

# Did the Messianic Jewish Believers Use the OT Deceitfully or Ignorantly in the New Testament?

Glenn Miller

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I received this sweet and honest-spirited email, with a number of excellent questions...I will try to address these as they come up, so I will intersperse my responses (normal font) from the questioner's (boldface)

Let's dig in...

**Glenn,**

**I hope you can help me out here. I downloaded a discussion dated 26 Jan 1995 regarding the use of the [LXX versus the MT](#). It was very helpful to me in my struggle over an issue I will now detail.**

**I come from a Jewish background and have my spiritual inspiration from Jesus and his followers. I am not one to put my head in the ground, nor take things at face value what the church tells me. I see challenges from my Jewish roots as really opportunities to understand better the world of the Jesus, yet they are always filled with the tension of wanting to stay honest and be willing to lose a formerly cherished belief if presented with a more mature view.**

First, let me applaud your attitude of honesty and commitment!

**An Orthodox Jewish friend pointed out a discrepancy in Acts regarding the number of Jacobs clan as differing from the Hebrew. He also mentioned that the gravesite also wrong for Jacob. Coming from the point of view that as Jews the original meaning of the texts are paramount, any use of it for Proof-texts or prophecies must be accurate or we must be dubious about the claims that these texts are purporting to support (i.e. Jesus is the Messiah). Basically I am being challenged that the NT writers were either negligent, sloppy, reckless, deceptive, or just plain creative, and that they really have no fidelity or loyalty to the Torah/words of God; and how then can they be regarded with seriousness? If it is true that the NT use of scripture is without integrity and honor then I would have to agree.**

**Now I know that this issue is not that simplistic, so I have been trying to get at the truth of it. In all that I have read, I have not yet heard any attention placed on this question-- did the writers use of OT in the NT reflect a real creation and therefore NOVEL faith that DEPARTS from Jewish continuity, or does it just take some sensitive work at getting into the world of the first century to understand the relationship of the Torah, the people, translations, language, cult, etc.?**

**Please help me here!!**

The short answer here is that the early Jewish Christians were *altogether unoriginal and "uncreative" (almost boring) in their exegesis and use of scripture!* Other groups within pre-Christian and even early post-NT Judaism were MUCH more creative with the OT: the Rabbi's with their midrash, the Qumran-ites with their 'near' eschatology, the Hellenistic Jews (e.g. Philo) with their allegorizing, and the various authors of the Pseudepigraphical works with their pseudonymity.

There are several ways to demonstrate this, but first we must distinguish *two separate questions* in your above section:

1. What about the 'mistakes' in Stephen's speech in Acts 7?
2. Did the early Jewish believers radically depart from 'acceptable' practices of OT exegesis, argument, and usage?

Interestingly, the first question provides a fruitful window into the second.

Indeed, Stephen's speech in Acts 7 contains several problems, with four of these in verses 2-8 (including the two you mention). But **his usage is well within the parameters of acceptableness in the day**. So, Longenecker ([EBC](#), in.loc., emphasis mine):

"There are a number of difficulties as to chronological sequence, historical numbers, and the use of biblical quotations in Stephen's address that have led to the most strenuous exercise of ingenuity on the part of commentators in their attempts to reconcile them. Four of these difficulties appear in vv. 2-8. Verse 3 quotes the words of God to Abraham given in Genesis 12:1 and implies by its juxtaposition with v. 2 that this message came to Abraham "while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran," whereas the context of Genesis 12:1 suggests that it came to him in Haran. Verse 4 says that he left Haran after the death of his father, whereas the chronological data of Genesis 11:26-12:4 suggests that Terah's death took place after Abraham's departure from Haran. Verse 5 uses the words of Deuteronomy 2:5 as a suitable description of Abraham's situation in Palestine, whereas their OT context relates to God's prohibition to Israel not to dwell in Mount Seir because it had been given to Esau. And v. 6 speaks of 400 years of slavery in Egypt, whereas Exodus 12:40 says 430.

