

Haggadah in Early Judaism and the New Testament

Edited by
Roger David Aus

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*

Mohr Siebeck

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461



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Dedication

To all those who openmindedly try to appreciate the great riches of haggadah / aggadah in early Judaism and the New Testament.

That is an invitation, especially to those whose expertise lies elsewhere. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, you will be deeply rewarded.

Preface

Because I am deeply convinced of how haggadic sources are of major relevance to a much better understanding of New Testament texts, I proposed a volume dealing with various aspects of haggadah in early Judaism and the New Testament to Professor Jörg Frey, the main editor of the WUNT series. I am deeply grateful to him for having accepted it. My thanks also go to Elena Müller, the program director of Theology and Jewish Studies at Mohr Siebeck, for her guidance during the publication process, as well as to Jana Trispel and Tobias Stäbler for their careful editorial remarks. Above all I thank my son, Dr. Jonathan Aus, who after formatting almost all my other volumes, has also done so with this, probably my final one. At the age of eighty, it could be time to stop writing and pay more attention to the insights of others (my wife, however, refuses to believe this will happen).

I am grateful to the other seventeen authors who accepted my invitation to contribute an essay to this volume: women and men, Jews and Christians, all experts in their own fields. Because of the extended COVID-19 crisis, for many of them this has been a very trying time: having to teach via video, the library being closed, being shut in at home with kindergarten or school children. Thus I take my hat off and salute them for submitting their essays in time for this publication. It has been a pleasure for me to edit them – in three languages.

Some fifty years ago I became acquainted with the importance of haggadah / aggadah while doing a Ph.D. in New Testament Studies at Yale University. Among other things I studied the Tannaitic commentary on Deuteronomy, Sifre, with Judah Goldin and a small group of his students. There I learned to appreciate not only Judaic (early Jewish) halakhic interpretation, but also how haggadic elements are often employed to buttress arguments and to make them more easily “digestible.” For example, a parable is related in order to illustrate what an halakhic assertion means. Even today a rabbi or pastor when teaching or giving a sermon knows that stating a theological truth can indeed be correct but rather boring, and it will not be retained by the listener without the speaker’s illustrating it in a concrete way: “This is as if....” Haggadah (for a concise definition, see Günter Stemberger’s introductory essay here) adds flesh to the dry bones of a skeleton, making it much more attractive to view and to contemplate. And sometimes it simply entertains, thus holding one’s attention.

Having done a double major in English and German Studies at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, I taught English for a year at a Protestant Gymnasium near Heidelberg before studying theology at Harvard Divinity School and Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. During the latter, I served my vicar year in Geneva, Switzerland, in part as a research assistant in the Department of Theology of the Lutheran World Federation, in the same building as the World Council of Churches. Since then I have been greatly interested in ecumenism. My wife is German, and I am bilingual. While an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, after my Ph.D. in 1971 I served three different German-speaking congregations in Berlin until my retirement. The Protestant Church here graciously granted me one short study leave in 1981, which I spent together with my annual vacation in Jerusalem. There I not only learned more Hebrew at the Hebrew University and used every available opportunity to travel throughout the country, from Eilat to the Golan Heights, but also had fine discussions with people such as David Flusser. In the course of the last five decades I have written not only articles for scholarly journals and *Festschriften*, but also fifteen volumes, almost all of which have been published in various series edited by Jacob Neusner, who in an ecumenical spirit kindly accepted them from a Christian pastor. Dealing with both the Gospels and Paul, these studies always elucidate specific New Testament passages on the basis of Judaic, primarily haggadic sources.

I wish the reader much interest in, and appreciation of, the many insights the contributors to this volume have provided in regard to the importance of haggadah in specific texts in early Judaism and the New Testament. May these studies encourage others to follow their fine example.

Berlin, Germany, November 1, 2020

Roger David Aus

Table of Contents

<i>Roger David Aus</i> Introduction	1
<i>Günter Stemberger</i> Haggadah in Rabbinic Literature	7
<i>Roger David Aus</i> Historicity and Truth in Haggadic Texts	27
<i>Hermann Lichtenberger</i> Haggadah in den Qumrantexten	43
<i>Gudrun Holtz</i> Abraham als Archetyp der Gottesliebe: Die Opferung Isaaks in Philos biographischem Enkomium „Das Leben des Weisen“ (<i>De Abrahamo</i> 167–208a)	67
<i>Anna Maria Schwemer</i> Schriftauslegung und Haggadah in den <i>Vitae Prophetarum</i>	95
<i>Michael Avioz</i> Aspects of Haggadah in Josephus	129
<i>Daniel R. Schwartz</i> Josephus and Chronology According to Sabbatical and Jubilee Periods	139
<i>Alan Avery-Peck</i> Rabbinic Stories in the Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah	157
<i>Tal Ilan</i> The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Jerusalem Talmud	175
<i>Peter J. Tomson</i> Jesus, Master of Aggadah. The Parable of the Four Kinds of Soil	183
<i>Lieve M. Teugels</i> Rabbinic Meshalim and the Parables of Jesus. The Pattern of the Master and the Appointed Overseer	201

<i>Bruce D. Chilton</i>	
The Last Earthquake: Zechariah, Matthew, <i>Peter</i> , and the Force of Haggadah	229
<i>Roger David Aus</i>	
Luke 1:78–79; the Sprout as the Messiah; the Dawn / Morning Star; and the Gradual Beginning of Redemption in Judaic Tradition on Esther, the “Hind of the Dawn”	251
<i>Harold W. Attridge</i>	
Scripture and Haggadah in the Fourth Gospel. Haggadic Strategy in John 10:34–36.....	289
<i>Arie W. Zwiep</i>	
Haggadic Motifs in the Acts of the Apostles: A Search for Traces of the Tradition of the Elders in Acts 1–3	307
<i>Christian Grappe</i>	
Traces de motifs haggadiques dans le récit de libération merveilleuse de prison de Pierre en Actes 12	335
<i>Gerbern S. Oegema</i>	
Haggadah in Gal 3:6–14 and Rom 4:1–16	359
<i>Klaus Haacker</i>	
Freispruch für den Frevler. Ps 32,1–2 in Röm 4,5–8 und in jüdischen Rezeptionen	375
<i>Alan C. Mitchell</i>	
What Is Haggadic About Hebrews?	393
Authors	409
Index of Major Ancient Sources	411
Index of Modern Authors	423
Subject Index	430

Abbreviations

In order to be consistent, the abbreviations for journals and series in all the contributions in this volume, whether in English, German, or French, are cited according to *The SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). The abbreviations in German and French for biblical books and writings such as the pseudepigrapha are those presently customary in biblical scholarship in those languages. However, the following abbreviations, primarily of rabbinic works, are not spelled out with bibliographical information in *The SBL Handbook of Style*. Since they occur frequently in this collection of essays, this is given here. An example would be: Finkelstein 297; Eng. Hammer 272. This list proceeds from the earliest, Tannaitic sources, to the later Amoraic ones.

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- Zuckerman, *Tosefta*, ed. Moshe Zuckerman, with a supplement by Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1970).
- Lieberman, *The Tosefta*, ed. Saul Lieberman (*sic*) (New York: The Jewish Theological Society of America, 1955–1992), 10 vols.
- Neusner, *The Tosefta*, trans. Jacob Neusner et al. (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1977–1986), 6 vols.
- Soncino, *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Isidore Epstein, various translators (London: Soncino, 1952), 18 vols. and index.
- Krotoshin, *Talmud Yerushalmi*, Krotoshin edition (Jerusalem: Shiloh, 1969).
- Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, trans. Jacob Neusner et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982–1995), 34 vols.
- Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. Jacob Lauterbach (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976), 3 vols.
- Horowitz, *Siphre ad Numeros adjecto Siphre zutta*, ed. Haim Horovitz (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1976).
- Neusner, *Sifre to Numbers*, trans. Jacob Neusner (BJS 118–119; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 2 vols.
- Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969).
- Hammer, *Sifre. A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, trans. Reuven Hammer (YJS 24; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
- Midrash Rabbah*, with the five Megilloth at the end of vol. 2 (Vilna: Romm, 1887), 2 vols.
- Mirkin, *Midrash Rabbah*, Pentateuch, ed. and vocalized by Moshe Mirkin (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1981), 11 vols.
- Soncino, *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, various translators (London: Soncino, 1939), 9 vols. and index.
- Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, ed. Judah Theodor and Chanoch Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 3 vols.

- Dunski, *Midrash Rabbah. Shir ha-Shirim*, ed. Shim'on Dunski (Jerusalem: Dvir, 1980).
- Midrash Tanhuma*, Eshkol edition (Jerusalem: Eshkol, no date), 2 vols.
- Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu*. Genesis and Exodus, trans. Samuel Berman (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1996).
- Buber, *Midrasch Tanhuma: Ein agadischer Commentar zum Pentateuch*, ed. Salomon Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1885), 2 vols.
- Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma (S. Buber Recension)*, 3 vols., Genesis-Deuteronomy (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1989–2003).
- Becker, *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*. Synoptische Edition beider Versionen, ed. Hans-Jürgen Becker with Christoph Berner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).
- Schechter, *Abot de Rabbi Nathan (A and B)*, ed. Solomon Schechter (Vienna, 1887; reprinted New York: Feldheim, 1945).
- Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan (A)*, trans. Judah Goldin (YJS 10; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).
- Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan (B)*, trans. Anthony Saldarini (SJLA 11; Leiden: Brill, 1975).
- Friedmann, *Pesikta Rabbati*, ed. Meir Friedmann (Vienna, 1880; reprint Tel Aviv, 1962–1963).
- Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, trans. William Braude (YJS 18; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 2 vols.
- Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), 2 vols.
- Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, trans. William Braude and Israel Kapstein (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975).
- Friedmann, *Seder Eliahu rabba und Seder Eliahu zuta*, ed. Meir Friedmann (Vienna, 1902–1904; reprint Jerusalem, 1969).
- Braude and Kapstein, *Tanna debe Eliyyahu*, trans. William Braude and Israel Kapstein (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981).
- Buber, *Midrasch Tehillim*, ed. Salomon Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1891).
- Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William Braude (YJS 13,1–2; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2 vols.
- Visotzky, *Midrash Mishle*, ed. Burton Visotzky (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990).
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- Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, trans. Gerald Friedlander (London, 1916; reprint New York: Hermon Press, 1970).
- Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam*. The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology, ed. and trans. Heinrich Guggenheimer (Northvale, NJ, and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1998).
- Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic*, ed. Alexander Sperber (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 4 vols.
- Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, trans. Bernard Grossfeld (The Aramaic Bible 6; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988).
- Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance*, ed. Ernest Clarke (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1984).
- Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, trans. Michael Maher (The Aramaic Bible 1B; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992).
- Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1*, ed. Alejandro Diez Macho (Madrid – Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968–1978), 5 vols.
- McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, trans. Martin McNamara (The Aramaic Bible 1A; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992).

