering, of course, how prominent the psalms were in Israel's worship, and how powerful therefore their tellings of Israel's story must have been in shaping the first-century Jewish worldview). Psalm 105 retells, in classical style, the story of the patriarchs and the exodus, concluding with no ambiguity but only a continuing task: Israel must therefore praise YHWH and keep his commandments.⁵ But Psalm 106 tells the story differently: the exodus was itself an ambiguous time, with much disobedience and judgment on Israel herself, and the period of living in Canaan, similarly, was deeply flawed, and resulted in exile. Nevertheless, Israel's god remembered the covenant and caused her captors to pity her; but the story was not yet com-

plete. 'Save us, O YHWH our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.' Until that happens, the great story is not yet complete, is still full of ambiguity.⁶

The great story of the Hebrew scriptures was therefore inevitably read in the second-temple period as a story in search of a conclusion. This ending would have to incorporate the full liberation and redemption of Israel, an event which had not happened as long as Israel was being oppressed, a prisoner in her own land. And this ending would have to be *appropriate*: it should correspond to the rest of the story, and grow out of it in obvious continuity and conformity. We can see what this appropriateness might mean by taking an example of its opposite. Josephus' retelling of the entire story, in the *Antiquities*, provides an ending which destroys the narrative grammar of the rest: Israel's god goes over to the Romans, Jerusalem is destroyed, Judaism dispersed. That is like retelling the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk* in such a way that Jack's mother murders her returning son, takes the gold and goes off to marry the giant himself. If Josephus still believed in a future ending in which everything would again be reversed, he kept it very much to himself.

A different, and in some ways more orthodox, reading of Israel's story is given in Sirach 44–50, written around the start of the second century BC. 'Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generation', the passage begins (44.1), and in one sense the whole section is a general account of Israel's ancestors such as might win admiration from a non-Jewish reader.⁷ But it is still Israel's story that is being told. And the passage ends (50.1–21) with a glowing portrait of one who was not an ancestor at all, but most likely a contemporary of the writer: the high priest Simeon II, son of Jonathan ('Onias' in the Greek), who held office from 219–196 BC. The message is clear: Israel's story finds its perfect conclusion in the splendid and ordered worship of her god in the Temple. This fits perfectly with the theology of chapter 24 (the divine Wisdom coming to dwell, as the Shekinah, in Zion, and turning out to be identified with the Torah itself), and more or less obviates the need for eschatology, whether political or otherwise.⁸ Israel's story has arrived where it should be.

This settled and quietly triumphant retelling of the story could not last, of course, when confronted with the ravages of Antiochus Epiphanes. The Maccabees thereupon offer another example of Israel's story with a new ending. Their attempt to tell their own story as the triumphant conclusion to the whole story of Israel (particularly in 1 Maccabees) was a *coup d'état* in some ways as daring and successful as the one they launched against Antiochus Epiphanes: they hijacked the story-line of Israel's future hope, and claimed that this hope had been achieved through them. The ambiguities inherent in their regime were enough to cause other groups to retell the story differently: the Has-

² See Koch 1969; Fishbane 1985, esp. 281–440.

³ This puzzle is stated at its starkest in Ps. 89.

⁴ cp. the enthusiasm for these two in Zech. 3–4, which seems to have waned in Zech. 9–14.

⁵ Ps. 105.1–6, 44f.

⁶ Ps. 106.47. The final verse (48) of the canonical psalm rounds off the story, and the fourth 'book' of the Psalter, in a way that, though justified by the strength of the hope, must not be allowed to obscure the puzzle and the longing of the rest of the psalm.

⁷ See Frost 1987; Lane 1991, 2.316f.

⁸ Sir. 50.23f. may be an exception, but it looks more like a traditional and generalized prayer rather than an organic part of the writer's thought.

monean regime was corrupt, and Israel's god would overthrow it and set up the right one instead.⁹

These three examples of the many different retellings of Israel's story show that Jews of the period did not simply think of the biblical traditions atomistically, but were able to conceive of the story as a whole, and to be regularly looking for its proper conclusion. Summary forms of the story are found in many biblical passages, as well as in many second-temple works;¹⁰ and some whole books retell the story, or foundational parts of it, in such a way as to point up both the sense of its not having reached its proper conclusion and the urgency of living appropriately while waiting for this ending to come.

Thus, for example, the book of *Jubilees* tells the story of the patriarchs with an eye to Israel's future, warning the writer's contemporaries in the second century BC that they should keep strictly to the sabbaths, the festivals, the practice of circumcision and the solar calendar (as opposed to the lunar one then current in mainstream Judaism). If they do this, the story will reach its true ending. Isaac addresses Esau and Jacob in the following words:

Remember the Lord, my sons, the God of Abraham your father, and how I too made him my God and served him in righteousness and joy, that he might multiply you and increase the number of your descendants till they were like the stars of heaven, and that he might establish you on the earth as the plant of righteousness which will not be uprooted for all generations for ever.¹¹

Israel must remain faithful to all the requirements of the covenant. Only then will the story which began with Abraham and Isaac reach its proper conclusion.

The same story is told from a very different perspective, and in a very different style, by chapters 10–19 of the (roughly contemporary) *Wisdom of Solomon*. The thrust of this retelling is that Wisdom, who was given to the first humans (10.1–4), was then specifically active in the history of Israel, from the time of the patriarchs (10.5–14), and in the events of the exodus (10.15–11.14, 16.1–19.22). These accounts are full of hints as to how the writer thinks the heirs of this tradition should live as a result: they should avoid that paganism which mirrors the practices of both Egypt and Canaan (11.15–15.19). This paganism, of course, was designed to correspond to that which was faced as a pressing problem by the Jews of the second-temple period.

The book of *Pseudo-Philo*, which belongs in genre somewhere between *Jubilees* and apocalyptic, and in time to the first century AD, tells the same story, but brings it up as far as the death of Saul.¹² Once again there is a strong

moralizing tone, as the readers maintain their obedience while waiting for the day of deliverance to dawn, as it surely will.¹³ Hannah, Samuel's mother, rejoices over the birth of her child not just for his own sake but because of the coming kingdom:

Behold the word has been fulfilled,
and the prophecy has come to pass.
And these words will endure
until they give the horn to his anointed one
and power be present at the throne of his king.¹⁴

A different perspective again is provided by the various apocalyptic writings, which we will study in more detail in chapter 10. Here world history, and particularly Israel's history, is arranged into epochs, with the last epoch about to dawn. In this, as in many things, 'apocalyptic' is not to be marked off from the much wider Jewish tradition. The apocalyptic picture of Israel's suffering and redemption, though often drawn in lurid colours, remains thematically a direct linear descendant of the exodus tradition. On virtually all sides there is a sense that the history of the creator, his world and his covenant people is going somewhere, but that it has not yet arrived there. The creator will act again, as he did in the past, to deliver Israel from her plight and to deal with the evil in the world. The multiple tellings of this basic story witness powerfully to every aspect of the Jewish worldview.

(iii) The Smaller Stories

Within this tradition of telling the large story, letting it point forwards in various ways to its own conclusion, there was a rich Jewish tradition of sub-stories. These can be seen in two forms, which criss-cross and overlap. On the one hand, there are explicit tellings of one small part of the larger story, often extensively elaborated, and designed to function as a paradigm or example of a general principle which may be abstracted from the main story. This is a process which takes place within the biblical narratives themselves, as we see in the obvious example of the book of *Ruth*, which falls within the period of the Judges. On the other hand, there are stories which form little or no part of the biblical story, but are loosely attached, and gain their thrust not from explaining something in the Bible but from their underlying narrative structure and meaning.

An example of the first type of story is *Joseph and Aseneth*, a work probably from the second-temple period.¹⁵ This book recounts, in the form of a theological romance, the betrothal and marriage of Joseph to the daughter of

⁹ On retellings of the story within the NT see Part IV below.

¹⁰ Compare the summary 'histories of Israel' in e.g. Dt. 6.20–4; 28.5–9; Josh. 24.2–13; Pss. 78, 105, 106, 135, 136; Neh. 9.6–37; Ezek. 20.4–44; Jud. 5.5–21; 1 Macc. 2.32–60; 3 Macc. 2.2–20; Wisd. 10.1–12.27; Jos. *Ant.* 3.86f.; 4.43–5; *War* 5.379–419; CD 2.14–6.11; 4 Ezra 3.4–36; 4.29–31. Cf. too Mk. 12.1–12; Ac. 7.2–53; 13.16–41; Rom. 9–11; Heb. 11.2–12.2 (on whose parallels with Sir. see Frost 1987, and ch. 13 below); Jas. 5.10–11. I owe some of these references to (an earlier version of) Hill 1992, 100, as also the further ref. to Holz 1968, 100f.; and some others to Skehan and Di Lella 1987, 499f.

¹¹ *Jub.* 36.6 (tr. Charles, rev. Rabin, in Sparks 1984).

¹² The book may be found in Charlesworth 1985, 297–377 (tr. D. J. Harrington).

¹³ See Nickelsburg 1984, 108f.

¹⁴ *Ps-Philo* 51.6. In the light of this passage, and of the way in which the book leads up to the death of Saul (i.e. the prelude to David's becoming king), I find it difficult to agree with Harrington (in Charlesworth 1985, 301) that the book is uninterested in the future Messiah.