"We need not, however, get so disturbed over such things as, on the one hand, to pounce on them to disprove a "high view" of biblical inspiration or, on the other hand, to attempt to harmonize them so as to support such a view. **These matters relate to the conflation and inexactitude of popular Judaism**, not necessarily to some then-existing scholastic tradition or to variant textual traditions. **In large measure they can be paralleled in other popular writings of the day**, whether overtly Hellenistic or simply more nonconformist in the broadest sense of that term. **Philo**, for example, also explained Abraham's departure from Ur of the Chaldees by reference to Genesis 12:1 (*De Abrahamo* 62-67), even though he knew that Genesis 12:1-5 is in the context of leaving Haran (cf. *De Migratione Abrahami* 176). **Josephus** spoke of Abraham's being seventy-five years old when he left Chaldea (contra Gen 12:4, which says he was seventy-five when he left Haran) and of leaving Chaldea because God bade him go to Canaan, with evident allusion to Genesis 12:1 (cf. *Antiq.* I, 154 [vii.1]). Likewise, **Philo** also placed the departure of Abraham from Haran after his father's death (*De Migratione Abrahami* 177). And undoubtedly the round figure of four hundred years for Israel's slavery in Egypt--a figure that stems from the statement credited to God in Genesis 15:13--was often used in popular expressions of religious piety in Late Judaism, as were also the transpositions of meaningful and usable phrases from one context to another.

And, relative to the burial location, the same phenomena can be seen in the LXX and in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Longenecker again):

"...the confusion in v. 16 between Abraham's tomb at Hebron, in the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite (cf. Gen 23:3-20) and wherein Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were buried (cf. Gen 49:29-33; 50:13), and the burial plot purchased by Jacob at Shechem from the sons of Hamor, wherein Joseph and his descendants were buried (cf. Josh 24:32). Again, **these are but further examples of the conflation and inexactitudes of Jewish popular religion**, which, it seems, Luke simply recorded from his sources in his attempt to be faithful to what Stephen actually said in his portrayal. And **again, they can in large measure be paralleled elsewhere**. Genesis 46:27 in the **LXX**, for example, does not include Jacob and Joseph but does include nine sons of Joseph in the reckoning, thereby arriving at "seventy-five souls" all together who went down to Egypt. And with this number **both Exodus 1:5 (LXX) and 4QExoda at 1:5 agree**.

So, Stephen's inexactitude seems to fall in line with at least some of the more obvious contemporary Jewish practices, as evidenced by the LXX, Qumran, Josephus and Philo. [Note also: (1) that the **Hebrew MS** at Qumran called 4QExod(a) gives 75 as the correct number--in agreement with the LXX, over against the Hebrew MT!; and (2) Stephen was a Hellenist and spoke Greek anyway--the LXX would be his choice NOT because he was a "Christian" but because he was a Hellenistic Jew]

But let' use this as a springboard into the second, more general question:

**Did the early Jewish believers radically depart from 'acceptable' practices of OT exegesis, argument, and usage?**

In other words, do their practices as evidenced in the NT documents find *material parallels in the various writings of the time*? To what extent are their arguments, texts, exegetical practices mirrored in the literature of the day?

Let's ask first the methodological question: how would we determine 'parallel usage'?

Let's suggest a few first:

1. **Textual**: Do they use similar texts to the 'very Jewish' writers of the day? In other words, do the other Jews of the period (i.e., Qumran, Philo, Josephus, writers of the Pseudepigraphical/Apocryphal/Diaspora works, any very early writings in the Rabbinics) use the LXX and other text types?
2. **Exegetical**: Do they use similar interpretive approaches to the text? In other words, do the other Jews of the period use the same kinds of exegetical rules (e.g., peshet midrash, typological)?
3. **Theological**: Do they use similar theological understandings of the text? In other words, do the other Jews of the period (list above) understand messianic texts and overall theological themes in the same ways?

It is absolutely essential to recognize that pre-70 AD Judaism was NOT the talmudic Judaism that came later. ALL of the groups we will look at (e.g., Qumran, Pharisees, Diaspora/Hellenistic) were "good Jews" of the day. Early Christianity was "merely" a sect of Judaism for the first century. So, Charlesworth ([ABD](#), s.v. "Pseudepigrapha, OT"):

"The study of Christian origins has also been revolutionized thanks to the study and appreciation of the Pseudepigrapha and of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Not only synagogal, or rabbinic, Judaism, but also earliest Christianity (from 30 to at least 70 c.e.) was part of and eventually developed out of **the complex "Judaisms" which made up early**

**Judaism.** What was seen as only the "background" of Christianity is now acknowledged to be part of the "foreground" of Christianity.

Now, although we will get into the LXX issue in more detail below, we can at least compile the data for our first area (TEXTUAL) here.

## The TEXTUAL issue-----

What we are looking for here are samples of usage of "non-MT" (even though there really wasn't an "MT" at that point in history) by writers in those various segments of Judaism. Fortunately, these are quite easy to find, especially from standard Textbooks on textual criticism.