- Klein, *The Fragment Targums of the Pentateuch*, ed. and trans. Michael Klein (AnBib 76; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 2 vols.
- Harrington and Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets*, trans. Daniel Harrington and Anthony Saldarini (The Aramaic Bible 10; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987).
- Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah*, ed. and trans. John F. Stenning (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949).
- Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, trans. Bruce Chilton (The Aramaic Bible 11; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987).
- Hayward, *The Targum of Jeremiah*, trans. Robert Hayward (The Aramaic Bible 12; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987).
- Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel*, trans. Samuel Levey (The Aramaic Bible 13; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987).
- Cathcart and Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, trans. Kevin Cathcart and Robert Gordon (The Aramaic Bible 14; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989).
- Merino, *Targum de Salmos*, ed. with a Latin translation by Luis Díez Merino (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1982).
- Stec, *The Targum of Psalms*, trans. David Stec (The Aramaic Bible 16; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).
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Introduction

Roger David Aus

My wife and I usually enjoy a glass of dry red wine in the evening. This reminds me of the wine mentioned in biblical and early Jewish sources, which was also almost always red. In the Song of Moses, for example, the author chides Israel for not acknowledging that the Lord provided for it in earlier, difficult times. Deut 32:14 states regarding this period: “you drank fine wine from the blood of grapes.” The Tannaitic interpreter of this verse in Siphre Deuteronomy aptly comments here: “these are *haggadoth*, which attract a man’s heart like wine.”¹

Almost everyone in the area of biblical scholarship knows and can state what *halakhah* is: the legal interpretation of Scripture. Yet when pressed to define *haggadah* / *aggadah*, most students of the New Testament, for example, suddenly become quiet. This is in part due to a lack of solid exposure to early Judaism in their training, but also to the fact that the term is impossible to describe with only one expression. It is not simply everything which is not *halakhah*.² Rather, it “includes narrative, legends, doctrines, admonitions to ethical conduct and good behavior, words of encouragement and comfort, and expressions of hope for future redemption.” It can consist of “parables and allegories, metaphors and terse maxims, lyrics, dirges, and prayers, biting satire and fierce polemic, idyllic tales and tense dramatic dialogues, hyperboles and plays on words, permutations of letters,” and other subjects.³ In contrast to the “law” of *halakhah*, it is often labeled “lore.”⁴

Haggadic interpretation of Scripture is very old. One could label it typical of *haggadah*, already in the Bible, when 1–2 Chronicles add details of names, places and times to what was thought to be lacking in 1–2 Samuel and 1–2

¹ Cf. Siphre Ha’azinu 317 on Deut 32:14 (Finkelstein 359; Eng. Hammer 324). See also b. Yoma 75a (Eng. Soncino 362) regarding the *gad* (coriander) of Num 11:7: “It was like *haggadah*, which attracts a man’s heart like water.” This comparison was especially true in the scorching summer sun of Palestine.

² This is carefully pointed out in the first essay of this volume by Günter Stemberger. See also Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* 1. IX: *Haggadah* is “a name that can be explained by a circumlocution, but cannot be translated.”

³ Cf. the art. “*Aggadah* or *Haggadah*” in *EncJud* (2007) 1.456.

⁴ Cf. Jacob Neusner, *The Halakhah and the Aggadah*. Theological Perspectives (Studies in Ancient Judaism; Lanham, MD, etc.: University Press of America, 2001) 28.

Kings. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, in its earliest parts from the third century BCE, also betrays different readings or vocalizations of the Hebrew text, at times interpreting its meaning in a major new way. Haggadic comments on Genesis in the pseudepigraphical book of “Jubilees” were made already in the second century BCE,⁵ and the “Genesis Apocryphon” at Qumran also betrays such comment.⁶ The Palestinian work “Pseudo-Philo,” thought to be from “around the time of Jesus,” retells and expands in a major, haggadic way the biblical narrative from Adam to David.⁷ Essays on Philo and Josephus in this volume demonstrate the same tendency to retell and embellish the content of the Bible.

It is thus puzzling why New Testament scholars do not employ the term “haggadah” when dealing with such elements in the Gospels, Paul, and elsewhere. Nor do they often recognize and appreciate them as such. One recent example is the voluminous *Jesus Handbuch* of 2017.⁸ It has a section devoted to Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah and halakhah,⁹ yet nothing specifically, for example, on the use of Judaic haggadic traditions which inform his miracles.¹⁰ The same applies to the Matthean and Lukan birth narratives, includ-

⁵ Cf. O. S. Wintermute in OTP 2.44 for 160–140 BCE. Chapters 1–46 deal with the Genesis narratives. George Nickelsburg in *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005²) 73 thinks of “the early 160s [BCE].”

⁶ Cf. 1QapGen ar in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, ed. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden, etc.: Brill; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 1.28–49. On the relationship of this writing to 1 Enoch, see Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature* 172–177. He considers it to have been composed “some time around the turn of the era” (177).

⁷ Cf. Daniel Harrington in OTP 2.299–300 and 297. See also the critical Latin text with an introduction by Harrington in *Pseudo-Philon, Les Antiquités Bibliques* (SC 229; Paris: du Cerf, 1976) 1–2. In contrast, Nickelsburg in *Jewish Literature* would date the work in the vicinity of the Jewish-Roman War of 66–70 CE (269). The Palestinian writing “The Lives of the Prophets” may date to “the first quarter of the first century A.D.” See D. R. Hare in OTP 2.381, and the contribution of Anna Maria Schwemer in this volume for somewhat later.

⁸ Ed. Jens Schröter and Christine Jacobi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

⁹ Cf. pp. 402–416 by Thomas Kagan.

¹⁰ Cf. pp. 322–326 by Bernd Kollmann, who, including bibliography, nowhere refers to the haggadic traditions behind the Gospel narratives he analyzes, although I have elucidated some of these extensively elsewhere. See for example *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist. Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:17–29* (BJS 150; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 1–37; “Walking on the Sea. The Crossing of the Reed Sea in Exodus 14–15, and Jesus as the Second Moses and Messiah in Mark 6:45–52, Matt 14:22–33, and John 6:16–21” in “Caught in the Act,” *Walking on the Sea, and the Release of Barabbas Revisited* (SFSHJ 157; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 53–133; *The Stilling of the Storm. Studies in Early Palestinian Judaic Traditions* (ISFCJ; Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2000) 1–87; *Feeding the Five Thousand. Studies in the Judaic Background of Mark 6:30–44 par. and John 6:1–15* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD, etc.: University Press of America, 2010); and “The Cursing of the Fig Tree in Mark 11:12–14, 20–21 and Judaic Tradition on Ps 1:3” in *Essays in the Judaic Background of Mark 11:12–14, 20–*

ing the “virgin birth” of Jesus and the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple,¹¹ as well as to the account of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning.¹²

As noted in the Preface, it was my privilege to study for a short time during my graduate work at Yale University with the professor of early Judaism, Judah Goldin, himself a student of Louis Ginzberg, author of the opus magnum *The Legends of the Jews*.¹³ When Goldin at one point described “Haggadic Interpretation,” he aptly spoke of “imaginative dramatization,”¹⁴ and Isaac Heinemann also spoke in this regard of “creative historiography” as a major type of haggadah.¹⁵ The narratives noted above are such Jewish Christian imaginative dramatizations, primarily intended to glorify him whom his adherents now considered to be the Messiah, the Son of God.

In light of their own Jewish tradition, it was very understandable that early Jewish Christians retrospectively attributed to the historical Jesus miraculous capabilities.¹⁶ For them, he was more, for example, than Israel’s greatest miracle worker, Elisha (2 Kgs 4:42–44), more than the child prodigy Samuel in the Temple, and more than Israel’s first redeemer, Moses, whose birth and death, including his translation to heaven and his grave site’s never being

21; 15:23; Luke 1:37; John 19:28–30; and Acts 11:28 (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD, etc.: University Press of America, 2015) 1–40.

¹¹ Cf. pp. 214–219 by Stephen Hultgren in the *Jesus Handbuch*. On these, see *Matthew 1–2 and the Virginal Conception in Light of Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaic Traditions on the Birth of Israel’s First Redeemer, Moses* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD, etc.: University Press of America, 2004); “Luke 1:37 in Light of Gen 18:14 and Judaic Traditions on the Wondrous Conception of Isaac by the Rejuvenated Virgin Sarah” in *Essays in the Judaic Background* 67–116; and “The Child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41–51a), and Judaic Traditions on the Child Samuel in the Temple (1 Samuel 1–3)” in *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*. Three Early Palestinian Jewish Christian Gospel Haggadoth (SFSHJ 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 1–64.

¹² Cf. pp. 495–497 by Christine Jacobi in the *Jesus Handbuch*, including interpretation of it as an early Christian “legend.” A concrete haggadic background to the narrative is offered in *The Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, and the Death, Burial, and Translation of Moses in Judaic Tradition* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD, etc.: University Press of America, 2008).

¹³ Goldin is well-known, for example, for his *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (Yale Judaica Series 10; New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1955). Interestingly, Ginzberg wrote his 1898 Heidelberg dissertation on Jewish haggadah in the Church Fathers, later marrying a woman from Berlin. He taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York from 1903 until his death in 1953. See his encyclopedic *The Legends of the Jews*, 6 volumes with vol. 7, Index.