¹⁵ Charlesworth 1985, 177–247 (tr. C. Burchard).

the pagan Egyptian priest Potiphra.¹⁶ The subject is 'historical', but the message is reasonably clear. Israel and the pagans are totally distinct: inter-marriage, or even lesser contact, can only take place if the pagan in question converts. The book explains a puzzle in the Bible: how could a good and wise Jew like Joseph marry a pagan girl? At the same time, it addresses its contemporaries with a message about their own covenant loyalty and hope.

A whole genre devoted to the first type of sub-story is of course the Targumim.¹⁷ These Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible are, in their present form, much later than our period, but it is increasingly thought that parts of them at least go back to earlier, quite probably first-century, prototypes. Certainly some Targumic activity is early, as fragments from Qumran attest. The necessity for an Aramaic version of scripture in the first century is as obvious as the need for modern translations of the Bible in the twentieth; and, though some of the Targums stuck quite close to the original text, others were very free in their midrashic adaptation of it, applying the biblical story to issues relevant in much later periods.¹⁸ The evident popularity of the Targumim is further demonstration that retelling bits of the Jewish story was widely practised as an effective way of reinforcing the basic worldview.

An example of the second type of sub-story, a non-biblical tale which nevertheless exemplifies the narrative grammar of the biblical story and stories, is the apocryphal book of Susannah. The heroine is threatened by Jewish elders, who place her honour and her life in jeopardy. Daniel comes to her rescue, and, in a dramatic lawcourt scene, Susannah is vindicated and rescued from her enemies, who are themselves killed in her place. The book thus shares the pattern of the stories in the book of Daniel, to which it is attached in the Septuagint: Jews under threat will be vindicated against their enemies.¹⁹ The twist to this tale is that here the enemies are not pagans: they are elders of Israel. This turns the normal Jewish anti-pagan polemic against Jews themselves, as can be seen when Daniel rounds on one of the elders with 'You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah.'²⁰ Nickelsburg suggests that the book reflects the pressures and temptations that could arise within a Jewish community of the period, and this of course may well be true.²¹ But the storyline is deeper than a mere moralistic tale. It is the regular story of Israel, persecuted but vindicated, but now told as the story of a *group within Israel*, here 'represented' in the literary sense²² by a single individual, persecuted by those in power precisely within Israel, but finally vindicated. It is, in other words, the

¹⁶ cf. Gen. 41.45; he is called Pentephres in *Jos. & As.* 1.3, etc.

¹⁷ See Schürer 1.99–114; 2.339–55 (on expansion of biblical teaching in general); and now esp. Strack and Stemberger 1991 [1982].

¹⁸ An extreme example is the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen. 21.21, mentioning the names of Muhammad's wife and daughter.

¹⁹ See ch. 10 below. As Nickelsburg 1984, 38 points out, this pattern, of the persecution and vindication of the wise or righteous one, is a regular theme in works as diverse as Gen. 34, Esther, Ahikar and Wisd. 2–5, and has also informed the passion narratives in the gospels, and the story of Stephen's martyrdom in Ac. 6–7. We might add 2 Macc. 7 and other passages.

²⁰ Sus. 56.

²¹ Nickelsburg 1984, 38.

²² See ch. 10 below.

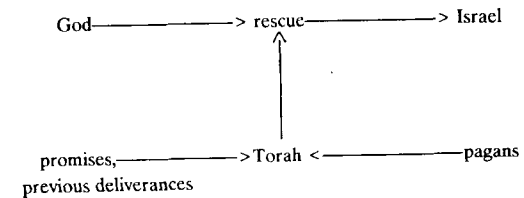
sort of story which would powerfully reinforce the worldview of a Jewish sect or party: Israel's present leaders are corrupt, and no better than pagans, but we are the true Israel who will be vindicated by our god and, perhaps, by a new Daniel. The book of Daniel itself, with its story of Jewish vindication after oppression at the hands of pagans, would be read at the time of the Maccabees as providing powerful support for the Hasmonean regime. The story of Susannah, when attached to the book of Daniel, subverts this message. The new rulers are themselves becoming paganized, and are oppressing the real faithful Israelites.

(iv) Conclusion

How then does the basic Jewish story 'work', in terms of the analysis of stories outlined in chapter 3? As we shall see in the next chapter, the focal point of the worldview is clearly the creator's covenant with Israel, and hence, in a period of political oppression and tension, his rescue of Israel. This is common to all the retellings of the Jewish story that come from such a context. But the stories diverge, characterizing the different groups and sects, when they come to the question: how is rescue to be accomplished?

One basic form of the Jewish story would look like this:

Initial Sequence:

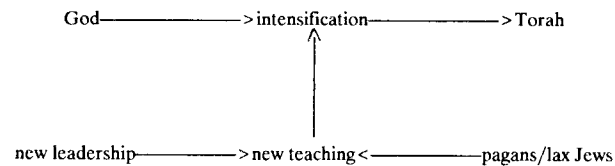


God has given Israel his Torah, so that by keeping it she may be his people, may be rescued from her pagan enemies, and confirmed as ruler in her own land. This, substantially, is how the story of the book of Joshua works; it is likely that a good deal of the rest of the Bible would also have been read in this way in the first century. It is certainly how the stories of Esther and of the Maccabees, celebrated at Purim and Hannukah, work: those who are faithful to the covenant god and his Torah will be rescued from their enemies. Some of the post-biblical writings, such as Judith, have substantially this shape, too. We have seen that the same pattern could be repeated with a dark and potentially tragic variation: Israel's rulers appear under the category of 'opponents' in Susannah, and of course in the implicit story told throughout the Essene writings.

The problem in the first century was that Israel had now been waiting a long time for rescue, and it had not been forthcoming. How, then, could Torah

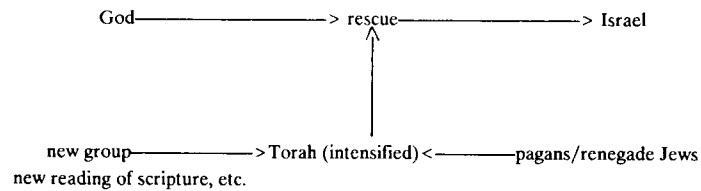
be made to do the job it was supposed to be doing? How could it be helped in its work of rescuing Israel? The answer is that it was to be intensified, by this or that programme:

Topical Sequence:



The last line allows for various options.²³ The Essenes believed that Israel's god had provided the means for the true intensification of Torah in their new community: this was how Israel would finally be rescued. The Pharisees believed that their brand of fidelity to the traditions of the fathers was the divinely appointed programme of Torah-intensification, and thus the means of Israel's rescue. No doubt other schemes would fit in here as well, not least the explicit revolutionary movements. Messianic hopes could easily become part of this scheme, as in the Scrolls. The result would be the final achievement of Israel's aspiration:

Final Sequence

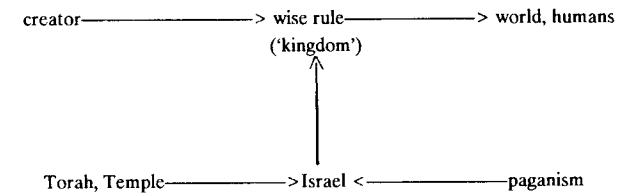


This was the resolution of the story as seen by some Jews of Jesus' day, not necessarily of course so clearly, but under the guise of various stories, and of poetry, prophecy, dreams and less articulate hopes and longings. It is this story, basically, that is articulated in apocalyptic, in legend, in tales of martyrs, in festival and symbol. Such Jewish stories served to encapsulate the worldview. Israel is the people of the creator god, in exile, awaiting release; Israel's god must become king, and rule or judge the nations; at that time, those who remain faithful to this god and his Torah will be vindicated.

There are, of course, all sorts of other dimensions to the story. It is never quite as simple as a single diagram. There is, in particular, the question of the long-term purpose of Israel: why was she called into being in the first place?

²³ For details, see ch. 7 above.

What was the creator up to in calling Abraham? If this purpose relates to the rest of the world, to the other nations, how is this relation to be conceived? There is, behind the story which focuses on Israel's rescue, a sense of an older and more fundamental story, which goes like this:



Israel is to be the creator's means of bringing his wise order to the created world. In some Old Testament passages, this is expressed, as we shall see, in terms of a pilgrimage of nations to Zion. During the period we are considering, it finds expression in terms of the defeat and punishment of the nations (e.g. the *Psalms of Solomon*). The world was made for the sake of Israel;²⁴ Israel is to be the true humanity, the creator's vicegerent in his ruling of the world. When YHWH becomes king, Israel will be his right-hand man. In so far as this wider story-line was in the mind of Jewish thinkers of the period, the sequence we sketched above must be seen as subsidiary. The overall plan has gone wrong, and the hero of the larger story (Israel) has been imprisoned by the villain (paganism). The rescue of the initial hero must now become the new major story-line. The larger story remains in view, but usually only in terms of the world being brought into subjection to the divine rule, probably mediated through Israel and/or her Messiah. For many Jews, however, it was the smaller story that occupied their minds: they did not need to think beyond the rescue and restoration of which some of their key stories, such as the Passover haggadah, reminded them year by year.