Let's go through these:

1. **Qumran.** This community considered itself to be the true remnant of Israel, and was thusly even more 'pure' than the Pharisees of the day. This community is associated with those documents known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are dated in three periods: Archaic (250-150 bc), Hasmonean (150-30 BC), and Herodian (30 bc-70 ad).

These Dead Sea Scrolls show usage of LXX, Samaritan, and various proto-MT textual traditions. One of the standard TC works today is Emmanuel Tov of Hebrew University [[OT:TCHB](#)]. Only 60% of the texts found there agree with the MT ([OT:TCHB:115](#)). That's leaves 40% that vary. Let me show this from some of his material.

"Before the Qumran discoveries S [symbol for Samaritan text] was thought to be an ancient text, whose nature could not be determined more precisely beyond its popular character. However, **since the discovery in Qumran of texts which are exceedingly close to S**, this situation has changed...The best preserved pre-Samaritan text is 4QpaleoExod(m) of which large sections of 44 columns from Exodus 6 to 37 have been preserved...The main feature characterizing these texts is the appearance of harmonizing additions within Exodus and Numbers taken from Deuteronomy...This feature links these texts exclusively with S." [[OT:TCHB:97-99](#). He also lists 4Q158 and 4Qtest (=4Q175) as following S.]

The LXX is a Greek translation, of course, so we would not expect to see it among the DSS. However, it DOES show up in fragments there(!), and since it was translated from a Palestinian Hebrew original, we also find some documents that are related to that original.

Also, it must be remembered that the LXX and MT are not as widely divergent as is commonly supposed:

"The Hebrew text presupposed by the LXX basically represents a tradition which is either **close to** that of MT or can easily be explained as a descendant **or a source of it**. In several individual instances, however, the LXX represents a text that comes close to other sources, viz., certain Hebrew scrolls from Qumran and the Sam. Pent." [Tov, in [HI:TCULLXX:188](#)]

He points out that "Several scrolls often coincide with details in the LXX, either with the central manuscript group or with a specific group of its manuscripts" [HI:TCULLXX:188] and he gives examples of 4QJer(b), 4QJer(d,17), 4Qdeut(q), 4Qsam(a), 4QLev(d), 4Qexod(b) [pp.191-195].

Let me be clear about one thing, though. I am NOT suggesting that the Hebrew Text underlying the LXX was itself a major substrate in the DSS; merely, that the *various* textual traditions at Qumran had knowledge of this strain of text. It is at best a minor aspect of the DSS, as it is a minority piece of the NT quotations (as seen in the previous discussion).

2. **Philo.** As an Alexandrian Jew, he even ascribed the **highest level of divine inspiration to the LXX** (the Pentateuch only), and called the translators prophets! (*Life of Moses*, II.38-40):

"But this, they say, did not happen at all in the case of this translation of the law, but that, **in every case, exactly corresponding Greek words were employed to translate literally the appropriate Chaldaic words, being adapted with exceeding propriety to the matters which were to be explained;** (39) for just as I suppose the things which are proved in geometry and logic do not admit any variety of explanation, but the proposition which was set forth from the beginning remains unaltered, in like manner I conceive did these men **find words precisely and literally corresponding to the things, which words were alone**, or in the greatest possible degree, **destined to explain with clearness and force** the matters which it was desired to reveal. (40) And there is a very evident proof of this; for if Chaldaeans were to learn the Greek language, and if Greeks were to learn Chaldaean, and if each were to meet with those scriptures in both languages, namely, the Chaldaic and the translated version, they would admire and reverence them both as sisters, or rather as one and the same both in their facts and in their language; considering these translators not mere interpreters **but hierophants and prophets to whom it had been granted it their honest and guileless minds to go along with the most pure spirit of Moses.**

"Philo (ca. 25 bc-ad 40) makes the translation an act of divine inspiration, and the translators prophets: although they worked separately they produced a single text that was literally identical throughout." [[WTOT:51](#)]

3. **Josephus.** Josephus, like Philo, writes in Greek, but is a Palestinian Jew and not Alexandrian. He uses the LXX at places as well.

"Josephus claims to have based his account on the Hebrew text of the sacred writings (*Ant.* I, 5). This claim appears to hold good for the Hexateuch. In the later books of the bible, however, he has clearly consulted the Septuagint." [[HI:IIW:112-113](#)].

Josephus also used other Greek translations than the LXX, most notably the proto-Lucian texts [[WTOT:60,n.38](#)].