¹⁴ Cf. his *The Song at the Sea* (Philadelphia / New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1971 / 1990) 27.

¹⁵ Cf. the art. “Aggadah or Haggadah” in *EncJud* (2007) 1.462.

¹⁶ This does not apply to his healings and exorcisms, which have a greater chance of having an historical core.

found, were greatly embellished in Judaic tradition. This was considered by them as Jews to be a legitimate expression of their belief.

The above tendency to embellish is also true, for example, for later Christian interpretation of the “wise men from the East” who came to pay homage to “the newborn king of the Jews” in Matt 2:1–12. In the course of time they became three on the basis of three gifts in the text (v. 11), although no number is given for the wise men. They now were also considered kings because of the costly gifts they brought, and they received concrete names: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. One is now usually portrayed as a Black, which is also not in the text. “Creative dramatization” has thus been at work here throughout the centuries. It continues even today in Christmas pageants and in new collections of Christmas stories, which sell especially well in the Advent season. If present-day Christians are capable of accepting and appreciating such much later embellishment of the Matthean birth narrative,¹⁷ they could also now learn to appreciate other haggadic elements in the Gospel narratives of the adult Jesus. There is in principle no difference, and New Testament pastors and scholars, properly trained in the nature of haggadah already at the seminary or divinity school level, could show lay persons how to gain such an appreciation.

In addition, the questions of historicity and truth in haggadic narratives,¹⁸ a thorny issue for fundamentalists and some very conservative Evangelicals, would no longer be a major issue because the haggadic nature of narratives would then be recognized and acknowledged for what it is: not threatening for one’s faith.

Haggadic elements were employed in early Judaism not only in the Aramaic translation (*targum*) of the Hebrew text read aloud in a worship service in order to make its present-day meaning better understood by the listeners. They also were used in sermons / homilies there, as well as in the study house (*beth ha-midrash*). The purpose was clear, as shown in the Tannaitic Sipre ‘Eqeb 49 on Deut 11:22, “cleaving to Him” : “Expounders of haggadoth say: If you wish to know Him who spoke and the world came into being, study haggadah, for thereby you will come to know Him who spoke and the world came into being and cleave to His ways.”¹⁹ The study of haggadah can thus also lead to a better understanding of God’s dealing with man, and to man’s proper response to it.

Finally, this volume of nineteen essays on various aspects of Judaic and early Jewish Christian haggadah can encourage pastors and prospective New

¹⁷ Often it is even combined with the very different narrative of Luke 2:1–20. Many examples of the further development of a New Testament figure are found in the “New Testament Apocrypha.”

¹⁸ See the essay “Historicity and Truth in Haggadic Texts” in this volume.

¹⁹ Cf. Finkelstein 115; Eng. Hammer 106, who omits one phrase.

Testament scholars during their professional training (and even later) not only to master Greek, but also to study Hebrew, including rabbinic Hebrew, as well as Aramaic, which is especially relevant for the targums. By so doing they will have much easier access to the great riches found in Judaic haggadic sources, will appreciate these riches, and will learn to better understand how the New Testament writers employed such materials. With such training, they will greatly improve their abilities as theologians to interpret the biblical message for today, and they will also be much better equipped to participate in meaningful Jewish-Christian dialogue.²⁰

²⁰ On the Jewish side it may be noted that a German Jew who emigrated to Palestine in 1935 and thus escaped the Holocaust, Schalom Ben Chorin (b. 1913 as Fritz Rosenthal, d. 1999) wrote, for example, a trilogy on Jesus, Mary and Paul, including there many insights from the haggadah. He also graciously participated actively in “Kirchentage” and other ecumenical meetings in Germany. Over coffee and cake in his Jerusalem apartment, after a very long discussion of the relevance of haggadah to the Gospels, he once kindly called me a *ba'al aggadah*.

Haggadah in Rabbinic Literature

Günter Stemberger

It is notoriously difficult, if not impossible, to define the rabbinic term Haggadah or Aggadah, in its alternative spelling influenced by Aramaic, or its Aramaic equivalent Aggadah or Aggadeta, translated by Marcus Jastrow as “tale, story, lesson, esp. *Agadah*, that class of Rabb. literature which explains the Bible *homiletically*,”¹ or similarly by Michael Sokoloff “homiletical interpretation”² or “homiletic story.”³ The word is derived from the Hebrew *le-haggid* (hiph’il of *nagad*), to tell, to narrate. It has become common to define the term in a negative way, contrasting it with halakhah. In its more special meaning, Haggadah is the text of the Passover Seder, the recitation of the story of Israel’s redemption from Egypt.

I. “Haggadah” in Tannaitic Literature⁴

The term occurs only once in the Mishnah. If somebody is prohibited by vow from deriving benefit from his friend, the friend nevertheless “teaches him midrash, halakhot and aggadot. But he does not teach him Scripture (ואמלמדו מדרש הלכות ואגדות. לא ילמדינו מקרא)” (m. Ned. 4:3). As the Palestinian Talmud explains this passage, for teaching Scripture one may receive pay, but not so for teaching midrash, halakhot and aggadot. Therefore being taught these subjects does not imply any benefit. The sequence מדרש הלכות ואגדות is thus opposed to Scripture, although not independent from it, as the term mid-

¹ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* 11, or s.v. Haggadah, “homiletics, popular lecture” (330).

² Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002²) 34.

³ Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002) 78.

⁴ Rabbinic texts are quoted according to the manuscript versions available in the *Ma’agarim* of the Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. Biblical texts are quoted according to the New Revised Standard Version, unless the rabbinic context requires a more literal rendering. Where for rabbinic texts I use an existing translation, I quote their authors, but frequently the context requires a more literal rendering.

rash makes clear. As Paul D. Mandel understands this passage, “the singular [midrash] is used as a collective noun to indicate a *collection* of transmitted teachings, as distinguished from the collections indicated by the words *halakhot*, and *haggadot*; together, these comprise the major corpora of the transmitted collections of the ‘Oral Law.’”⁵ The contrast with Scripture makes it clear that *midrash* is connected with it, biblical traditions, but different from the Bible it is “Oral Law.” Yet it is not quite clear if *halakhot* and *aggadot* are part of midrash, or rather independent of it. At any rate, *aggadot* are in the plural, not yet in the abstract or rather collective singular, *aggadah*.

A similar sequence occurs in t. Ber. 2:12:

Zabim and *zabot*, and menstruating women, and women after childbirth are permitted to read [aloud] (לקרות) from the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, and to study (לשנות) Mishnah, midrash, halakhot and aggadot (מוחרין לקרות בתורה בנביאים ובכתובים ולשנות במשנה במדרש) (בהלכות ובאגדות), but those who have had a seminal discharge are forbidden [to engage] in all [of the aforementioned activities]. R. Yosé says, “But one may study routine halakhot (בהלכות הרגילות) as long as he does not cite the Mishnah” (transl. Jacob Neusner).

This passage allows people affected with certain forms of impurity to read the Bible and to study Mishnah, midrash, halakhot and aggadot, thus viewing aggadot as belonging to the Oral Torah (לשנות)⁶ and associating them in some way with the Bible, last in the continuum beginning with the Torah. They are the object of a kind of religious learning, accessible even to women, who normally would not be mentioned in such a context and are excluded in later formulations of this tradition. This religious learning is not affected by minor forms of impurity, but is not allowed to people having suffered a seminal discharge.⁷ (This, however, is not the place to discuss the reasons behind this differentiation between forms of impurity.) Aggadot are associated with Bible, Mishnah and midrash; they belong to the religious sphere and participate to some extent in its holiness. This passage is cited in y. Ber. 3:4, 22a (cf. y. Šabb. 1:4, 3d), where R. Abba bar Aḥa in the name of Rabbi allows a person with seminal discharge more generally to learn halakhot, but not to learn

⁵ Paul D. Mandel, *The Origins of Midrash. From Teaching to Text* (JSJS 180; Leiden: Brill, 2017) 265. He argues that up to the second century CE the term “*midrash*” means instruction in the law; only later does it become more and more the interpretation of a text, as we see it in m. Nedarim: “Only when combined with the two categories, *halakhot* and *aggadot*, is the word *midrash* used as a collective singular noun” (265, n. 109).

⁶ Louis Finkelstein, “Midrash, Halakhot, and Aggadot” (Hebrew), in Salo W. Baron et al. (eds.), *Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Israel Historical Society, 1960) 28–47, derives from the common verb לשנות, which also includes the study of midrash, halakhot and aggadot, that the term mishnah here includes them all (28–29); aggadah is part of the study of halakhah and its culmination (31).

⁷ Y. Mo‘ed Qat. 3:5, 82d forbids, among other things, these same activities of religious learning to mourners.

haggadot (ואינו שונה הגדות). Does this imply that *aggadot* have a higher degree of holiness, or simply that learning halakhot is so essential that even higher forms of impurity cannot keep a person from it? We cannot know.

T. Soṭah 7:21 offers several interpretations of Prov 24:27: “Prepare your work outside, get everything ready for you in the field; and after that build your house,” referring the three parts of the verse to several possibilities of three parts of study, as e.g. Scripture, Mishnah and midrash. One sequence has midrash, laws and *aggadot*, another starts with halakhot, to be followed by *aggadot*, and finally by talmud. If we do not consider the different sequences as haphazard and inconsequential, one interpretation considers midrash as the basis of all learning, with *aggadot* as its final consummation (“after that build your house”), whereas the other takes halakhot and *aggadot* as the two preliminary steps to the study of talmud, the comprehensive mastering of religious learning. In the next and last interpretation talmud is followed by a good deed (מעשה הטוב), which leads to interpretation and reward (בא דרוש וטול שכר). As frequently in such sequences of “another matter” (דבר אחר), they are not to be read as alternatives, but rather as panels of a polyptychon, to be seen together. All study should finally lead to good deeds and their reward. But where in the course of study the *aggadot* are placed is significant. They are always based on midrash, together with the halakhot, and (as in so many other texts) they always follow the halakhot. In one case they may be regarded as secondary to the halakhot, in the other as their final consummation.