Israel's stories are therefore to be understood, at their deepest level, not merely as moralistic tales or pious legends designed to glorify heroes and heroines of old. They embody, in a rich variety of ways, the worldview which in its most basic form remains anchored to the historical story of the world and Israel as a whole. The creator has called Israel to be his people. She is at present suffering, but must hold fast to his covenant code, and he will rescue her. There will come a time when, in a final recapitulation of the smaller stories, Israel will arrive at the conclusion of the larger one. This analysis of the Jewish story-line is not only of interest in itself. In helping us to understand how the first-century Jewish worldview functioned, and how the biblical stories which reinforced it would have been heard, it also gives us a grid against which we can measure the alternative stories told, implicitly and explicitly, by Jesus, Paul and the evangelists, and to see their points of convergence and divergence.

²⁴ e.g. 4 Ezra 6.55.

3. Symbols

(i) Introduction

The stories which articulate a worldview focus upon the symbols which bring that worldview into visible and tangible reality. There is no problem in identifying the four key symbols which functioned in this way in relation to the Jewish stories. At the heart of Jewish national life, for better or worse, stood the Temple. All around, looking to the Temple as its centre, lay the Land which the covenant god had promised to give to Israel, which was thus his by right and hers by promise. Both Temple and Land were regulated by the Torah, which formed the covenant charter for all that Israel was and hoped for, and whose importance increased in proportion to one's geographical distance from Land and Temple. Closely related to all three was the fact of Jewish ethnicity: the little race, divided by exile and diaspora, knew itself to be a family whose identity had to be maintained at all costs. Temple, Land, Torah and racial identity were the key symbols which anchored the first-century Jewish worldview in everyday life.

(ii) Temple

The Temple was the focal point of every aspect of Jewish national life.²⁵ Local synagogues and schools of Torah in other parts of Palestine, and in the Diaspora, in no way replaced it, but gained their significance from their implicit relation to it.²⁶ Its importance at every level can hardly be over-estimated:

In the eyes of the people it constituted primarily the divine dwelling-place of the God of Israel which set them apart from other nations . . . the offering of the sacrifices and the ritual cleansing involved atoned for the individual's transgressions and served as a framework for his spiritual elevation and purification . . . The Temple, its vessels and even the high priest's vestments were depicted as representing the entire universe and the heavenly hosts . . . With the destruction of the Temple the image of the universe was rendered defective, the established framework of the nation was undermined and a wall of steel formed a barrier between Israel and its heavenly Father.²⁷

The Temple was thus regarded as the place where YHWH lived and ruled in the midst of Israel, and where, through the sacrificial system which reached its climax in the great festivals, he lived in grace, forgiving them, restoring them, and enabling them to be cleansed of defilement and so to continue as his

²⁵ See esp. Safrai 1976b; Barker 1991; Sanders 1992, chs. 5–8. Among older works cf. e.g. McKelvey 1969, chs. 1–4. On the role of the Temple in Jewish economic life cf. e.g. Broshi 1987.

²⁶ Safrai 1976b, 904f. This means that synagogues, like the Temple itself, were as much local socio-political meeting-places as purely 'religious' ones: cf. e.g. Jos. *Life* 276–9.

²⁷ Safrai, *ibid.* Although some of the evidence for these beliefs is Talmudic, enough is found in Josephus and Philo to make the summary of great value for our purposes. See too Neusner 1979, 22 on the Temple as the vital nexus between God and Israel.

people.²⁸ Defilement, of course, was not a matter of individual piety alone, but of communal life: uncleanness, which could be contracted in a large number of ways, meant disassociation from the people of the covenant god. Forgiveness, and consequent reintegration into the community of Israel, was attained by visiting the Temple and taking part in the appropriate forms of ritual and worship, and it was natural that the Temple should thus also be the centre of communal celebration.

But the Temple was not simply the 'religious' centre of Israel—even supposing that a distinction between religion and other departments of life could make any sense at the period in question. It was not, shall we say, the equivalent of Westminster Abbey, with 'Buckingham Palace' and the 'Houses of Parliament' being found elsewhere. The Temple combined in itself the functions of all three—religion, national figurehead and government—and also included what we think of as the City, the financial and economic world.²⁹ It also included, for that matter, the main slaughterhouse and butcher's guild: butchery was one of the main skills a priest had to possess. Allowing for the fact that the Romans were the *de facto* rulers of the country, the Temple was for Jews the centre of every aspect of national existence. The high priest, who was in charge of the Temple, was as important a political figure as he was a religious one. When we study the city-plan of ancient Jerusalem, the significance of the Temple stands out at once, since it occupies a phenomenally large proportion (about 25%) of the entire city. Jerusalem was not, like Corinth for example, a large city with lots of little temples dotted here and there. It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it.

For all these reasons, it is not surprising that the Temple became the focus of many of the controversies which divided Judaism in this period. An extreme position is represented by the Essenes, who probably had a community in Jerusalem at some stages, as well as at Qumran.³⁰ As we have seen, they rejected the post-Maccabean Temple regime as illegitimate in theory and corrupt in practice, and looked forward to the day when a new Temple, officiated over by a properly constituted high priest, would be built according to the proper specifications.³¹ The Pharisees objected in principle to the Has-monean priesthood and its successors, but were prepared to tolerate it for the sake of being able to continue with the prescribed Temple rituals, as is clear from the fact that they, unlike the Essenes, continued to attend.

Dissatisfaction with the first-century Temple was also fuelled by the fact that, although it was certainly among the most beautiful buildings ever constructed, it was built by Herod.³² Only the true King, the proper successor of

²⁸ On Temple-worship and its significance see now particularly Sanders 1992, chs. 5–8.

²⁹ This is illustrated in e.g. Pss. 46, 48. Readers from outside England can, I hope, translate the symbols I have used into their own equivalents: for the USA, the White House, Capitol Hill, the National Cathedral and Wall Street are the obvious start.

³⁰ Josephus mentions the 'gate of the Essenes' in *War* 5.145.

³¹ See ch. 7 below. On evidence for, and attitudes to, corruption in the Temple in this period see particularly Evans 1989a, 1989b.

³² On Herod's rebuilding of the Temple, see Jos. *Ant.* 15.380–425, and Schürer 1.292, 308f.; 2.57–8.

Solomon the original Temple-builder, had the right to build the Temple (see chapter 10 below); and whatever Herod was, he was not the true King. The last four prophetic books in the canon (Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi), and in its own way the work of the Chronicler, all point to the restoration of the Temple under the leadership of a royal (Davidic), or possibly a priestly, figure.³³ Only when this work was done would the new age arrive. Conversely, if the new age was not yet present, as it was not (or else why would the Romans still be ruling the Land, and why had the Messiah not come?), any building that might happen to occupy the Temple mount could not possibly be the eschatological Temple itself. There was therefore a residual ambiguity about the second Temple in its various forms. Many Jews regarded it with suspicion and distrust. It nevertheless remained, *de facto* at least, the focal point of national, cultural and religious life.

The Temple thus formed in principle the heart of Judaism, in the full metaphorical sense: it was the organ from which there went out to the body of Judaism, in Palestine and in the Diaspora, the living and healing presence of the covenant god. The Temple was thus also, equally importantly, the focal point of the Land which the covenant god had promised to give to his people.

(iii) Land

The virtual absence of the Land as a major theme in the New Testament has led most New Testament scholarship to bypass it as a topic for full discussion.³⁴ But if we are to understand first-century Judaism we must rank Land, along with Temple and Torah, as one of the major symbols. It was YHWH's Land, given inalienably to Israel. The Romans had no more right to be ruling it than did any of their pagan predecessors. The Land was, of course, not only a symbol: it was the source of bread and wine, the place to graze sheep and goats, grow olives and figs. It was the place where, and the means through which, YHWH gave to his covenant people the blessings he had promised them, which were all summed up in the many-sided and evocative word *shalom*, peace. It was the new Eden, the garden of YHWH, the home of the true humanity.

And it was now being laid waste. Young men were driven off ancestral property because heavy taxation prevented them from making a living.³⁵ Alien cultural institutions (gymnasia, schools, pagan temples, Roman standards) were being set up in it. Although, as we shall see, 'the kingdom of god' had as its primary referent the *fact* of YHWH's becoming King, this social context

³³ See Juel 1977; Runnals 1983. The Chronicler so emphasizes David's responsibility for the building of the original Temple, and Solomon's actual building of it, as to point forward into the future from his own perspective with the hope that another son of David might arise to rebuild and restore it once more.

³⁴ Notable exceptions are Davies 1974; Freyne 1980, 1988. See too Brueggemann 1977.

³⁵ Sanders 1992, ch. 9 argues that this fact is often exaggerated; but, even if he is right, the ordinary Jewish family still had to bear a fairly substantial burden of taxation.

meant that the idea of divine kingship also carried the notion of the Land as the *place where* YHWH would be ruler. He would cleanse his holy Land, making it fit again for his people to inhabit, ruling the nations from it.