He also praises the pagan king, who received the Greek translation of the Pentateuch (*Ant* 1.10-13):

"I found, therefore, that the second of the Ptolemies was a king who was extraordinarily diligent in what concerned learning and the collection of books; that he was also peculiarly ambitious to procure a translation of our law, and of the constitution of our government therein contained, into the Greek tongue. (11) Now Eleazar, the high priest, one not inferior to any other of that dignity among us, did not envy the forenamed king the participation of that advantage, which otherwise he would for certain have denied him, but that he knew the custom of our nation was, to hinder nothing of what we esteemed ourselves from being communicated to others. (12) Accordingly, I thought it became me both to imitate the generosity of our high priest, and to suppose there might even now be many lovers of learning like the king; for he did not obtain all our writings at that time; but those who were sent to Alexandria as interpreters, **gave him only the books of the law,** (13) **while** there were a vast number of **other matters** in our **sacred books.**

This mixture of textual elements in Josephus is noted in the ABD (s.v. "Josephus"):

"An important question centers around the issue of the biblical text that Josephus had at his disposal. It is important because the answer would help shed significant light on the state of the text in 1st-century Palestine, almost a millennium before our first extant complete Hebrew manuscript. Josephus seems to have had in his possession texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; and **he varied in his use of them from biblical book to book.** In view of the fact that in Josephus' time there were **a number of divergent Hebrew and Greek texts** of the Bible, we cannot be sure which version he used at any

given time, especially since he usually paraphrased and elaborated rather than translated. **Nor must we discount the possibility** that Josephus followed **a tradition independent of both the MT and the LXX**, as may be seen from the fact that he agrees with Pseudo-Philo in some places that diverge from both the MT and the LXX.

"The fact that Josephus was himself writing in Greek would make it seem likely that his chief textual source was the LXX, especially since he cited it as a precedent for presenting the history of the Jews to a non-Jewish audience (*Ant* 1. Proem 3 §10-12) and since he devoted so much space paraphrasing the account of the translation given in *Let. Aris.* (*Ant* 12.2.1-15 §11-118), hardly what one would expect in a work which is essentially a political and military rather than a cultural and religious history of the Jews. And yet, the very fact that **he paraphrased the Bible in Greek** would seem to indicate that **he hoped to improve on that rendering**, since there would hardly be much point otherwise in a new version. Hence it is not surprising that where the style of the LXX is more polished, as in the Additions to Esther or in 1 Esdras, he adheres more closely to its text. And yet, to have ignored the LXX, **in view of the tremendous regard in which that version was held**, would have been looked upon as an attempt to hide something. Nevertheless, even when Josephus agrees with the LXX, this is not necessarily an indication that he had the LXX text before him, since he may have incorporated an exegetical tradition which had been known earlier to the translators of the LXX. **Finally, the biblical texts found at Qumran indicate that the differences between the Hebrew and the Greek texts were not so great as had been previously thought.**

**4. Writers of the Pseudepigraphical and Apocryphal works.** Here we have a vast amount of literature, from 300 bc to 300 ad, from Palestine and beyond, written in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic (or 'other!'), by all types and stripes of theological persuasion. We can scarcely even sample this, but let's look at some of it.

As would be expected, the Greek-language and/or Egyptian-provenanced pieces demonstrate high LXX usage, but such usage is NOT confined to these texts. Below is a list of partial citations/allusions in the Pseudepigrapha to passages in the LXX. (The Apocrypha, of course, is PART of the LXX.)

1. 1 Chron 29.2 in *Joseph and Asenath* 2c
2. 1 Sam 13.17 in *Joseph and Asenath* 24z
3. 2 Sam 4.6 in *Joseph and Asenath* 10g
4. Dan 4.13 in *Joseph and Asenath* 10e
5. Dan 4.33a-34 in *Joseph and Asenath* 10b
6. Dan 4.33a-b in *Joseph and Asenath* 10h2
7. Dan 4.34 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12a
8. Dan 7.15 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12y
9. Deut 32.21 in 3 (*Greek Apoc*) of *Baruch* (Gk) 16.3
10. Deut 32.30 in *Apocalypse of Daniel* 4.14
11. Esther 3.17 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 2.2
12. Ex 12.40 in *Demetrius* Frag 2.16,18
13. Ex 13.9 in *Aristobulus* Frag 2.8
14. Ex 17.16 in *Joseph and Asenath* 8d2
15. Ex 2.15-18 in *Artapanus* Frag 3.27.19
16. Ex 20.11 in *Aristobulus* Frag 5.12
17. Ex 22.27 in *Joseph and Asenath* 10v
18. Ex 3.20 in *Aristobulus* Frag 2.8
19. Ex 9.3 in *Aristobulus* Frag 2.8
20. Gen 1.2 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12d, 12e
21. Gen 1.3-24 in *Aristobulus* Frag 4.3