Here we may also quote the anecdote of the Roman soldiers who are sent to Rabban Gamaliel, feigning to be proselytes, to learn the whole Jewish religious tradition and to know its value (וראו תורתם של ישראל מה טיבה). There “they read Scripture and learnt (orally) Mishnah, midrash, halakhot and *aggadot*” (וקראו את המקרא ושנו את המשנה מדרש הלכות והגדות): Sipre Deut. 344; the parallel y. B. Qam. 4:3, 4b adds talmud after Mishnah). Here too the full spectrum reaches from Scripture to *aggadot* as part of midrash; they all belong together.

In the context of the trial of property cases before the Sanhedrin, m. Sanh. 4 and its parallel, t. Sanh. 7, discuss the right order of arguments. “[If there is]... a law and an exegesis (הלכה ומדרש) – they attend to the law, an exegesis and a tale (מדרש ואגדה) – they attend to the exegesis; an exegesis and an argument a fortiori – they attend to the argument a fortiori; an argument a fortiori and an analogy – they attend to the argument a fortiori” (t. Sanh. 7:7). It is not quite clear how much these arguments still pertain to a trial and not to the determination of the halakhah. What is clear, however, is the opposition of midrash to halakhah and to *aggadah*; they are not both regarded as part of midrash. *Aggadah* is here the weakest argument. If it is simply a “tale,” as translated by Neusner, is thus not quite clear. Much closer is the connection with the explanation of Scripture, midrash, in the two remaining occurrences

of aggadah in the Tosefta. In t. Soṭah 7:9 two rabbis visit R. Joshua in Peqin. He wants to know what R. Eleazar ben Azariah taught in the school-house (בבית המדרש): “Whence was the aggadah? (היכן היתה הגדה) ‘Assemble the people – men, women, and children’ (Deut 31:12). He said to them, ‘What did he explain in this connection’ (מה דרש בה)?” This is the reading of MS Vienna; MS Erfurt reads: “What did he explain” (ובמה דרש)? Both versions continue that R. Eleazar expounded Deut 31:12. Aggadah and derash here are clearly equivalent to the interpretation of a biblical text, explaining the need to include women and children in the commandment to assemble the people every seventh year for a public reading of the Torah. In t. ‘Ed. 1:14 R. Aqiva is said to interpret five matters in form of aggadah (דורש כמין אגדה): “In five aspects does the father endow the son.” The discussion with the rabbis on this matter involves the meaning of “generation” in several biblical texts (Isa 41:4; Gen 15:16, etc.). The text does not go into details of the interpretation; but it is clearly not the literal meaning of the texts.⁸

The occurrences of the term haggadah in the halakhic midrashim confirm what we found in Mishnah and Tosefta. In Sipre Deut. 306 (ed. Finkelstein 339), one of several interpretations of Deut 32:2 reads:

Another interpretation: My doctrine shall drop as the rain: Just as rain falls on trees and infuses them with the particular flavor (of their fruit) – the grapevine according to its flavor, the olive tree according to its flavor, the fig tree according to its flavor – so also words of Torah are all the same (דברי תורה כולן אחת), yet they comprise Scripture, Mishnah, Midrash, Halakhot, and Haggadot (מקרא ומשנה ומדרש והלכות והגדות) (transl. Hammer, slightly adapted).

It may astonish one that this passage considers halakhot and aggadot in the same way as words of Torah, as Scripture itself: “they are all the same,” at least as God’s doctrine, which may be accessible to man in different ways. Not everybody may directly understand the word of the Torah, yet the outcome of its interpretation in halakhot and aggadot. All depends on the person who receives the doctrine. The midrash warns the student that he should not be content to master difficult scriptural lessons and to neglect the easy ones: “This is no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life” (Deut 32:47). “Something which you say is worthless is your very life.” Therefore one must study everything, “Midrash, halakhot, and aggadot” (למוד מדרש הלכות והגדות). And similarly, “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3), refers to halakhot and aggadot (אילו הלכות והגדות) (Sipre Deut. 48). Commenting on Deut 32:2, Sipre Deut. 306 states: “Just as rain cannot be anticipated in advance..., so is a disciple of the wise – you do not know what his character is

⁸ The parallel m. ‘Ed. 2:9 does not refer to haggadah.

Index of Major Ancient Sources

Hebrew Bible / Septuagint

Genesis

13:5 360
15:6 360

Exodus

15:1 207

Leviticus

23:40 192–193

Numbers

23:7 204
23:18 204
24:3 204

Deuteronomy

32:14 1

Joshua

24:1 118
24:25–27 118

1 Kings

6:1 154

2 Kings

4:42–44 3
18:13–20:17 105
18:17 107
21:16 105

1 Chronicles

4:17 132

2 Chronicles

24:20–21 121
36:20–21 144

Nehemiah

3:15–16 108

Esther

5:1–3 276
8:16 279

Psalms

22:1 277
32:1–2 377, 389
LXX 68:26 321
68:28 210
82:3–5 302
82:6 297
82:8 304
LXX 108:8 321
118:22–23 222
132:17 256

Isaiah

6:9–10 197
7:3 107
8:6 108
9:1 281
12:3 108
19:1, 20 111
36–39 105
36:2 107
61:1–2 141

Jeremiah

LXX 18:7, 9 112
23:6 305
LXX 26:15 111
LXX 50:7–9 109
LXX 51:29 111

Ezekiel

17:2 204
24:3 204
37:1, 9–10 51
37:11 117
40:1 147–148

<i>Daniel</i>		<i>Jubilees</i>	
12:2	51	1:11–12	117
		3:8–12	47
<i>Joel</i>		4:1, 8, 10	129
2:10	41	7:1–2	48
		8:12, 19	115
<i>Amos</i>		17:7	77
8:9–10	40–41	18:9	77
<i>Zechariah</i>		<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>	
14:4–5	229–230	159	89
Apocrypha		<i>Lives of the Prophets</i>	
		Isaiah	104–109
<i>Sirach</i>		Jeremiah	109–115
LXX 46:10	120	Ezekiel	115–117
LXX 49:10	120	Hosea	117–120
51:12–13	256–257	Zechariah	120–123
<i>1 Maccabees</i>		<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>	
15:33–34	101	8.217–250	245
<i>2 Maccabees</i>		<i>Slavonic Enoch</i>	
2:1, 13–15	113	70–72	58
2:4–8	113		
2:4	112		
7:9, 11, 14, 23	51	<i>Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs</i>	
		Ashur 7:6–7	117
<i>4 Maccabees</i>		Dead Sea Scrolls	
7:18	86		
13:13	86	<i>1Q Genesis Apocryphon</i>	
		II, 1–25	57–58
Pseudepigrapha		II, 19–22	44
		XII, 13–17	49
<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i>		XIX, 14, 19	61
3:3–10	106	XIX, 24–27	131
3:13–20	244	XX, 2	62
5:1, 11	106, 117	XX, 12–21	63
8:11	106	XX, 17–18:30–31	50
11:41	117	XX, 21–22	64
		XXI, 8	360
<i>1 Enoch</i>			
1:3–9	118	<i>The Damascus Document (CD)</i>	
1:3–4	112	II, 15–21	52–53
106:1–107:3	56	III, 107	53
		IV, 21	53
<i>Fourth Ezra</i>		V, 2–6	53
11:46	331		
12:34	331		

<i>IQ Hodayot</i>		<i>Dec.</i>	
VIII	196	64	83
X, 8–10	328		
4Q161, Frag. 8–10, III	259	<i>Her.</i>	
4Q174	323	90–93	363
4Q174, Frag. 1, II 21.2	259		
4Q186, II, 5–9	60	<i>Leg.</i>	
4Q186, III, 3–6	60	1.82	79
4Q225, II ii.8	81	3.85–87	79
4Q225, II ii.9–10	88	3.228–229	363
4Q242, Frag. 1–4	54		
4Q252, Frag. 1, II 2–3	49	<i>Mig.</i>	
4Q252, V	260	43–52	362
4Q265, Frag. 7, II 11–17	47–48		
4Q285, Frag. 5	260	<i>Mos.</i>	
4Q364, Frag. 3, II 1–6	46	2.44	114
4Q365, Frag. 6a, II	46		
4Q385, Frag. 2, V–X	50	<i>Mut.</i>	
4Q385a, Frag. 18, I–II	51–52	1	79
4Q534, Frag. 1, I 1–11	59	131	79
4Q535, Frag. 3	60–61	186–192	364
4Q561, Frag. 1, I 1–5	60		
		<i>Sacr.</i>	
Pseudo-Philo		21–27	323
1:1	129	<i>Somn.</i>	
9:13	29	2.127	68
11:15	32		
23:1	118	<i>Spec. Leg.</i>	
25:2	101	2.155	40
27:16	101		
32:1–2,4	77	Josephus	
32:1–2	81		
		<i>Ant.</i>	
Philo		1.52–53	129
		1.113	132
<i>Abr.</i>		1.151	130
1–6	70	1.154–157	130–131
167–208	67–94	1.154–156	127–128
262–265	364	1.164	131
268–276	364	1.166–168	130–131
		1.227	131
<i>Conf.</i>		2.224	132
62–63	265–269	2.238–253	132
		5.182–184	101
<i>Contempl.</i>		7.130–146	384
87–88	46	8.389	132
		8.414	132
		9.178	135