Jerusalem was obviously the major focal point of this Land. But the holiness of the 'holy Land' spread out in concentric circles, from the Holy of Holies to the rest of the Temple (itself divided into concentric areas), thence to the rest of Jerusalem, and thence to the whole Land.³⁶ And 'Galilee of the Nations', on the far side of hostile Samaria, surrounded by pagans, administered from a major Roman city (Sepphoris), was a vital part of this Land. It was, moreover, a part of it which was always suspected to be under pagan influence, and which needed to be held firm, with clear boundary-markers, against assimilation.³⁷ The question of whether a potentially seditious Galilean teacher showed his loyalty to Jerusalem by paying the Temple-tax is exactly the sort of issue we should expect to see raised in this period and this place.³⁸ If Israel's god claimed the whole Land, loyal Jews needed to make sure that they—and their compatriots—were keeping in line. This meant, among other things, making the appropriate tithes to show that they still regarded the produce of their fields as covenant blessings, so that they could demonstrate their link with the centre of covenant blessing, Jerusalem and the Temple itself, and thereby with the covenant god who had placed his name there.³⁹ It also meant, when necessary, cleansing the Land from pollution, in order to 'turn away wrath from Israel'.⁴⁰

The fortunes of the Land, obviously, expressed the whole theme of exile and restoration, which we shall study in detail in the following chapters. The Land shared the ambiguity of the Temple: that is, it had been repossessed by those who returned from Babylon, but the repossession had been partial, and Israel did not in fact rule it herself except as a puppet (Roman troops were not, as is sometimes imagined, everywhere in evidence, but they were near enough to be called upon if movements towards independence reared their heads).⁴¹ Control and cleansing were what was required, and as long as Rome was policing and polluting YHWH's sacred turf it was obvious that neither had happened.

(iv) Torah

The Torah was the covenant charter of Israel as the people of the covenant god. Temple and Torah formed an unbreakable whole: the Torah sanctioned

³⁶ cf. Ezek. 40–8.

³⁷ See Freyne 1988, ch. 6.

³⁸ Mt. 17.24–7; cf. Horbury 1984. We may compare Jos. *Life* 104–11, in which Josephus, having come from Jerusalem, attempts to dissuade Galilean rebels from their sedition.

³⁹ See Sanders 1992, 146–57.

⁴⁰ 1 Macc. 3.8; *Ant.* 12.286 (both referring to the activity of Judas Maccabaeus).

⁴¹ Between 63 BC and AD 66 there were Roman troops stationed at Caesarea Maritima, and small garrisons in Jerusalem and a few other towns, e.g. Jericho: see, with the evidence, Schürer 1.362–7. The centurion at Capernaum (Mt. 8.5 and pars.) was presumably stationed there because it was near the border between Galilee and Philip's territory of Gaulanitis. Customs were levied there since at least the break-up of Herod's kingdom (Schürer 1.374).

and regulated what happened in the Temple, and the Temple was (in much of this period) the practical focal point for the observance of Torah, both in the sense that much Torah-observance actually consisted of Temple-ritual, and in the sense that the Temple was the major place for study and teaching of Torah.⁴² So, too, Torah and Land formed a tight bond. The Torah offered the promises about the Land, the blessings which would be given in and through it, and the detailed instructions as to the behaviour necessary for blessing to be maintained. After all, the reason that YHWH had driven out the previous occupants of the Land was precisely their idolatry and immorality. Israel had to be different if she was not going to suffer the same fate.⁴³

At the same time, ever since the exile it had been possible to study and practise Torah (or, at any rate, that which came to be seen as Torah) even without the Temple and the Land. In the exile, of course, there was no Temple. This, naturally, constituted part of the problem of how to be a Jew in Babylon, how to sing YHWH's song in a strange land. But in the Diaspora, then and subsequently, the study and practice of Torah increasingly became the focal point of Jewishness. For millions of ordinary Jews, Torah became a portable Land, a movable Temple.⁴⁴ The Pharisees in particular, in conjunction with the burgeoning synagogue movement, developed the theory that study and practice of Torah could take the place of Temple worship. Where two or three gather to study Torah, the Shekinah rests upon them.⁴⁵ The presence of the covenant god was not, after all, confined to the Temple in Jerusalem, which was both a long way off and in the hands of corrupt aristocrats. It had been democratized, made available to all who would study and practise Torah.

The sanctity and supreme importance of Torah, seen from this perspective, can hardly be exaggerated. Those who kept it with rigour were, in some ways though not all, as if they were priests in the Temple.⁴⁶ Not that the Pharisees, until the destruction actually happened, ever imagined a Judaism without Temple and Land altogether. In the Diaspora they still looked to Jerusalem; after the destruction, as we saw, many of them yearned and agonized for the Temple to be rebuilt. But Torah provided, in both cases, a second-best substitute which, in long years without the reality, came to assume all its attributes. In later Judaism, the ideologies proper to Temple and Land were fused together into the central symbol of Torah.⁴⁷

With natural logic, the sacrificial system was also translated into terms of Torah. One cannot go to Jerusalem to offer the sacrifices on a regular basis if one lives in Babylon or Rome, in Athens or Alexandria, as a large number of

⁴² On the relation between Temple and Torah see Freyne 1988, 190f.

⁴³ Gen. 15.16; Lev. 18.24–8; Dt. 9.4–5; 18.12, etc.

⁴⁴ See Sanders 1990a, chs. 2–3: without travelling to the Temple, Jews would be technically unclean most of the time.

⁴⁵ mAb. 3.2.

⁴⁶ See ch. 7 above on Pharisees and Essenes, and esp. Sanders 1990a, ch.3; 1992, 352–60, 376, 438–40.

⁴⁷ See again chs. 6 and 7 above. The synagogue itself, as the focus of the teaching of Torah, also came to function as a major Jewish symbol. See Gutmann 1981; Levine 1987; Sanders 1990a, 67–81; 1992, 198–202. On the question of the antiquity of the building and use of synagogues cf. Shanks 1979; Kee 1990; and Sanders 1990a, 341–3, notes 28, 29.

would-be observant Jews did. Observance of key Torah commandments will do instead. 'Spiritual sacrifices' are thus offered when one gives alms, or prays, or studies Torah, or fasts.⁴⁸ It is difficult to tell how far this had been taken by the time of Jesus, but the progression is natural and clear. In the eyes of its adherents, Torah had come to assume the status of the Temple, and, with that, to take on divine qualities.⁴⁹ In the presence of Torah one was in the presence of the covenant god. Thus, what became true for all of Judaism after 70 and 135 was anticipated in the necessities of Diaspora life.

And the Torah, especially in the Diaspora, but also anywhere where Jews felt themselves beleaguered, as they mostly did in one way or another, could be seen as focusing on those things which distinguished Jews from their (potentially threatening) pagan neighbours: circumcision, the keeping of the sabbath, and the purity laws. With these we move into the closely related world of praxis, where the symbols come to life on a daily basis. We shall examine this presently.

If Torah is to be kept in every detail of everyday life, it must be applied to those details in a way that was clearly not done in the Pentateuch itself. The Bible instructs Israelites to dwell in booths when they celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. But what counts as a 'booth'? One must debate, and get it right; not to do so would be to treat Torah flippantly.⁵⁰ So, too, the Bible prescribes a ceremony to be used when the brother of a dead man refuses to discharge his obligation by marrying the widow: but how precisely is the ceremony to be performed?⁵¹ These are two tiny examples of an enormous phenomenon, as a result of which there grew up a large body of what is in effect detailed case law. In the first century, this was not written down, nor officially codified, but passed on from teacher to pupil by repetition. The Hebrew for 'repetition' is *Mishnah*: thus, quite naturally, was born one of the basic genres of Jewish literature.

The 'Mishnah' itself was not written down until around the start of the second century AD. But, as we saw in the previous two chapters, many of its debates reflect, even if they distort, earlier debates and controversies. Since these took place in the oral, not the written, mode, we are faced with the question of 'oral Torah'. It has sometimes been claimed that the Pharisees created a large body of oral Torah well before the turn of the eras, and that they valued this oral Torah higher than the written Torah. The former was, after

⁴⁸ e.g. Pss. 40.6–8; 50.7–15; 51.16f.; 69.30f.; 141.2. See Millgram 1971, 81–3, 254, 361. For the details: on prayer, bTaan. 2a, bBer. 32b (R. Eleazar); on acts of mercy, Aboth de Rab. Nathan 4; on study of Torah (making one equivalent to a high priest), Midr. Pss. 1.26, 2.300; on fasting, bBer. 17a. These later texts embody, to be sure, a post-destruction rationalization; but they pretty certainly also reflect the reality of pre-destruction Diaspora life.

⁴⁹ cf. Sir. 24.1–23, where Wisdom is identified with the clouded Presence (24.4; cf. Ex. 14.19f.), with Shekinah (24.8–12) and then with Torah (24.23); Jos. *Apion* 2.277 ('our Law at least remains immortal'); Bar. 4.1f. ('She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk towards the shining of her light'); 4 Ezra 9.26–37; mSanh. 10.1.

⁵⁰ For the command: Lev. 23.42; cf. Neh. 8.17f. For the discussion of valid booths, mSukk. 1.1–11. For the desire to 'get everything just right', cf. Sanders 1992, 494.