22. Gen 1.6 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12h
23. Gen 10.1 in *Apocalypse of Adam* 4.9
24. Gen 10.1f in *Joseph and Asenath* 2q
25. Gen 14.19 in *Joseph and Asenath* 8f
26. Gen 2.8 in *Testament of Abraham* A 11.1
27. Gen 22.17 in *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 3.10
28. Gen 25.1-4 in *Demetrius* Frag 3.1
29. Gen 3.23 in *Joseph and Asenath* 16.n
30. Gen 30.37 in *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 1.3
31. Gen 39.19 in *Joseph and Asenath* 23r
32. Gen 42.19 in *Joseph and Asenath* 26e
33. Gen 42.33 in *Joseph and Asenath* 26e
34. Gen 44.7 in *Joseph and Asenath* 23u
35. Gen 46.27 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.64
36. Gen 49.24 in *Joseph and Asenath* 8w
37. Gen 5.4 in *Apocalypse of Adam* 1.1
38. Gen 50.22b-26 in *Joseph and Asenath* 29i
39. I Kings 4.29-34 in *Testament of Solomon* 3.5
40. Is 1.13 in *Joseph and Asenath* 14c
41. Is 14.12 in *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 4.28
42. Is 26.19 in *Apocryphon of Ezekiel* Frag 1
43. Is 40.12 in *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 7.5
44. Is 47.8 in *Joseph and Asenath* 11k2
45. Is 52.13 in *Ascension of Isaiah* 4.21
46. Is 58.11 in *Joseph and Asenath* 24x
47. Is 66.1 in *Joseph and Asenath* 22r
48. Is 8.20 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.69
49. Is 9.5 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.10
50. Jer 38 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12f
51. Job 38.38 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.16
52. Job 9.18 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12x
53. Jonah 1.17 in *Testament of Zebulun* 4.4
54. Judges 7.16 in *Joseph and Asenath* 24z
55. Mal 1.1 in *Lives of the Prophets* 16.2
56. Micah 1.8 in 2 (*Syriac*) *Apocalypse of Baruch* 10.8
57. Numbers 12.8 in *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 6.6
58. Numbers 16.48 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 6.6
59. Prov 11.31 in *Apocalypse of Daniel* 11.11
60. Prov 24.21 in *Syriac Menander* 9
61. Prov 8.27 in 2 (*Slavonic Apocalypse*) of *Enoch* 25.4
62. Ps 100.3 in *Odes of Solomon* 7.12
63. Ps 102.1 in i 12y
64. Ps 103.2 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 3.3; 12.16
65. Ps 103.24 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.7
66. Ps 103.25 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.24
67. Ps 103.25-26 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 3.11
68. Ps 104.21 in 2 (*Slavonic Apocalypse*) of *Enoch* 104.21
69. Ps 106.34 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.61
70. Ps 113.12 in *Joseph and Asenath* 2f
71. Ps 120.8 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 13.12
72. Ps 129.3f in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 11.11
73. Ps 143.4 in i 12y
74. Ps 144.18 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 6.3
75. Ps 144.3 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.25
76. Ps 146.4 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.19
77. Ps 146.5 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.1

78. Ps 151 in *LIBER ANTIQUITATUM BIBLICARUM* 62.5
79. Ps 18.2 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.5
80. Ps 20.4 in *Odes of Solomon* 9.8
81. Ps 36.4 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 13.9
82. Ps 41.2 in *History of Joseph C Verso* 6
83. Ps 50.21 in *Apocalypse of Daniel* 14.12
84. Ps 50.3 in *Odes of Solomon* 7.10
85. Ps 61.3 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12y
86. Ps 67.18 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 4.15
87. Ps 73.15 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.78
88. Ps 77.24 in *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* 12.75
89. Ps 88.10 in *Joseph and Asenath* 12x
90. Ps 9.37 in *Joseph and Asenath* 19d
91. Ps 95.11 in *Joseph and Asenath* 8f2
92. Zech 5.1-3 in *Lives of the Prophets* 3.5
93. Zech 13.6 in *Ladder of Jacob* 7.30
94. Zech 2.15 in *Joseph and Asenath* 15l

Many of these pieces are anonymous (or pseudonymous), but some of these are individual writers from Diaspora Jewry. There are also other Diaspora Jewish writers NOT listed above that bear on this question. Consider some specific writers:

1. Artapanus (between 250-100bc). "His narrative is in many cases dependent on the LXX, even in vocabulary, indicating clearly the author's respect for these Jewish scriptures." [[NT:JMD:128](#)]
2. Egyptian Ezekiel (2nd century BC). "Reading the narrative of the Exodus in the LXX, Ezekiel saw the potential to present its dramatic storyline in the form of a Greek tragedy...In most of the fragments the influence of the LXX is easily observed...Ezekiel's was a Judaism fully committed to the Jews' communal text (the Septuagint), their communal story, their national hero and their ancestral customs." [[NT:JMD:133-134, 138](#)]
3. *The Letter of Aristeas* (of course) is the source of the story of the miraculous translation of the LXX to begin with!
4. Aristobulus, arguing that the famous philosophers were actually dependent on Moses(!), advances a rather strange story: "how were Homer and Plato able to gain enlightenment from Moses' Hebrew text? He counters (12.1) with the thesis of an early Greek translation--before the version sponsored by Demetrius of Phalerum, before even 'the Persian conquest' (341 or 525 bce)" [[NT:JMD:151](#)] Aristobulus (c. 170bc) actually refers to Prov 8.22f, probably in translation [so Hengel, [NT:JH01:163](#)].
5. Pseudo-Phocylides, writes around 1st century bc., and attributes his work to the 6th century Greek poet. He writes a poem, in which "Some verses in the poem are derived directly from the LXX, either in concept or in vocabulary" [[NT:JMD:338](#)].
6. There are two writers in Palestine in our period, who write in Greek: The Anonymous Samaritan, often called pseudo-Eupolemus (ca 200-100 bc), and the Jewish historian Eupolemus (1 century bc). Hengel discusses their usage of the LXX [[NT:JH01:88-95](#)], and summaries on p.102: "The use of the LXX in the anonymous Samaritan and in Eupolemus, together with the discovery of LXX fragments in Qumran and in the caves used in the Bar Kochba revolt, shows that the Greek translation of the Old Testament also came to be **highly prized in Palestine** from the second century BC to the second century AD--in contrast to the sharp criticism of later Rabbis."

5. **Any early "rabbinical" literature.** Here we have a basic problem: this literature is not written down until AFTER the period in question. This creates some difficulty, but at the same time affords an interesting situation. If we are able to find SOME indication of usage of pre-MT text types prior to the formalization of the MT at the end of the 1st century AD, then this data will count very heavily for the acceptance of LXX-type usage.

The problem here is instantly obvious: this material is all in Hebrew or Aramaic, so how are we to detect LXX usage?

First, we have to note that ALL we are trying to show that the text type was NOT fixed at this point, not just that the LXX was in usage by Jews. We have already seen how the Samaritan Pentateuch & LXX showed up in Qumran, so all we have to try to do is find places in the Rabbinics and/or Aramaic Targumim that manifest textual variants.

In this case, any data about the early pre-Rabbinical scribes relative to a 'fixed MT' text-type would be useful.

Fortunately, we DO have indication of a plurality (and therefore, non-fixity) of text types in use in Palestine at the time. So Waltke ([EBC](#), vol 1, "Textual Criticism of the Old Testament", pp. 214-215):

"On the other hand, the Sopherim, called by Ginsburg "the authorized revisers of the text," some time after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity altered the script from its angular paleo-Hebrew form to the square Aramaic form, aided the division of words--a practice carefully observed in the Hebrew inscriptions from the first half of the first millennium--by distinguishing five final letter forms and aided the reading of a text by continually inserting consonantal vowels called *mattes lectionis*.

"More significantly, some liberal-minded scribes altered the text for both philological and theological reasons. Thus, they modernized the text by replacing archaic Hebrew forms and constructions with forms and constructions of a later Hebrew linguistic tradition. They also smoothed out the text by replacing rare constructions with more frequently occurring constructions and they supplemented and clarified the text by the insertion of additions and the interpolation of glosses from parallel passages. In addition, they substituted euphemisms for vulgarities, altered the names of false gods, removed the harsh phrase "curse God," and safe-guarded the sacred divine name by failing to pronounce the tetragrammaton (*YHWH* [*Yahweh*]) and occasionally by substituting other forms in the consonantal text.

"As a result of this liberal tendency, **three distinct recensions and one mixed text type emerged during this period** (c. 400 B.C. to c. A.D. 70). The three text types already known from the LXX, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the text preserved by the Masoretes--the *textus receptus*--were corroborated by the finds at Qumran. Here the Hebrew text lying behind the Greek translation, the Jewish text type adopted and adapted by the Samaritans for their sectarian purposes, and the *textus receptus* are **all represented**.