10.1	142	<i>Yoma</i>	
10.25–27	135	6	36
10.27	142		
10.36	142	<i>Megillah</i>	
10.38	105	4:10	133, 136
10.100	135		
10.103	136	<i>Ḥagigah</i>	
10.106–107	127	1:8–3:6	193
10.145	153		
10.181–182	155	<i>Yebamot</i>	
11.5–6	142	4:13	177
11.6	152		
12.10	118	<i>Nedarim</i>	
13.74–79	118	4:3	7
16.179–183	97		
17.149–167	122	<i>Soṭah</i>	
18.29–30	346	4	178
18.116–119	38, 200		
19.343–353	352–353	<i>Sanhedrin</i>	
20.97–99	98	4	9
20.167	114		
20.169–172	98	<i>'Abot</i>	
20.169	318	3:2	315
		4:17	330
		5:10–16	193
<i>B.J.</i>			
1.648–654	122		
2.221–263	98	Tosefta	
2.259	114		
3.352	145	<i>Berakot</i>	
5.70	318	2:12	8
7.163–177	38	10:9	131
<i>C. Ap.</i>		<i>Sukkah</i>	
1.38	135	3:11–13	33
1.54	145		
<i>Vita</i>		<i>Ḥagigah</i>	
8–9	145	2:2–7	200
		2:2–4	192
Rabbinic Sources		<i>Yebamot</i>	
		8:3	177
Mishnah		<i>Ketubbot</i>	
<i>'Erubin</i>		5:1	189
4:3	319		
4:8	189	<i>Nedarim</i>	
		4:3	190
<i>Pesaḥim</i>			
10:8–9	346		

<i>Soṭah</i>		<i>Mo'ed Qaṭan</i>	
7:9–10	190	21a	21
7:9	22	25b	40
7:21	9	28b	21
<i>Sanhedrin</i>		<i>Hagigah</i>	
7:7	9	3a	22
		14a	22, 24, 192
<i>'Eduyyot</i>		15a–b	157
1:14	10	<i>Yebamot</i>	
<i>Zebaḥim</i>		49b	105
13:6	148	56b	177
		62a	129
Babylonian Talmud		<i>Ketubbot</i>	
<i>Berakot</i>		111a	248
10a	23, 135	<i>Nedarim</i>	
31b	35	65a	136
34b	229	<i>Soṭah</i>	
<i>Šabbat</i>		12a	29
87a	23	26a	177
<i>Pesaḥim</i>		<i>Qiddušin</i>	
54b	313	30a	21
<i>Yoma</i>		<i>Baba Qamma</i>	
9a	148	55a	190
29a	274	<i>Baba Meši'a</i>	
38b	23	59a–b	157
75a	1, 23, 42	<i>Baba Batra</i>	
<i>Sukkah</i>		9b	22
28a	21	134a	21
29a	40	145b	22
53a	23	<i>Sanhedrin</i>	
<i>Ta'anit</i>		29b	131
16a	21	38b	24, 192
30a	21	67b	24
<i>Megillah</i>		92b	30
3a	313	97b–98a	330
14a	273	103b	105
14b	150	107a	385
17a	140		
25a–b	133		

<i>'Abodah Zarah</i>		<i>Soṭah</i>	
5a	300, 386	4:1, 19c	178
		4:5, 19d	177–178
<i>'Arakin</i>		<i>Baba Meši'a</i>	
12a–b	145, 148	2:13, 8d	14
17a	136		
33a	150	<i>Baba Batra</i>	
<i>Niddah</i>		6:4, 15c	19
69b	22	<i>Sanhedrin</i>	
70b	22	10:2, 28b	135
Palestinian Talmud		10:2, 28c	105
<i>Berakot</i>		<i>'Abodah Zarah</i>	
3:4, 6c	179–180	3:1, 42c	40
3:4, 22a	8	<i>Horayot</i>	
5:1, 9a	14	3:5, 48c	190
9:7, 14b	86	3:8, 48c	15
<i>Pe'ah</i>		<i>Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael</i>	
1:1, 15d	40	Beshallah 1	11
2:6, 17a	14–15	Beshallah 4	209, 364–65
<i>Ma'aser Šeni</i>		Beshallah 5	32
3:10, 51a	16	Beshallah 6	210
<i>Šabbat</i>		Beshallah 7	365–66
1:4, 3d	8	Vayassa' 1	11
		Vayassa' 5	11
<i>Šeqalim</i>		Vayassa' 6	202, 313
5:1, 48c	190, 192	Baḥodesh 5	226
		Baḥodesh 8	208
<i>Ta'anit</i>		<i>Mekilta de Rabbi Šim'on ben Yoḥai</i>	
2:2, 65b	16	Exod 16:31	11
<i>Megillah</i>		<i>Sipre Numbers</i>	
4:1, 74d	40	95	33
		112	12
<i>Mo'ed Qaṭan</i>		<i>Sipre Deuteronomy</i>	
3:5, 82d	8, 21	48	10, 220
<i>Ḥagigah</i>		49	4, 12, 42, 191
2:1, 77b	200	177	131
3:6, 79c	193	306	10
<i>Yebamot</i>		317	1, 11, 191
4:2, 5c	16	342	38
		344	9
		348	11

352	211	4:12 § 3	33
355	34		
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i>		<i>Lamentations</i>	
		Proem 24	131
		1:1 § 1	41
<i>Genesis</i>		1:16 § 51	26
1/3	191		
3/4	17	<i>'Abot de Rabbi Nathan A</i>	
12/6	331–332	1	129
12/9	191	40	193
12/10	17		
22/47	129	<i>'Abot de Rabbi Nathan B</i>	
28/3	248	45	190, 193
41/1	20		
44/8	19	<i>Pesiqta de Rab Kahana</i>	
44/13	366	15/3	41
46/2	373	27/9	193
56/4	81		
56/7	88	<i>Pesiqta Rabbati</i>	
61/4	129	4/3	106
66/3	33	26	136
73/7	19	33/7	323
81/2	18	44/7	323
		45	391
<i>Exodus</i>		<i>Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer</i>	
1/20	29	21	129–130
3/12	366		
15/26	40	<i>Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah</i>	
18/12	346–347	16	135
21/6	32		
<i>Leviticus</i>		<i>Midrash Psalms</i>	
10/5	130	21/2	305
15/2	20	22/2–3, 15	279
16/4	18	22/13	278
18/3	19–20	22/15	282
19/6	135	78	132
28/2	212		
30/9–12	193	<i>Midrash Samuel</i>	
31/1	18, 191	11	132
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		<i>Tanḥuma</i>	
2/22	279	Vayyera 23	131
		Vayyera 42	131
<i>Ecclesiastes</i>		Balak 16	129
1:9 § 1	38		
<i>Canticles</i>		<i>Seder 'Olam Rabbah</i>	
1:15 § 3	34	1	131
		11	149

13	35	<i>Targum 2 Chronicles</i>	
21	131	18:33	132
24	148		
26	155	<i>1 Targum Esther</i>	
28	148	9:29	274
30	148		
		<i>Targum Canticles</i>	
<i>Semahot de Rabbi Ḥiyya</i>		8:5	248
3:3	224		
		<i>Targum Isaiah</i>	
<i>Eighteen Prayer</i>		4:2	261
15th Benediction	258–259	4:5–6	315
		66:1	106
<i>Dura Europos Synagogue</i>			
Ezekiel Panel	249	<i>Targum Jeremiah</i>	
		23:5–6	261–262
Targums		33:15	262
		<i>Targum Ezekiel</i>	
<i>Targum Onqelos</i>		29:21	262
Gen 13:15	360		
Gen 15:6	361		
Num 35:34	315	<i>Targum Zechariah</i>	
		3:8	263
<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>		6:12	263
Gen 4:2,8	129	14:4, 9	234
Gen 13:15	361		
Gen 15:6	361	<i>Targum Psalms</i>	
Exod 12:42	345	18:5–6	328
Exod 40:34–38	315	116:3	326
Num 35:34	315	132:17	264
Deut 31:15–18	315		
		New Testament	
<i>Targum Neofiti I</i>		<i>Matthew</i>	
Gen 13:15	361	2:1–12	4
Gen 15:6	361	5:16	193
Gen 28:3	356	7:24–30	175–177
Gen 35:11	356	7:24–27	196
Gen 48:4	356	8:5–13	229
Exod 12:42	345	13:10–23	196
Num 35:34	315	13:13–15	198
		15:24	176
<i>Fragment Targum</i>		21:33–41	222
Gen 22:10	81	23:29–31	97
Exod 12:42	345	23:35	122
Exod 15:18	345	25:14–30	216–217, 229
<i>Targum 2 Samuel</i>		27:45–56	233
22:5	328	27:62–66	238
		28:1–2	235

<i>Mark</i>		3:21	332
1:14–15	199	5:36	98
1:14	200	21:38	98
4:2	197		
4:10–20	196	<i>Romans</i>	
4:10–12	197	4:7–8	377
4:34	197	4:9–12	372
6:14–29	37–38, 200	7:2	189
11:27–33	200		
15:25, 33–37	39	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	
15:38	41	10:4	33
16:1–8	33		
		<i>Galatians</i>	
<i>Luke</i>		3:6–14	371
1:11	123	4:25	113
1:78–79	251, 253		
2:1–20	4	<i>Hebrews</i>	
2:41–52	35	1:5	398–399
4:16–30	36–37	1:6	400
4:18–19	141	1:7	401
6:47–49	196	1:8–9	401
7:1–10	229	1:10–12	401–402
7:18–28	200	1:13	402
8:5–8	195	3:7–11	403–404
8:9–15	196	4:1–11	404–405
8:9–11	197–198	11:37	105, 115
11:47–48	97	12:1	105
11:50–51	121–122		
13:31–33	200	<i>James</i>	
16:1–8	225	2:23	367
19:11–27	218, 229		
20:1–8	200	<i>2 Peter</i>	
		1:19	284
<i>John</i>			
4:46–53	229	<i>Revelation</i>	
7:1–52	108	22:16	284
10:34–39	297		
13–17	38–39	Early Christian Writings	
18:38	29		
		<i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>	
<i>Acts</i>		1:6	244
1:7	312		
1:9	314	<i>Barnabas</i>	
1:12	317	13:7	368
1:16–22	321		
1:19	322	<i>1 Clement</i>	
2:14–36	323	10:1	368
2:24	324		
3:19–20	329–330		