⁵¹ Dt. 25.7–9; cf. Ruth 4.1–12; mYeb. 12.1–6.

all, somewhat esoteric: anybody could read the written Torah, but the oral Torah was the special prerogative of those to whom it had been entrusted. It was given the status of antiquity through the pious fiction of being ascribed, like the written Torah, to Moses himself.⁵²

This view of an early and high-status oral Torah has been subjected to damaging criticism, and cannot now be maintained as it stands.⁵³ The view just outlined corresponds, in fact, more closely to the secret teachings of the Essenes: they, it appears, really did possess secret laws which they regarded as equivalent to, and as coming from the same source as, the written Torah itself. The Temple Scroll carries this to its logical conclusion, being written in the first person, as though coming direct from YHWH himself. But the Pharisees on the one hand, and ordinary Jews on the other, while they undoubtedly had case law which enabled them to apply the Torah to particular situations, did not claim for this a status exactly equivalent to the written Torah itself. They interpreted, they applied, they developed Torah. They had to. But they knew when they were doing it.

It is important to see what they were thereby achieving. The alternatives to developing some system of oral Torah (without capital letters) was to abandon the Torah itself. Case law was a way of preserving the Torah as a symbol. It could not be abandoned without giving up one major part of the worldview. Torah was interwoven with covenant, promises, Land and hope. Admit that one has abandoned Torah, and one admits to being a traitor to Israel. The detailed discussions of how Torah should be kept on a day-to-day basis are therefore ways of maintaining the vital symbol while making it relevant, while turning it into praxis. This illustrates a vital point about the elements of worldviews. A symbol that loses touch with either story or praxis becomes worthless. The Pharisees and their would-be successors developed ways of ensuring that this did not happen.

(v) Racial Identity

The question of who was actually a pure-bred Jew became one of the large issues among those who returned from Babylon in the period known, however misleadingly, as 'the return from exile'. The long genealogies that open 1 Chronicles, and that characterize Ezra and Nehemiah,⁵⁴ bear witness to the strongly felt need in the newly founded community to make good its claim to be the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Just as the Temple formed the inner circle of the Land, so the Priests formed the inner circle of Israel, and their genealogies were particularly important.⁵⁵ As the returning Israelites retold the stories of their forefathers, they were reminded of the events which had brought (in their prophetic interpretation) catastrophe upon Israel: inter-

⁵² For this view of oral Torah see e.g. Rivkin 1978.

⁵³ Sanders 1990a, ch. 2.

⁵⁴ 1 Chron. 1-9; Ezra 2, 8, 10; Neh. 7, 12.

⁵⁵ cf. Ezra 2.59-63.

marriage with non-Israelites had precipitated a slide into paganism. This rereading in turn prompted anxiety, in that the same phenomenon was occurring again, and one of the focal points of Ezra's work, according to the book that bears his name, was to insist upon Israelite men separating from pagan wives.⁵⁶ Unless this was done, the 'holy seed', which seems to have functioned as an evocative synonym for 'the remnant', would be polluted.⁵⁷ Israel's god has further purposes for this 'seed', and it is therefore vital that it be kept pure. Not only intermarriage, but also the practice of allowing foreigners into 'the assembly of God', was prohibited.⁵⁸ Josephus, reflecting on this whole episode, and particularly Ezra's banning of foreigners, from his position in the late first century, remarks that Ezra thus 'purified the practice relating to this matter so that it remained fixed for the future'.⁵⁹ The book of Esther, too, stands as powerful testimony both to early anti-Semitism and to the response: the Jews must stay together and refuse to compromise with pagans.

With this fifth-century background (remembering that what matters for our present purpose is not what actually happened at that period, but how the story was being retold in the post-Maccabean period), it is scarcely surprising that we find the issue of racial purity maintaining its significance. The fifth-century Jews had been surrounded by hostile forces who resented the re-establishment of a Jewish state, and were faced with a special problem in the form of those who became known as the Samaritans.⁶⁰ This sense of being beleaguered on all sides increased, as we saw, under Syrian rule, and by the first century BC the ideology which preserved the Jewish race intact was simply taken for granted. The covenant sign of circumcision marked out the Jews as the chosen people; sexual relations, and the begetting of offspring, was appropriate for Jews within the context of that people, but not outside.

We thus find, in works from the Hasmonean and Roman periods, an emphasis on the race as the true people. The Testament of Dan urges the Jews to 'turn from unrighteousness of every kind and hold fast to the righteousness of the law of the Lord; and your race will be kept safe for ever'.⁶¹ The apocryphal book of Baruch urges Jews:

Do not give your glory to another,
or your advantages to an alien people.

⁵⁶ Ezra 9-10.

⁵⁷ Ezra 9.2; cf. Isa. 6.13; Mal. 2.15. The latter verse is difficult (cf. Smith 1984, 318-25; Fuller 1991, 52-4), but I suggest that it should be read: 'Did not he [i.e. God] make one [i.e. man and woman in marriage]? And the remnant-of-spirit [i.e. the true family, returned from Babylon] is his [i.e. God's plan for renewing Israel is in hand]. And why [did he make you] "one"? Because he intends to produce "seed-of-God" [not just "godly children", but the true "seed", through whom the promises will find fulfilment]. The problem seems to be that Jews who had earlier married Jewish wives had then divorced and married pagans. This, the prophet says, is not only covenant-breaking, but is putting in jeopardy the long-term purposes of Israel's god.

⁵⁸ Neh. 13.1-3.

⁵⁹ Ant. 11.153, reading *monimon*, 'fixed', with the Loeb, rather than the variant *nomimon*, 'statutory'. The difference is immaterial for our purposes.

⁶⁰ On the Samaritans see Schürer 2.16-20.

⁶¹ T. Dan 6.10 (tr. M. de Jonge in Sparks 1984, 566). The last clause is missing from one MS, and is not even noted by H. C. Kee in Charlesworth 1983, 810.

Happy are we, O Israel,
for we know what is pleasing to God.⁶²

Even Josephus, in his eagerness to present the Jews as accommodating and hospitable to pagans, makes it quite clear that the welcome goes so far and no further:

To all who desire to come and live under the same laws with us, he [i.e. Moses] gives a gracious welcome, holding that it is not family ties alone which constitute relationship, but agreement in the principles of conduct. On the other hand, it was not his pleasure that casual visitors should be admitted to the intimacies of our daily life.⁶³

The *Letter of Aristeas* proves the same point: Jews must set a good example to the world, but at the same time must remain clearly distinct.⁶⁴ The most notable sign of an emphasis on racial purity is of course the notice in the Temple which forbade non-Jews to penetrate further than the 'court of the Gentiles'.⁶⁵ Though of course Jews who lived in day-to-day contact with Gentiles, as many of them did even in Palestine itself, had no choice but to mix with them regularly and quite freely, the literature gives us a fairly clear sense that Gentiles were presumed to be in principle idolaters, immoral and ritually impure.⁶⁶

Jewish racial identity remained, throughout our period, a cultural and religious symbol every bit as vital as Temple, Land and Torah, and indeed thoroughly linked with all of these. We will see presently the way in which this symbol gave rise to particular forms of praxis, and the ways in which it was reinterpreted in borderline cases.

(vi) Conclusion

The four symbols we have studied in this section clearly dovetailed completely into the story-themes we examined earlier. Symbol and story are mutually reinforcing: those who adhere to the first are implicitly telling the second, and vice versa. The symbols therefore provided fixed points which functioned as signals, to oneself and to one's neighbour, that one was hearing the story and living by it. They became in themselves stories in stone, in soil, in scroll, or in flesh and blood—just as the stories, and the fact of their retelling, were themselves symbolic. But stories and symbols must be integrated into the praxis which brought them alive. To this we now turn.

⁶² Bar. 4.3f.

⁶³ Jos. *Apion* 2.210 (cf. *Ant.* 13.245, where the key word is *amixia*, 'separateness'). Thackeray's note ad loc., suggesting a reference to Passover, as in Ex. 12.43, is hardly relevant to *daily* life (so, rightly, Sanders 1990b, 183). Cp. too the prohibitions of intermarriage in *Jub.* 30.7, 14–17; *Ps-Philo* 9.5, etc.

⁶⁴ *Ep. Arist.* 139 (in its context), etc.

⁶⁵ See *War* 5.193f.; 6.125f.; and Schürer 1.175f., 378; 2.80, 222, 284f.

⁶⁶ See further section 4 (iv) below.

4. Praxis

(i) Introduction

It is commonly said that Judaism is not a 'faith', but a way of life. This is at best a half-truth. But it is true that Judaism gives 'theology' a lower place in its regular discussions than it does to the question: what ought one to do? If one is to keep the symbols alive, one must quite simply live by them. And the chief symbol by which one lives is of course Torah.

But the daily keeping of Torah was by no means the long and the short of first-century Jewish praxis. The high points of praxis in any one year were the major festivals, which both retold Israel's story and highlighted her key symbols. Second, there was the actual study of Torah: if one is to practise, one must first learn. It is in that context that we will consider, third, the day-to-day practice of Torah and what it involved.

(ii) Worship and Festivals

We have already seen that the Temple and the synagogue were far more than institutions where an individual might pursue his or her private religion in company with like-minded others, away from ordinary life. Temple and synagogue were vital social, political and cultural institutions just as much as 'religious' ones (such distinctions are of course anachronistic anyway in our period). There were daily as well as weekly services in both. Regular prayers were taught for private as well as public use, for the family (especially at meals), and for special occasions. The average Jew would grow up knowing the basic prayers, and a good many psalms, at least as well as, and probably much better than, the average child in a churchgoing family today knows the Lord's Prayer, several hymns, and—to grasp at a secular equivalent—the regular jingles of television advertisements. What (some) first-century Jews may have lacked in literacy they will more than have made up for in memory.⁶⁷

Sabbath services in particular were a major social focus, a vital sign of loyalty to Israel. The regular prayers—the *Shema* and the Eighteen Benedictions being of course central features⁶⁸—sustained and rejuvenated the Jewish self-consciousness, reinforced the worldview and the hope. There was one god, Israel was his people, and he would deliver them soon. In the mean time they must remain faithful.