"The confusion of text types in Palestine at this time is reflected in the citations from the OT in the NT, the Apocrypha, and the rabbinic traditions. **The NT shares readings** with the received text, Samar., LXX, **Targ. Onkelos**, Sirach, Testimonia, Florilegium, and Theod.

"In addition to rabbinic traditions about the textual emendations of the scribes cited above, other rabbinic tradition tells of the need for "book correctors" in Jerusalem attached to the temple and even of **divergent readings in Pentateuchal scrolls kept in the temple archives**. Moreover, collations made from the Codex Severus and preserved by medieval rabbis show **variants from the *textus receptus* in the scroll taken to Rome by Titus in A.D. 70**.

As mentioned above, the rabbinical literature is after our period, and should therefore show the greatest resistance to variance. Therefore, if we find **rabbinical citations of the OT that depart from MT**, they are therefore that much weightier. We indeed find this in both the primary rabbinics (e.g. Talmud) as well as the 'popular' rabbinics (i.e., the Targums).

As regards the primary rabbinics, Tov notes [[OT:TCHB:34](#), p.10]:

"At the same time, **the biblical quotations in the rabbinic literature also differ from time to time from MT**, both in direct quotations and in variants underlying the *derashah*, 'sermon.'"

Although the number of these variants are small (less than a hundred), Tov gives a couple of particularly odd examples (p.34-35) **where the MT differs from the rabbinic citation**:

- Is 1.1 with Gen. Rab 13.1
- Is 1.3 with Sifre Deut 309 MS Daleth
- Is 1.18 with Sifre Deut 6 MS Daleth
- Jer 30.4 with Sifre Deut 1 MSS Daleth, Lamedh, and Tov
- Hab 1.13 with Pesiq. Rab Kah. 4.10; 25.1

The *Aramaic Targumim* (e.g., "interpretive translations") manifest **an even greater range of variance**.

Some are very close to the MT (e.g., Targum Onkelos), but others are quite different, and may reflect an earlier cycle of their development, prior to the suppression of variants by the Rabbis. So Waltke ([EBC](#), vol 1, p.224):

"Both it [Targum of Job] and the Psalms aim at giving a fairly faithful rendering of the Hebrew text and their brief aggadic additions can easily be separated. Moreover, **each contains an unusually high number of variants in vowels and consonants from MT**, and numbers of these also occur in the Pesh. and LXX.

And Tov notes [[OT:TCHB:151](#)]:

"According to the story in t. Shabb. 13.2; b. Shabb. 115b; y. Shabb. 16.15c, the Job Targum already existed at the time of Gamaliel the Elder (first half of the first century CE), and an early source of this targum has indeed been found in Qumran. The Job Targum from Qumran contains a literal translation, sometimes reflecting a *Vorlage* **different from MT**."

It is also interesting to note that Jesus, when quoting from the OT, also varies His textual-type. We noted earlier that the vast majority of His quotes agreed with BOTH the LXX and the MT, but there are cases where He uses something different than EITHER. And, in several of these twelve cases, His word choice seems to reflect the same underlying text as the targums. For example, His word choices are more in line with the Targum than with the MT or LXX in Mark 4.12; 4.24; Matt 7.2 [Chilton, [JSOTGP1:25-26](#); he notes that he has identified elsewhere 15 such passages], and Matt 4.10 [France, [JOT:240ff](#)].

The same is true for Rabbi/Apostle Paul and other speakers in the NT. So Wilcox [[HI:IIW:198](#)]:

"It has long been known that Eph. 4:8 cites Ps. 67(68):19 in a form which diverges from both the MT and the LXX but in that deviation agrees with the targum."

In fact, the NT overall makes the same types of textual 'decisions' as do the Targums. So Wilcox [[HI:IIW:194-195](#)]:

"In investigating the text form of the OT in the NT we need to keep several principles of method in mind. (1) We have no right to assume that the one NT writer will have always used the same OT textual tradition in his work(s). In the case of Matthew and Luke this is clearly not so...(2) Apparently minor deviations, such as the 'replacement' of one word or phrase by another in a text which otherwise looks verbally identical with a known OT textual tradition (e.g., the LXX), also occur (a) between extant Greek OT versions, and (b) between the targumim, and in fact from one targum MS to another...it is characteristic of targum to replace a word or phrase which more or less literally renders the Hebrew by another (or even a longer passage) which gives the traditional interpretation of it...(3) The present 'deviant' form of an OT quotation may be a result of an earlier piece of exegesis..."

So, what do we have so far?