<i>The Gospel According to Peter</i>		Jerome	
5:15—6:21	241		
9:34—11:49	242	<i>De viris illustribus</i>	
12:50—13:55	243	75	96
13:55—57	246		
		John Chrysostom	
<i>Polycarp</i>		<i>Homilies on Acts</i>	
Phil. 1.2	327	3	317
<i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>		Justin Martyr	
55 (V.2)	223		
		<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>	
<i>The Tripartite Tractate of Nag Hammadi</i>		23.4	369
11.10, 18–34	245	69.7	239
		92.3	370
Church Fathers		108.2	239
		119.6	370
Aphrahat		120.5	106
<i>Homily 22</i>	247	124.1	305
		141	385
Epiphanius		Melito of Sardis	
<i>Adversus Haereses</i>		<i>Peri Paskha</i>	
26, 12, 1–4	123	5, 7, 32–33, 60, 67, 69, 71	235
<i>Epistola Apostolorum</i>		Origen	
15	346–347	<i>Contra Celsum</i>	
Eusebius		6.34	106
<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>		Greek Authors	
2, 23, 18	106, 109	Aelian	
5, 1, 9	123	<i>De Natura Animalium</i>	
5,23–25	346	12.5	327
<i>Onomasticon</i>		Apollodorus	
44.21–22	100	<i>Bibliotheca</i>	
<i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i>		2.7.7	315
IX 17:7	65	Aristotle	
IX 27:23–25	337	<i>Rhetorica</i>	
<i>Theophania</i>		1,9.1,28	76
4:22	221	1,9.32	73

1,9.35	71	Pseudo-Kallisthenes	
1,9.38–39	74		
1,9.38	82	<i>Historia</i>	
		1,31,6	110
Demosthenes		1,33,11	111
<i>Orations</i>		<i>Vita</i>	
III,3	313	1,33,8	111
		3,24,2–4	111
Dio Cassius		Sophocles	
<i>Epitome</i>		<i>Fragments</i>	
69,14,2	109	590	312
Euripedes		Latin Authors	
<i>Bacchae</i>		Cicero	
443–450	337		
576–619	338	<i>De Oratore</i>	
Himerius		3.55	309
<i>Orationes</i>		<i>De Partitione Oratoria</i>	
18.1	327	74–75, 82	72
		73, 75	73
Lycophron		78	86
		82	73
<i>Alexandra</i>		Curtius Rufus	
1198	327		
Nonnos		<i>Historia</i>	
<i>Dionysiaca</i>		4,8,6	111
35.228–229	337	10,10,20	111
44.18–47	337	Ovid	
45.266–46.3	338	<i>Metamorphoses</i>	
Philostrate		III.695–700	337
<i>Life of Apollonius</i>		Pliny the Elder	
8.30	337	<i>Natural History</i>	
Plutarch		II.6 (36–37)	283
<i>Moralia Sera</i>		Quintillian	
4.549–550F	312	<i>Institutionis Oratoriae</i>	
<i>Numa</i>		4,1.5	79
2.1–3	315	4,2.31	75

4,2.56 84
5,10.16 84

Seneca

Ad Lucilium Epistolae Morales
81.19 88

Suetonius

Caligula
27:3 105

Index of Modern Authors

Ackerman, James	298	Ben Chorin, Schalom	5
Adams, Sean	308	Berger, Klaus	70, 72
Adelman, Rachel	67, 93	Bergman, Juda	140
Akagai, Kai	291	Bergsma, John	141, 152, 155
Alexander, Loveday	308	Bernett, Monika	122
Alexander, Philip	28, 93	Bertram, Georg	324
Allen, Wesley	344	Best, Ernest	244
Allison, Jr., Dale	28, 316	Betz, Otto	380
Amir, Yehoshua	81	Beutler, Johannes	289
Anderson, A. A.	277	Bickermann, Elias	152
Anderson, Gary	53	Bietenhard, Hans	309
Anderson, Paul	295, 303	Billerbeck, Paul (Str-B)	202, 260, 310, 312–314, 331– 332
Arav, Rami	36	bin Gorion, Micha	386
Attridge, Harold	289–306, 394, 402	Birdsong, Shelley	136
Aune, David	308	Black, Matthew	310
Aus, Roger	VII–VIII, 1–5, 27–42, 68, 158, 201–202, 234– 235, 237, 249, 252–288, 295– 296, 301, 305, 309, 322	Blank, Josef	305
Avemarie, Friedrich	105	Blosser, Don	155
Avery-Peck, Alan	157–173	Bock, Darrell	318, 324–325, 327
Avioz, Michael	125–137	Börner-Klein, Dagmar	12–13
Bacher, Wilhelm	11, 67, 104, 189	Boismard, Marie-Émile	294, 301, 314
Backhaus, Knut	294, 308	Bonneau, Norman	292
Barbi, Augusto	331–332	Bonsirven, Joseph	310
Barnard, Leslie	264	Bonz, Marianne	308
Barrera, Julio	323	Borgen, Peder	80, 92, 295
Barrett, Charles	311, 313, 343	Bornkamm, Heinrich	380
Bassler, Jouette	390	Boucher, Madeleine	214
Bauckham, Richard	235, 244, 308	Bouttier, Michel	350
Bauernfeind, Otto	320	Bovon, François	253
Baumgarten, Joseph	47, 152	Bowker, John	323
Beauchamp, Paul	291	Boyarin, Daniel	214, 295
Becker, Hans-Jürgen	287	Bradshaw, Jeffrey	249
Beckwith, Roger	152	Bratscher, Robert	324
Beekes, Robert	325	Braun, François-Marie	295
Behr, John	303	Braun, Herbert	394
		Brendsel, Daniel	303
		Brettler, Marc	158, 213
		Brock, Sebastian	99
		Brooke, George	67
		Bruce, Frederick	314

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Brunner-Traut, Emma | 112 | de Vries, Pieter | 295 |
| Buchanan, George | 395 | Dietrich, Walter | 382–383 |
| Bultmann, Rudolf | 297 | Dietzfelbinger, Christian | 294 |
| Burridge, Richard | 308 | Di Lella, Alexander | 256 |
| Buse, Ivor | 293 | Dillon, Richard | 293 |
| Buth, Randall | 204, 223, 225 | Dimant, Devorah | 50, 99 |
| Bynum, William | 291 | Docherty, Susan | 125, 397–405 |
| Byrskog, Samuel | 28 | Dodson, Derek | 232 |
| | | Dölger, Franz | 252 |
| Cadbury, Henry | 324 | Doering, Lutz | 99, 109 |
| Calvert-Koyzis, Nancy | 88 | Doeve, Jan | 323 |
| Carmignac, Jean | 253 | Donfried, Karl | 394 |
| Cathcart, Kevin | 234 | Dormeyer, Detlev | 70, 72, 89 |
| Chagall, Marc | 389 | Doubles, Malcolm | 27 |
| Chanikuzhy, Jacob | 294 | Dupont, Jacques | 336, 343 |
| Charlesworth, James | 294 | | |
| Charlier, Jean-Pierre | 290 | Ego, Beate | 99, 107 |
| Chilton, Bruce | 229–249, 295,
308, 310 | Ehrman, Bart | 223 |
| Christopher, Dany | 343, 348–351,
355 | Elbogen, Ismar | 259 |
| Clark, E. G. | 292 | Elgvin, Torleif | 102, 113 |
| Clark-Soles, Jaime | 304 | Ellingworth, Paul | 395 |
| Cohen, Leonard | 388, 392 | Ellis, E. Earle | 323–324 |
| Cohen, Norman | 366 | Enz, Jacob | 292 |
| Collins, John | 245, 261, 266 | Eppstein, Victor | 232 |
| Coloe, Mary | 293 | Epstein, Jacob | 189 |
| Conzelmann, Hans | 320, 349 | Evans, Craig A. | 197–199, 232,
290 |
| Cook, Eduard | 130 | | |
| Craigie, Peter | 277 | Fabry, Heinz-Josef | 326 |
| Crawford, Sidnie | 93 | Falk, Daniel | 44, 46 |
| Cross, Frank | 261 | Farris, Stephen | 254 |
| Crossan, John | 28, 244–246 | Faure, Patrick | 314, 327 |
| Czachesz, István | 245 | Feldman, Louis | 72, 76, 79–80,
88, 126–129,
132–134, 137,
141 |
| | | Fiebig, Paul | 202, 213 |
| Daise, Michael | 293 | Finkelstein, Louis | 8, 258 |
| Dalman, Gustaf | 259 | Finsterbusch, Karin | 43 |
| Daly-Denton, Margaret | 290–291 | Fiorenza, Elisabeth | 176 |
| Damgaard, Finn | 92 | Fischel, Henry | 194 |
| Daube, David | 68 | Fitzmyer, Joseph | 197–199, 320,
322–323, 331,
351 |
| Davies, W. D. | 316 | | |
| DeConick, April | 211 | Flesher, Paul | 240 |
| Degg, Martin | 249 | Flusser, David | VII, 186–187,
195, 198–199,
202, 212 |
| Deines, Roland | 270 | | |
| de Jonge, Henk | 317 | Förster, Hans | 296 |
| Delamarter, Steve | 310 | | |
| Denaux, Adelbert | 284, 309, 332 | | |
| Derrett, John | 291–292, 296 | | |
| de Vos, J. Cornelis | 118 | | |