The same message, heightened in emotional and cultural impact by the excitement of going on pilgrimage (if one could afford the time or money), and by the development of local equivalents (if one could not),⁶⁹ was undergirded

⁶⁷ See W. D. Davies 1987, 19–21; on the obligation even for children to recite certain prayers see mBer. 3.3. For the praying life of Jews as part of the whole culture see e.g. Sanders 1990a, 331; 1992, 195–208. See further below, on the use of the Bible.

⁶⁸ Schürer 2.447–9, 454–63; Sanders 1992, loc. cit.

⁶⁹ On the celebration of festivals outside Palestine see Schürer 3.144.

by the major festivals which brought Jews in their thousands to Jerusalem three or more times a year.⁷⁰ The three major festivals, the high holy days, and the two additional festivals of Hanukkah and Purim, summed up a good deal of the theology and national aspiration we have been studying, and celebrated it in great symbolic actions and liturgies.⁷¹ These festivals and fasts thus gave both reinforcement and reality to Israel's theology.

The three major festivals were of course intimately connected with agriculture (Passover, with barley harvest; Pentecost, with wheat harvest and the bringing of first-fruits to the Temple;⁷² Tabernacles, with the grape harvest). They thus symbolically celebrated the blessing of Israel's god upon his Land and his people, and thereby drew together the two major covenantal themes of Temple and Land. In addition, Passover celebrated the exodus from Egypt; Pentecost, the giving of Torah on Sinai;⁷³ Tabernacles, the wilderness wandering on the way to the promised land. All three therefore focused attention on key aspects of Israel's story, and in the retelling of that story encouraged the people once again to think of themselves as the creator's free people, who would be redeemed by him and so vindicated in the eyes of the world. This theme was amplified in the prayers appointed for the different occasions.⁷⁴

The two extra festivals made substantially the same point, though without the agricultural connection. Hanukkah, commemorating the overthrow of Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas and his followers, underlined the vital importance of true monotheistic worship and the belief that when the tyrants raged against Israel her god would come to the rescue. Purim, celebrating the story found in the book of Esther, re-enacted the reversal of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews in the Persian empire; it drove home the same message.⁷⁵ Together the five feasts ensured that any Jew who made any attempt to join in—and by all accounts participation was widespread—would emerge with the basic worldview strengthened: one God, Israel as his people, the sacredness of the Land, the inviolability of Torah, and the certainty of redemption. Even the regular monthly festival of the New Moon reinforced the last point, as the new shining after a period of darkness symbolized the restoration of Israel after her period of suffering.⁷⁶

The same message, too, was driven home by the regular fasts. Zechariah 8.19 lists four such fasts, taking place in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months. All four were in fact linked to events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians; keeping them was a reminder that Israel was

still waiting for her real redemption from exile.⁷⁷ The same point, of course, was made most strikingly for both individual and nation in the high holy days. The passage in Zechariah, interestingly, speaks of the four fasts being turned into feasts. How could this prophecy be fulfilled, except by the real return from exile—which, by implication, had still not taken place at the time when Zechariah 8 was written?⁷⁸

Feasts and fasts thus enacted the entire Jewish worldview, and gave regular reinforcement to the fundamental Jewish hope. Temple, Land, Torah and racial identity were encapsulated in symbolic actions and memorable phrases, all of which gave expression to the Jewish belief in one god and his election of Israel, and the hope to which this twin belief gave rise.

(iii) Study and Learning

The context of Torah-study must be understood as the resolute application of passages such as these:

The law of YHWH is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of YHWH are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of YHWH are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of YHWH is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of YHWH is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of YHWH are true
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Oh, how I love your law!
It is my meditation all day long.

Consider how I love your precepts;
preserve my life according to your steadfast love.
The sum of your words is truth;
and every one of your righteous ordinances endures for ever.⁷⁹

If Torah was a symbol which encapsulated the Jewish worldview, it was necessary that some Jews at least be committed to a serious programme of study. The only way in which one could become a master of Torah was to

⁷⁷ Safrai 1976a, 814-6; Millgram 1971, 275ff.; Schürer 2.483f. Zech. 7.3f. mentions the fasts of the fifth and seventh months as being kept during the time of the exile. There were of course extra fast-days added in case of particular calamities; see Schürer 2.483f.; Safrai loc. cit.; and e.g. Jos. *Life* 290.

⁷⁸ See ch. 10 below.

⁷⁹ Pss. 19.7-10; 119.97, 159f.

⁷⁰ Schürer 2.76.

⁷¹ See Millgram 1971, chs. 8 (199-223), 9 (224-60), 10 (261-88). On the high holy days see ch. 9 below.

⁷² Described in mBikk. 3.2-4.

⁷³ Not mentioned in this connection in the OT, but clearly a pre-rabbinic tradition, with echoes in the NT. See *Jub.* 1.5; 6.11, 17; 15.1-24; bPes. 68b; and Ac. 2.1-11; Eph. 4.7-10, etc. (see Caird 1964; Lincoln 1990, 243f., citing also evidence from the later synagogue lectionary). The addition of Simchat Torah to Tabernacles is a later innovation.

⁷⁴ Millgram 1971, 214.

⁷⁵ On Hanukkah see Schürer 1.162-3; on Purim, 2.450.

⁷⁶ So Millgram 1971, 265.

spend hours and days becoming familiar with it. Nor was this study undertaken in (as we might say) a 'purely academic' way. If to study the Torah is the equivalent to being in the Temple, in the presence of the Shekinah, then studying becomes in itself a 'religious' activity, picking up these themes from the psalms. In this spirit the pious Jews of the second-temple period went to their work. At one extreme, of course, this was simply a necessary function of a society: there has to be a group who know their way about the law and can see that it is put into effect. But at the other extreme there was a sense, as in these psalms, of delighting in it for its own sake, as one of the key places where the covenant god had agreed to meet with his people. The priests were the great teachers and guardians of Torah; but there grew up alongside them, at what period it is hard to say with precision, a corps of lay scribes and teachers, who appear in the work of Ben-Sirach (early second century BC), where we meet the blend of study and piety just noted. After pointing out that all kinds of professions are necessary, as we say, 'to make the world go round' (38.1–34a), he proceeds:

How different the one who devotes himself
to the study of the law of the Most High!
He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients,
and is concerned with prophecies;
he preserves the sayings of the famous
and penetrates the subtleties of parables . . .
He sets his heart to rise early
to seek the Lord who made him,
and to petition the Most High;
he opens his mouth in prayer
and asks pardon for his sins . . .
The Lord will direct his counsel and knowledge,
as he meditates on his mysteries.
He will show the wisdom of what he has learned,
and will glory in the law of the Lord's covenant.⁸⁰

Or, as one of Akiba's disciples, Rabbi Meir (second century AD), put it:

Engage not overmuch in business but occupy thyself with the Law; and be lowly in spirit before all men. If thou neglectest the Law many things neglected shall rise against thee; but if thou labourest in the Law He has abundant reward to give thee.⁸¹

The study of Torah was thus revered and institutionalized within second-temple Judaism. It was not one profession among others; nor, as in some modern countries, was study discounted as an irrelevance within a hard-headed practical world. It was, after priesthood itself, the supreme vocation, and commanded the highest respect:

In the study of the Law, if the son gained much wisdom [the while he sat] before his teacher, his teacher comes ever before his father, since both he and his father are bound to honour the teacher.⁸²

⁸⁰ Sir. 38.34b–39.8.

⁸¹ mAb. 4.10.

⁸² mKer. 6.9; cp. mBMez. 2.11.

Study of Torah, as a key feature of first-century praxis, thus acquired a symbolic as well as a practical function; and it integrated into the story-line of the worldview. Israel's god gave his Torah to Moses, and one of the most characteristically Jewish activities is to study it, both for its own sake and so that one may bring oneself, and those whom one can influence or teach, under the leading of that which has been identified not only with the divine wisdom but with the tabernacling presence of YHWH himself.⁸³ But this then leads to the other side of the same coin. How did Torah work out in practice?

(iv) Torah in Practice

If Torah was a vital symbol within first-century Judaism, it was a severely practical one. At a time when Judaism's distinctive identity was under constant threat, Torah provided three badges in particular which marked the Jew out from the pagan: circumcision, sabbath, and the kosher laws, which regulated what food could be eaten, how it was to be killed and cooked, and with whom one might share it. In and through all this ran the theme of Jewish 'separateness'.

Within an all-Jewish or mostly-Jewish society, circumcision could be assumed, and the manner of its keeping was (more or less) uncontroversial: a male was either circumcised or he was not.⁸⁴ But, even within such societies, the keeping of sabbath was a matter of dispute: what counted and what did not?⁸⁵ The maintaining of purity was even more uncertain: what rendered one unclean and what did not?⁸⁶ Debates about sabbath and purity, therefore, occupied an immense amount of time and effort in the discussions of the learned, as we know from the Mishnah and Talmud.⁸⁷ This was not, it should be stressed, because Jews in general or Pharisees in particular were concerned merely for outward ritual or ceremony, nor because they were attempting to earn their salvation (within some later sub-Christian scheme!) by virtuous living. It was because they were concerned for the divine Torah, and were therefore anxious to maintain their god-given distinctiveness over against the pagan nations, particularly those who were oppressing them. Their whole *raison-d'être* as a nation depended on it. Their devotion to the one god was enshrined in it. Their coming liberation might perhaps be hastened by it, or conversely postponed by failure in it. If one's basic categories of thought were

⁸³ Sir. 24.10–12, 23.

⁸⁴ Circumcision was prohibited under Antiochus Epiphanes, and then again under Hadrian: see 1 Macc. 1.14f.; *Jub.* 15.33f.; and Schürer 1.155, 537–40. Some Jews attempted at various times to remove the marks of circumcision (ch. 6 above). Though the necessity of circumcision was sometimes debated, it was basically regarded as vital for full conversion to Judaism (see the debate over the conversion of Izates in the mid-first century: *Jos. Ant.* 20.38–48; and the discussion of circumcision of refugees in *Life* 112f.).

⁸⁵ See Sanders 1990a, 6–23; 1992, 208–11.

⁸⁶ Sanders 1990a, chs. 3–4, modified somewhat by 1992, 214–22.

⁸⁷ Sabbath: mShabb., mEruv., *passim*, and frequently elsewhere. Purity: Tohoroth (the 6th division of the Mishnah), *passim*.

monotheism and election, creation and covenant, it is hard to see how at this period one could think differently.

To a Palestinian Jew of the first century, particularly to a Pharisee, therefore, maintaining the marks of Jewish distinctiveness was quite simply non-negotiable. One could debate the details of *how* these marks should be maintained; *that* they should be observed was not to be questioned. A challenge at this point was like an axe laid to the roots of the tree. Particularly in territory under threat or pressure, Jews who did not observe sabbath and purity were like someone in modern Montreal who puts up an English shop-sign, or like someone in any country who tears down the national flag. They were traitors to the national symbols, to the national hope, to the covenant god.

Torah thus provided the vital covenant boundary-marker, especially in those areas where it seemed important to maintain Israel's distinctiveness. That this was the case in Galilee ought to go without saying. If one were in Jerusalem, the Temple (still governed by Torah, but assuming the central role) was the dominant cultural and religious symbol. It was around this that Israel was organized, it was this that the covenant god would vindicate. But away from Jerusalem (in Galilee, or in the Diaspora) it was Torah, and particularly the special badges of sabbath and purity, that demarcated the covenant people, and that therefore provided litmus tests of covenant loyalty and signs of covenant hope.⁸⁸

This conclusion, as we shall see later, is a point of peculiar significance for understanding both Jesus' controversies and Pauline theology. The 'works of Torah' were not a legalist's ladder, up which one climbed to earn the divine favour, but were the badges that one wore as the marks of identity, of belonging to the chosen people in the present, and hence the all-important signs, to oneself and one's neighbours, that one belonged to the company who would be vindicated when the covenant god acted to redeem his people. They were the present signs of future vindication. This was how 'the works of Torah' functioned within the belief, and the hope, of Jews and particularly of Pharisees.⁸⁹

To what extent, then, did this practice of Torah mean that Jews were committed to a policy of non-contact with Gentiles? It is often assumed that Jews simply had no dealings with Gentiles (perhaps on the basis of a tacit *a fortiori* from their well-known policy of having no dealings with Samaritans);⁹⁰ but this is misleading. Even in Judaea and Galilee Gentiles could not be avoided; in the Diaspora only the most sheltered ghetto-dweller could avoid daily contact, and quite likely dealings, with Gentiles.⁹¹ The fact that the Mishnah devotes an entire tractate (*Abodah Zarah*) to the question of how not to partake in Gentile idolatry shows the theological dimension of the question: but the trac-

tate also shows that business with Gentiles was the norm, and that abstaining from it (e.g. before a pagan festival) was the exception.⁹² The question then becomes: how were these dealings regulated? What counted as assimilation, and what as a necessary evil?

Sanders has argued that Jews in this period would not object in principle to associating with Gentiles, or even to eating with them, but that there would have been a general sense that one ought not to do these things too much.⁹³ This seems to me on the right lines, but I think if anything Sanders errs on the side of emphasizing Jewish openness to associating with Gentiles. Granted that ordinary life, especially in the Diaspora, was impossible without some such association, and that eating with Gentiles was not expressly forbidden anywhere (though eating their food, and drinking their wine, was ruled out),⁹⁴ there still seems to me very good warrant for believing that most Jews most of the time felt that fidelity to Torah implied non-association as far as one could manage it.

In his natural eagerness to exonerate first-century Jews from the charge of being arrogantly exclusive and stand-offish towards Gentiles,⁹⁵ Sanders seems to me to have made two unjustified moves. First, he argues (rightly) that one cannot retroject later rabbinic passages into the pre-70 period, but implies (surely incorrectly) that the pre-70 period would have been less likely than the post-70 period as a setting for anti-Gentile codes.⁹⁶ This is surely unwarranted. 'Pre-70', we should not forget, means 'post-167' and 'post-63' (both of course BC). The doctrine of *amixia*, 'separatedness', is asserted by Josephus to be well in place even before the Maccabean revolt, and even if this is anachronistic it certainly shows what could be presupposed in the first century AD.⁹⁷ We also have evidence of the promulgation of strict codes, forbidding mixing with Gentiles, precisely from the pre-war period.⁹⁸ The codes were undoubtedly not to everyone's liking; especially in the Diaspora, regulations that may have been workable for pious circles in Jerusalem were perceived as impracticable.⁹⁹ Yet there was clearly a strong body of opinion, throughout the period from the Maccabees to bar-Kochba, that Gentiles were basically unclean and that contact with them should be kept to a minimum. Here, as elsewhere, we should think of a continuum both of theory (e.g. between Shammaites and Hillelites, and between both of them and assimilated Jews in the Diaspora) and of prac-

⁸⁸ cf. *Apion* 2.277.

⁸⁹ See ch. 10 below. This is, more or less, what Sanders means by his phrase 'Covenantal Nomism' (see now 1992, 262-78), and I think he is here substantially correct. On 'works of Torah' in Paul see Dunn 1990, 216-25; Westerholm 1988, 109-21, etc.

⁹⁰ Sir. 50.25f. (the position of this statement, in the middle of the book's peroration, is strikingly emphatic); Jn. 4.8, etc. In mBer. 7.1, however, it is presupposed that one might eat with a Samaritan.

⁹¹ So, rightly, Sanders 1990b, 179.

⁹² mAb. Zar. 1.1-3, 5.

⁹³ Sanders 1990b, esp. 185f.

⁹⁴ See Jos. *Life* 14: some priests on their way to Rome only ate figs and nuts. This introduces a moderating note into Sanders' criticism of Bruce (1990b, 188 n.20).

⁹⁵ Sanders 1990b, 181f. The charge was made in antiquity: Tac. *Hist.* 5.5; Diod. Sic. 34/5.1.1-5, speaking of the Jewish laws as *ta misaxena nomima*, 'the hating-foreigners statutes'; Juv. *Sat.* 14.103f. See Schürer 3.153.

⁹⁶ Sanders 1990b, 172f.

⁹⁷ *Ant.* 13.245-7, esp. 247: '[the Jews] . . . did not come into contact with other people because of their separateness (*amixia*)'. See the note of Marcus in the Loeb, ad loc.; and cp. *Apion* 2.210.

⁹⁸ See the full discussion in Hengel 1989 [1961], 200-6, including a discussion of non-mixing with Gentiles in the Hasmonean period.

⁹⁹ See Hengel 1989 [1961], 203.

tice (some Jews will have had minimal contact, others a good deal).¹⁰⁰ But to say, as Sanders does, that 'the full expression of antipathy to Gentiles' cannot safely be retrojected earlier than 135 is to go against all we know of Judaism between the Maccabees and bar-Kochba. No doubt the post-135 rabbis added anti-Gentile sentiments of their own. But they added them to a collection that was already well established.¹⁰¹

Second, Sanders' argument seems to slide from his demonstration that contact with Gentiles was not ruled out into the suggestion that eating with Gentiles was equally permissible. He does this by the argument that all Jews were impure in any case most of the time, unless they were about to go into the Temple, and hence that even if Gentiles did partake in impurity no-one would worry, since everyone with whom one had contact was impure anyway.¹⁰² This seems to me to cut loose from the actual socio-cultural context into a world of pure legal formality which Sanders himself has elsewhere demonstrated to be an inadequate reading of Mishnaic Judaism. The rabbinic dictum that Gentiles' houses are unclean, with the presupposition that this is because they throw miscarriages or deliberate abortions down the drains,¹⁰³ seems to indicate that there was a general *mood*, a fixed though often incoherent belief, that Gentiles were unclean and contact with them undesirable, even if when pressed the reason given was lame. Like so many quasi-theological arguments, the reason given is a manifest rationalization of a preceding and presupposed socio-cultural phenomenon, but in this case what matters is the contemporary phenomenon. Jews may not have had a good explanation for it, but ever since the exile, and increasingly since the Maccabean revolt and the subsequent arrival of the Romans, Gentiles were the hated enemy, and serious fraternization with them was stepping out of line. To object that legally a Gentile was no more a polluting agent than one's ordinary (and usually, technically speaking, 'unclean') Jewish neighbour is, I think, to miss the point. The racial barrier cannot be reduced to terms of legalistically conceived ritual purity alone.¹⁰⁴ As in other areas, the tradition has altered the *focus* of a piece of teaching. We saw earlier that a debate about canonicity was turned into a debate about purity;¹⁰⁵ here we see an equally obvious move from a question of social policy to a question of purity.