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------|--|
| Fossum, Jarl | 295 | Groenewald, Alphonso | 324 |
| Foster, Paul | 241, 245–246 | Grossfeld, Bernard | 274 |
| Fox, Marvin | 26 | Grossman, Avraham | 127 |
| Fraade, Steven | 68, 78, 92 | Gruen, Erich | 307 |
| Fraenkel, Yona | 20, 214, 228 | Gruenwald, Ithamar | 126 |
| Frankfurter, David | 111 | Guggenheimer, Heinrich | 16 |
| Freed, E. D. | 289 | Gutmann, Joseph | 96 |
| Frey, Jörg | 296 | | |
| Fröhlich, Ida | 55 | Haacker, Klaus | 179, 375–392 |
| Froelich, Margaret | 37 | Hachlili, Rachel | 249 |
| Frühwald-König, Johannes | 293 | Haenchen, Ernst | 325, 327, 335 |
| Füglister, Notker | 342 | Hagner, Donald | 316 |
| | | Hahn, Ferdinand | 329 |
| Garrett, Susan | 349 | Halevy, Elimelech | 277 |
| Garsiel, Moshe | 382 | Hambly, W. R. | 292 |
| Garte, Edna | 249 | Hamburger, Jacob | 388 |
| Gathercole, Simon | 254–255, 378 | Hamilton, James | 291 |
| Gaventa, Beverly | 318 | Hanson, Anthony | 289, 292–293,
298, 304 |
| Gawlick, Matthias | 301 | | |
| Gelardini, Gabriella | 394–395 | Hare, D. R. | 2 |
| Genpf, Conrad | 308 | Harrington, Daniel | 2, 32 |
| Georghita, Radu | 397 | Harstine, Stanley | 301 |
| Gerhardsson, Birgir | 309 | Hasan-Rokem, Galit | 126 |
| Gerleman, Giles | 271 | Hayward, Charles | 295 |
| Gese, Hartmut | 115 | Heinemann, Isaac | 3, 131 |
| Gill, David | 308 | Heinemann, Joseph | 258, 396, 403 |
| Gilmour, S. MacLean | 252–253 | Henderson, Timothy | 241 |
| Ginzberg, Louis | 1, 3, 109, 126,
130, 132, 140,
144, 272, 283 | Hengel, Martin | 101–102, 104,
106, 114, 118,
122, 270, 294,
307 |
| Glasson, T. Francis | 301 | | |
| Gleede, Benjamin | 97, 99 | Henshke, David | 134 |
| Glicksman, Andrew | 293 | Hermann, Klaus | 310 |
| Goan, Sean | 292 | Herr, Moshe | 30, 135, 190,
271, 323–324 |
| Godet, Frédéric | 381 | | |
| Görgemanns, Herwig | 103 | Herrmann, Siegfried | 114 |
| Goldberg, Abraham | 189, 203, 213–
214, 314 | Heym, Stefan | 387 |
| | | Higger, Michael | 229 |
| Goldin, Judah | VII, 3, 34 | Hintermaier, Johann | 343 |
| Goldschmidt, Ernst | 194 | Hirshman, Marc | 189 |
| Goldstein, Jonathan | 249 | Hirshman, Menahem | 18, 125 |
| Goodman, Martin | 373 | Hogeterp, Albert | 284, 309, 332 |
| Gordon, Robert | 234, 248, 263 | Holladay, Carl | 30 |
| Gottlieb, Leeor | 132 | Holtz, Gudrun | 67–94 |
| Grässer, Erich | 394 | Homan, Jacqueline | 249 |
| Graetz, Michael | 318 | Homcy, Stephen | 299 |
| Grappe, Christian | 234, 237, 335–
357 | Horbury, William | 111, 185 |
| | | Horvitz, Rivka | 314 |
| Griffiths, David | 291 | Hoskyns, Edwin | 292 |

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hoskyns, Paul | 294 | Kohler, Kaufmann | 258 |
| Huie-Joly, Mary | 293 | Kollmann, Bernd | 2, 207, 212–
213, 225 |
| Hultgren, Stephen | 3 | Kopp, Clemens | 36 |
| Humann, Roger | 289 | Kraft, Robert | 133 |
| Ilan, Tal | 155, 176–181 | Kranz, Jakob | 30 |
| i Tàrrech, Armand | 234 | Kratz, Reinhard | 337, 339, 344 |
| Jacobi, Christine | 3 | Kraus, Hans-Joachim | 277, 381 |
| Jacobs, Louis | 274, 312, 318–
319 | Kraus, Wolfgang | 289–290 |
| Jacoby, Adolf | 253 | Kremen, Jacob | 331 |
| Jäger, Gottfried | 317 | Kretschmar, Georg | 317 |
| Jaffee, Martin | 257 | Kreuzer, Siegfried | 377 |
| Janowski, Bernd | 314 | Kubiś, Adam | 291 |
| Jaubert, Annie | 292 | Küchler, Max | 97, 101, 107–
108 |
| Jeremias, Joachim | 198, 212, 377 | Kugel, James | 128–129, 132 |
| Jervell, Jacob | 330 | Kuhn, Peter | 41 |
| Jirku, Anton | 277 | Kunath, Friedericke | 303 |
| Johnson, Luke | 253 | Kundert, Lukas | 70, 81 |
| Johnston, Robert | 202, 214 | Kurz, William | 292 |
| Jülicher, Adolf | 212 | Kvasnica, Brian | 223, 225 |
| Jungkuntz, Richard | 298 | Lacamara, Aelred | 292 |
| Kaddari, Tamar | 125 | Lake, Kirsopp | 324 |
| Käsemann, Ernst | 378 | Lamparter, Helmut | 381 |
| Kagan, Thomas | 2 | Lane, William | 394 |
| Kahana, Menahem | 11–12, 190 | Lange, Armin | 43 |
| Kalmin, Richard | 96, 105–107,
120–121, 123,
127, 157, 168 | Lanier, Gregory | 252, 254 |
| Kaylor, Robert | 314 | Lapham, Fred | 242 |
| Keel, Othmar | 101, 107 | Lapin, Hayim | 130 |
| Keener, Craig | 96, 307, 311,
316, 320, 324,
329–330 | Larkin, Katrina | 230 |
| Kelhoffer, James | 117 | Le Déaut, Roger | 296, 342, 345 |
| Kellermann, Ulrich | 258 | Lee, Dorothy | 302 |
| Kennedy, George | 323 | Legrand, Thierry | 61 |
| Kerr, Alan | 293 | Lehrman, S. | 32 |
| Kimelman, Reuven | 258 | Lerner, Myron | 128, 189, 194,
224 |
| Kister, Menahem | 190, 194 | Levine, Amy | 158, 175, 213 |
| Klein, Hans | 253 | Lichtenberger, Hermann | 43–65 |
| Klepper, Jochen | 284 | Lieu, Judith | 294 |
| Klijn, Albertus | 221 | Lifshitz, Berachyahu | 15, 25 |
| Knust, Jennifer | 296 | Lightfoot, John | 310 |
| Koenig, Sara | 384–388 | Lightfoot, Joseph | 320 |
| Köstenberger, Andreas | 289, 291 | Lincoln, Andrew | 305 |
| Koester, Helmut | 394 | Loader, William | 303 |
| | | Loeb, Isidore | 153 |
| | | Lohfink, Gerhard | 332 |
| | | Lohse, Eduard | 312, 347 |
| | | Loisy, Alfred | 28, 349 |

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|---|
| Longenecker, Richard | 324, 377 | Moore, Carey | 271–272, 283 |
| Lüdemann, Gerd | 322 | Moore, George | 229, 370 |
| Luomanen, Petri | 221 | Murray-Jones, Christopher | 192, 197, 199 |
| Luz, Ulrich | 348 | Morris, Leon | 381 |
| Luzaragga, Jesus | 314 | Moscovitz, Leib | 126 |
| MacDonald, Dennis | 308 | Moss, Charlene | 231–232 |
| Maciá, Lorena | 132 | Mownley, Henry | 292 |
| Mack, Burton | 72 | Moyise, Steve | 292 |
| MacRae, George | 332 | Müller, C. Detlef | 344 |
| Malbon, Elisabeth | 176 | Müller, Karlheinz | 388 |
| Malina, Bruce | 295 | Muñoz-León, Domingo | 294–295 |
| Mandel, Paul | 8 | Myers, Alicia | 294 |
| Manning, Gary | 293 | Nebe, Gerhard | 62 |
| Manns, Frédéric | 295, 321 | Netzer, Ehud | 97 |
| Marcus, Joel | 119, 197, 199 | Neusner, Jacob | 1, 12, 168, 247 |
| Marcus, Ralph | 143 | Neyrey, Jerome | 292, 296, 305 |
| Marguerat, Daniel | 320, 333, 335–
336, 342, 349–
351, 355–357 | Nickelsburg, George | 1–2, 55, 58, 256 |
| Markschies, Christoph | 95, 123 | Niehoff, Maren | 69, 72, 74, 76,
88, 101–102,
104, 265 |
| Marmorstein, Arthur | 256 | Nikolsky, Ronit | 209 |
| Maronde, Christopher | 302 | Noam, Vered | 137, 155 |
| Martin, Francis | 310 | Nock, Arthur | 372 |
| Martini, Annett | 386 | Noormann, Rolf | 88 |
| Mason, Steve | 70, 72, 139 | Norelli, Enrico | 106 |
| Mateos, Juan | 325 | North, Robert | 141 |
| McArthur, H. K. | 202 | Notley, R. Steven | 204 |
| McNamara, Martin | 295 | Obermann, Andreas | 294 |
| McWhirther, Jocelyn | 294 | Oegema, Gerbern | 359–374 |
| Meeks, Wayne | 301 | Oepke, Albrecht | 314 |
| Menken, Maarten | 289–293 | Oliver, Isaac | 320, 333 |
| Meyers, Carol and Eric | 230 | Pagels, Elaine | 292 |
| Michaels, J. Ramsey | 290 | Painter, John | 292 |
| Michel, Otto | 394, 406 | Palmer, David | 308 |
| Mihailios, Stefanios | 293 | Pancaro, Severino | 301 |
| Milikowsky, Chaim | 130–131, 140–
141, 143, 152,
155 | Pantrel, Raymond | 406 |
| Miller, Paul | 292 | Pao, David | 331 |
| Miller, Richard | 28 | Parsenios, George | 306 |
| Mitchell, Alan | 393–408 | Parsons, Mikael | 318 |
| Mittmann-Richert, Ulrike | 98–99, 121–
122, 284 | Peláez, Jesús | 325 |
| Moeller, Henry | 293 | Penner, Tod | 245 |
| Mollatt, Donatien | 296 | Pennington, Jonathan | 332 |
| Montanari, Franco | 311 | Peregrini, Silvia | 123 |
| Montefiore, Claude | 310 | Pérès, Jacques-Noël | 344 |
| Moon, Warren | 249 | Perkins, Pheme | 302 |

- | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Pervo, Richard | 307, 329, 332,
349 | Schäfer, Peter | 14, 24, 104,
200, 239, 389 |
| Pesch, Rudolf | 311, 332 | Schalit, Abraham | 134, 141–142,
144, 153, 155 |
| Peterson, David | 318, 343 | Schenk, Gottlob | 376 |
| Petuchowski, Jacob | 312 | Schlatter, Adolf | 252 |
| Phillips, Thomas | 37 | Schlier, Heinrich | 254, 270 |
| Pierce, Madison | 304 | Schmithals, Walter | 335 |
| Piper, Ronald | 217, 221 | Schnackenburg, Rudolph | 291, 302–303 |
| Pitts, Andrew | 308 | Schneckenburger, Matthias | 317 |
| Plümacher, Eckard | 307 | Schneiders, Sandra | 294 |
| Popkes, Edzard | 314 | Schnelle, Udo | 73, 310 |
| Porter, Stanley | 292 | Schniewind, Julius | 380 |
| Porton, Gary | 309 | Scholtissek, Klaus | 304 |
| Powell, Mark | 236 | Schreiber, Stefan | 312 |
| Quarles, Charles | 28 | Schuchard, Bruce | 289, 294 |
| Radl, Walter | 329, 343, 350–
351 | Schürer, Emil | 317 |
| Rahner, Johanna | 293 | Schwartz, Daniel | 139–155 |
| Rajak, Tessa | 81, 132 | Schwartz, Joshua | 184 |
| Ramsey, A. M. | 314 | Schwarz, Günther | 322 |
| Rappaport, Salomo | 127, 129, 131,
144 | Schweitzer, Albert | 186 |
| Reed, Annette | 202 | Schweizer, Eduard | 331 |
| Reeg, Gottfried | 278 | Schwemer, Anna | 95–124, 307 |
| Reim, Günter | 289 | Scott, Martin | 293 |
| Richardson, Cyril | 235 | Seeman, Chris | 143 |
| Richter, Georg | 294 | Segal, Alan | 268 |
| Robker, Jonathan | 136 | Serra, A. M. | 295 |
| Roloff, Jürgen | 341, 349 | Setzer, Claudia | 243, 309 |
| Ronning, John | 295 | Shuler, Philip | 72 |
| Rosner, Brian | 308 | Simkovitch, Malka | 373 |
| Roth, Cecil | 232 | Simon-Shoshan, Moshe | 177 |
| Rothschild, Claire | 308 | Skehan, Patrick | 256 |
| Rousseau, John | 36 | Sleeman, Matthew | 332 |
| Rowland, Christopher | 197, 199, 295,
313 | Smith, D. Moody | 289 |
| Rubenstein, Jeffrey | 157 | Smith, Robert | 292 |
| Rüpke, Jörg | 368 | Snodgrass, Klyne | 205, 217–219,
290 |
| Sabourin, Leopold | 314 | Sokoloff, Michael | 7 |
| Sänger, Dieter | 301 | Sperber, Daniel | 17 |
| Safrai, Shmuel | 89, 194, 204 | Speyer, Wolfgang | 106 |
| Safrai, Ze'ev | 194 | Spilsbury, Paul | 143 |
| Samely, Alexander | 397–398 | Stafford, John | 390 |
| Sandmel, Samuel | 76 | Standaert, Benoit | 343 |
| Satran, David | 96–97, 100,
103, 109 | Stemberger, Günter | 1, 7–26, 68,
104, 130, 135,
206, 226, 257,
323, 377 |
| | | Sterling, Gregory | 92, 292, 308 |

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Stern, David | 203, 208, 212,
214, 407 | Wall, Robert | 349 |
| Stichele, Caroline | 245 | Wasserman, Tommy | 296 |
| Stökl Ben Ezra, Daniel | 43, 50, 65 | Weaver, John | 335, 344 |
| Strathmann, Hermann | 30 | Weinrich, Otto | 337–339 |
| Strobel, August | 342–343, 347 | Weisberg, Dvora | 25, 393, 395 |
| Strom, Mark | 351 | Weiser, Alfons | 312, 341 |
| Strong, Justin | 214 | Weiss, Hans-Friedrich | 394 |
| Swancutt, Diana | 290 | Werman, Cana | 48 |
| Swete, H. B. | 242, 247 | Wettstein, Johann | 307 |
| | | Whealey, Alice | 221 |
| Teugels, Lieve | 201–228 | White, Sidney | 44 |
| Theobald, Michael | 291, 377 | Wiesenberg, Ernest | 152–152 |
| Thoma, Clemens | 213, 384, 389 | Wilcox, Max | 310–311, 324 |
| Thompson, Maryanne | 293 | Willet, Michael | 293 |
| Thyen, Hartwig | 108, 393–394 | Willets, Joel | 302 |
| Tigchelaar, Eibert | 230 | Williams, Catrin | 291 |
| Tönges, Elke | 395–396 | Wills, Lawrence | 394 |
| Tomson, Peter | 183–200, 202 | Wimpfheimer, Barry | 25 |
| Tov, Emanuel | 44, 46 | Winslow, Karen | 133 |
| Tripp, Jeffrey | 306 | Winsor, Ann | 293 |
| Trudinger, L. Paul | 301 | Winter, Bruce | 307 |
| Tuckett, Christopher | 291 | Winter, Paul | 253 |
| Tuval, Michael | 144 | Wintermute, O. S. | 2 |
| | | Wischnitzer-Bernstein, Rachel | 249 |
| Uelinger, Christoph | 107 | Witherington III, Ben | 308, 323 |
| Um, Stephen | 294 | Witmer, Stephen | 294 |
| Unterman, Alan | 314 | Wolter, Michael | 37, 120–121,
284, 333 |
| Urbach, Ephraim | 314 | Wright, Benjamin | 80 |
| Uytanlet, Samson | 311 | | |
| | | Yee, Gale | 293 |
| van der Horst, Pieter | 98, 307, 312 | Young, Franklin | 291 |
| van der Vaal, Cornelius | 289 | | |
| van der Watt, Jan | 302 | Zahavy, Tzvee | 279 |
| VanderKam, James | 141, 312 | Ziegler, Joseph | 278 |
| van Goudoever, Jan | 342 | Zimmermann, Ruben | 212, 302 |
| Vanhoye, Albert | 394, 406–407 | Zunz, Leopold | 30 |
| van Kooten, George | 292 | Zwiep, Arie | 307–333 |
| van Unnik, Willem | 307 | | |
| Vaňuš, Marek | 314 | | |
| Vawter, Bruce | 293 | | |
| Vermes, Geza | 130, 134, 229,
321 | | |
| Vielhauer, Philipp | 253 | | |
| Vilnay, Zev | 36 | | |
| von der Osten-Sacken, Peter | 29, 284, 287 | | |
| | | | |
| Wacholder, Ben | 154 | | |
| Wald, Stephen | 310 | | |

Subject Index

- Abraham
- In Philo's *De Abrahamo* 67–94
 - in Josephus 130–131
 - in rabbinic Judaism 364–367
 - in the early church 367–370
 - in Acts 1–3 307–333
- Acts 12:1–19 335–357
- the literary genre of marvelous liberation from prison 337–341
 - haggadic illumination of Acts 12 341–355
- Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 157–173
- exegetical material 161–162
 - supplementary material 162–166
 - synthetic material 166–168
- creative historiography 3–4
- David as a fallen hero of faith 380–390
- Dura Europos Synagogue 249
- earthquake, the last 229–249
- Zechariah 14 230
 - Matt 27:45–56 233–235
 - Matt 28:1–2 235–238
 - Matt 27:62–66 238–240
 - the Gospel of Peter 241–247
 - Ezekiel 37 248–249
 - the Dura Europos Synagogue 249
- Esther as the hind of the dawn and redemption 275–284
- haggadah
- definition 1, 7, 125, 359, 393
 - in Tannaitic literature 7–13
 - in the Yerushalmi and classical midrashim 13–20
 - in the Babylonian Talmud 21–25
 - late developments 25–26
 - experts 189–192
 - historicity in haggadic texts 27–42
 - haggadic interpretation of Abraham's faith in Gen 15:6 360–370
- imaginative dramatization 3–4
- the Jerusalem Talmud 175–181
- on a raped woman 177–178
 - on Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi's female slave 179–180
- Josephus and haggadah 125–137
- Cain and Abel 129–130
 - Abraham 130–131
 - identifying unnamed characters 131–132
 - Moses 132–133
 - omissions 133–134
 - oral or written sources 134–137
 - chronology according to Sabbatical and Jubilee periods 139–155
 - haggadic interest in biblical chronology 139–140
 - Abraham Schalit on Jubilee-based chronology 141–145, 151–155
 - the Talmudic dating of the destruction of the first and second Temples 145–151
 - death of Herod Agrippa 352–353
- parables
- definition 214–215
 - four kinds of soil 183–200
 - four kinds of 192–196
 - Luke 8:5–8 195
 - the kingdom of God 196–200
 - the master and the overseer 216–228
 - Matt 21:33–41 222–223
 - Shepherd of Hermas 55 223–224
 - Semahot deRabbi Hiyya 224
 - Luke 16:1–8 225–226

Philo

- *De Abrahamo* as a biographical encomium 69–74
 - the sacrifice of Isaac 74–92
 - relationship to the genre of “Rewritten Bible” 92–94
 - interpretation of Gen 15:6 362–364
 - interpretation of Zech 6:12 as messianic in *Conf.* 62–63 265–270
- Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34 297–306

Qumran haggadic texts 43–65

- additions in the manuscripts of the Pentateuch 46
- foundation for halakhah 47–49
- in the prophets 50–52
- in the history of Israel 52–55
- in the Genesis Apocryphon 55–65

“sprout” as the Messiah 251–270

- Ben Sirach 256–257
- the Eighteen Prayer 258–259
- the Dead Sea Scrolls 259–261
- rabbinic texts 261–264
- Philo, *Conf.* 62–63 265–270

the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mark 7:24–30 175–181

truth (religious) in haggadic texts 27–42

the *Vitae Prophetarum* 95–124

- date and origin 96–102
- literary form 102–103
- narrative material as early haggadic traditions 103–123
- life of Isaac 104–109
- life of Jeremiah 109–115
- life of Ezekiel 115–117
- life of Hosea 117–120
- life of Zechariah 120–123