¹⁰⁰ I think Sanders (1990b, 173f.) is thus a little unfair to Alon 1977, 146–89. Alon is not simply tracing later codes back to hypothetical early roots. The question of how long a Gentile is unclean after becoming a proselyte (mPes. 8.8 [not 8.1 as in Sanders 1990a, 284; 1990b, 174]) is not to the point; upon conversion the person becomes a Jew, and enters a new world with new regulations.

¹⁰¹ See ch.7 section 2 above. We need only cite 2 Maccabees and the Psalms of Solomon. Schiffman 1983 has shown that the regulations on relations with Gentiles in CD 12.6–11 are closely parallel to the later Tannaitic material.

¹⁰² 1990a, 284; 1990b, 174ff.

¹⁰³ mOhol. 18.7, with Danby's note; cf. mNidd. 3.7. The latter passage includes a saying by Rabbi Ishmael (a contemporary of Akiba); the former is not ascribed. On this, see Alon 1977, 186, demonstrating his awareness of the way in which traditions and explanations changed meaning over time.

¹⁰⁴ See Alon 1977, 187, 189, recognizing that though the idea of Gentile uncleanness goes back at least before the time of Herod, there was always a wide variety of actual practice.

¹⁰⁵ Above, p. 183.

The actual practice of Torah, then, no doubt varied greatly from one Jewish community to another, especially when one went outside the borders of the Land and entered the problematic world of the Diaspora. Nevertheless, difficulty (for the Jews of the time) in deciding how Torah should be kept, and difficulty (for the scholar today) in deciding who did what under what circumstances, should not be allowed to obscure the more fundamental point. Unless they intended to assimilate completely into Gentile culture, Jews in general and the stricter of them in particular regarded the day-to-day praxis of Torah as a vital badge of their Judaism, that is to say, as a vital part of their entire worldview. If a Jew removed the marks of circumcision, or ostentatiously went about his normal business on the sabbath, or organized her kitchen in flagrant disregard for the kosher laws, or treated Gentile acquaintances exactly the same as Jewish ones—any such praxis would make a clear socio-cultural and religious point. Two at least of the symbols (Torah and racial identity) were being challenged. A flag was quietly being run down, a story given a new ending.

5. According to the Scriptures: The Anchor of the Worldview

There are many threads which run throughout the entire tapestry of first-century Judaism, through its stories, its symbols and its daily life. Perhaps the most obvious one, which we may highlight in conclusion, is the centrality of scripture. The average Jew would hear a lot of scripture read aloud or sung, and might well know large amounts by heart.¹⁰⁶ The synagogue had a central part (not only in 'religion', but also) in the total life of a local community, and words heard often in that context, especially if they were understood to be promising liberation, would be cherished lovingly. In particular, the psalter, with its continual emphasis on the importance of the Temple and on the promises made to David, would have formed an important part of the mental furniture of the average Jew.¹⁰⁷

In this context, it was natural that, as well as turning to the Bible for the raw material for worship and for everyday living, Jews would look to it for signs of the future. Direct predictions of the return from exile were of course grist to their mill, but many other passages could be pressed into service as well.¹⁰⁸ We shall see in chapter 10 how some groups used a book like Daniel, but this was only one of many possible sources of hope. The Scrolls contain plenty of exegesis applied to the immediate present and future, and so of course do the 'apocalyptic' works. We can be reasonably certain that the great books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel would all have been well known; and the no less powerful shorter books of Zechariah and Malachi, with their emphasis on the rebuilding and purifying of the Temple, would not have been far behind.

¹⁰⁶ Schürer 2.419, etc.

¹⁰⁷ This would have been particularly true of the Hallel psalms (113–18, and the 'great Hallel', 136), and the psalms of ascent (120–34).

¹⁰⁸ Barton 1986, chs. 6–7.

When we set this awareness of scripture in the context of the prevailing second-temple belief that the real return from exile had not yet occurred,¹⁰⁹ the idea of scriptural fulfilment takes on a meaning which transcends the mere proof-texting of which first-century Jews have often been accused.¹¹⁰ It was not simply a matter of ransacking sacred texts for isolated promises about a glorious future. The entire story could be read as Story, namely, as the still-unfinished story of the creator, the covenant people, and the world. In that context, an event that happened 'according to the scriptures' would be an event that could be claimed as the next, perhaps the last or the penultimate, event in the story itself. The explicit prophecies of the great age to come fitted into the broader pattern. Scripture as the story, creating the context for the present, and scripture as Torah, creating the ethic for the present, both undergirded scripture as Prophecy, pointing forward to the way in which the story would reach its climax—for those who were faithful to Torah.

In this light, we can understand some of the methods that were used to bring the message of scripture as it were 'up to date'. How can an ancient text become authoritative for the present? The different answers that were given reflect, revealingly, the different perspectives of those who gave them. For Philo, the strange old stories could come to life through allegory. For the later rabbis, and probably their first-century predecessors, some form of oral Torah enabled the written code to be applied to new situations. In apocalyptic writings, scriptural imagery was reused, sometimes in bizarre fashions, and characters from the ancient story were used as mouthpieces for fresh words of warning and hope. Within ordinary synagogue teaching, the use of midrash and targum employed expanded paraphrase to ram home the relevance of the word for the present. And within the Essene community, the *peshet* method took prophecies line by line and claimed that the events of the present were the real fulfilment of what was spoken many generations before. There is an underlying logic to this: it was agreed on all sides that the prophecies had not yet been fulfilled; the sect believed that they were living in the days of fulfilment; therefore the scriptures must somehow refer to them—whatever their 'original' meaning may have been.¹¹¹ After all, Habakkuk had said that his writings were for many days hence, after an evident delay.¹¹² Even the retellings of bits of the story practised in very different ways from all these by Josephus, the Wisdom of Solomon, 4 Maccabees, and Paul, show that their authors were concerned to relate the biblical tradition to their own new context.

¹⁰⁹ cf. chs. 9–10 below.

¹¹⁰ The 'proof-text' method, at least in its modern forms, stems (I think) from the typical eighteenth-century Deist 'proof' of, e.g., Jesus' Messiahship—and the equally typical eighteenth-century 'refutation' of such a proof. Neither has much to do with the historical actuality of the first century.

¹¹¹ See Brooke 1985; Mulder 1987, ch. 10 (M. Fishbane); Schürer 2.348, 354, 580, 586; 3.392, 420–1. In terms of 'original' meanings, Moule is right to stress the 'sheer arbitrariness' of the method (1982 [1962], 77–84). But I hold to my suggestion that, as far as the sect was concerned, the story of Israel had taken a turn which somehow justified this reading.

¹¹² Hab. 2.3; cf. 1QpHab 7.9–14.

What is important is to realize that all these different 'techniques' were ways of maintaining vital contact with the stories and the symbols that indicated one's continuing loyalty to the Jewish heritage. As we saw in relation to oral Torah, it was essential for Jews, particularly those with new or rigorous agendas, to be able to satisfy themselves and their followers that they were in proper continuity with the story-line of Israel, and were paying the symbols proper respect. As we shall see in looking at the early Christian movement, their retellings of the same story can without difficulty be plotted on the same grid, and can be shown to reflect exactly the new situation in which they believed themselves to be living.

6. Conclusion: Israel's Worldview

Story, symbol and praxis, focused in their different ways on Israel's scriptures, reveal a rich but basically simple worldview. We can summarize this in terms of the four questions which, as we argued in chapter 5, are implicitly addressed in all worldviews.

1. Who are we? We are Israel, the chosen people of the creator god.
2. Where are we? We are in the holy Land, focused on the Temple; but, paradoxically, we are still in exile.
3. What is wrong? We have the wrong rulers: pagans on the one hand, compromised Jews on the other, or, half-way between, Herod and his family. We are all involved in a less-than-ideal situation.
4. What is the solution? Our god must act again to give us the true sort of rule, that is, his own kingship exercised through properly appointed officials (a true priesthood; possibly a true king); and in the mean time Israel must be faithful to his covenant charter.

The differences between different groups of Jews in this period can be plotted quite precisely in terms of the detail of this analysis. The chief priests would not have agreed with (2)–(4) as stated. They were in the Temple, which was all in order; the problem was the recalcitrance of other Jewish groups, and the solution was to keep them in their place. Essenes would have modified (4): our god has already acted to call us to be the advance guard of the age to come, and he will act again to vindicate us. And so on. But in principle these four answers to the basic questions remain constant for the majority of our literature, and, so far as we can tell, for the majority of the non-literary people, throughout the period, and come to expression in story, symbol and praxis. Together they point forward. The history we have already sketched, and the worldview we have now outlined, formed the context for and indeed helped to generate a passionately held theology, and a hope that refused to die.

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