**SUMMARY:** On the textual issue, relative to NT times, ALL major groups within the Judaism of the day could, and did, use various text types. The early Christians were accordingly NO DIFFERENT than their non-Christian counterparts; they reflected the prevailing 'methods' and understandings of 1st century "good Jewry."

## The EXEGETICAL ISSUE-----

The second category is a fascinating one: **Did the early Jewish Christians use the same exegetical methods** as 1st century Jewry (even given the wide variety within this Jewry)?

Now, how could we approach this question?

There are a couple of items to consider here:

1. We could first look at the various *interpretive approaches* scholars have identified and see how the NT exegesis compares.
2. We could look at accepted *rabbinical exegetical rules* of the day (e.g. Hillel) and see if they were used.
3. We might try to reality-check the *level of 'innovation/creativity'* in the various strands of Judaism of the day and see if NT exegesis was 'conservative' or 'wildly creative' by comparison.

.....  
*First, let's examine the interpretive approaches in the period.*

There were four approaches at the time: literalist, midrash, pesher, allegorical. This extended description from Longenecker [[BEALE:380ff](#)] will set the stage, as well as summarize some of the data of the period:

**"Jewish exegesis of the first century** can generally be classified under **four headings: literalist, midrashic, pesher, and allegorical.** Admittedly, such a fourfold classification highlights distinctions of which the early Jewish exegetes themselves may not have always been conscious. In dealing with a system of thought that thinks more holistically, functionally, and practically than analytically--one that stresses precedent over logic in defense of its ways--any attempt at classification must necessarily go beyond that

system's explicit statements as to its own principles. Nevertheless, we still maintain, **Jewish interpretations of Scripture fall quite naturally into one or other of these four categories.**

"A **literalist** (*peshat*) type of exegesis is to be found in **all stands of early Jewish interpretation**. While **midrashic exegesis may characterize the Talmud, rabbinic literature also contains many examples of Scripture being understood in a quite straightforward manner**, with the result that the natural meaning of the text is applied to the lives of the people--particularly in applying Deuteronomic legislation. The situation is somewhat **similar in the Dead Sea Scrolls**, where preoccupation with *peshet* interpretation so overshadows all other types of exegesis that one could easily get the impression that the men of Qumran never understood Scripture literally. Yet the opening lines of the *Manual of Discipline* commit the members of the community to a literal observance of both "the rule [order, *serek*] of the community" and what God "commanded through Moses and through all his servants the prophets" (1 QS 1.1-3). Deuteronomic legislation, in fact, while adapted somewhat to their unique situation, was taken by the Qumran covenanters, for the most part, quite literally--even hyperliterally. Likewise **Philo**, while known most for his allegorical interpretations, **understood certain biblical passages in a literalist fashion**. Most familiar in this regard is his insistence that though allegorical exegesis is proper, it must not set aside the literal practice of the Law (*De Migrat Abr* 89-94). Philo believed, for example, that circumcision should be allegorically understood, yet practiced literally (*De Migrat Abr* 92); he insisted on the eternality of the Law (*De Vita Mos* 44) and rebuked those who did not keep it (*De Exsecrat* 138-39).

"The **central concept in rabbinic exegesis**, and presumably that of earlier Pharisees as well, was "**midrash**." The word comes from the verb *darash* (to resort to, seek; figuratively, to read repeatedly, study, interpret), and strictly denotes an **interpretive exposition however derived and irrespective of the type of material under consideration**. In the Mishnah, the Palestinian Gemaras, and the earlier Midrashim the verb *peshat* and *darash* are used in roughly synonymous fashion, for the earlier rabbis (the Tannaim) did not see any difference between their literal interpretations and their more elaborate exegetical treatment. Only among the Amoraite rabbis, sometime in the fourth century C.E. were literalist exegesis and midrash exegesis consciously differentiated. But while not recognized as such until later, midrashic exegesis can be seen in retrospect to have differed from literalist exegesis among the Pharisaic teachers of the New Testament period.

"**Midrashic exegesis** ostensibly takes its **point of departure** from the biblical **text itself** (though psychologically it may have been motivated by other factors) and **seeks to explicate the hidden meanings** contained therein **by means of agreed-upon hermeneutical rules** (e.g., Rabbi Hillel's seven Middoth; Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha's later set of thirteen; Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Galili's thirty-two). The purpose of midrash exegesis is to contemporize the revelation of God given earlier for the people of God living later in a different situation. What results may be characterized by the maxim: "That has relevance for This"--that is, what is written in Scripture has relevance for our present situation. In so doing, **early Judaism developed what George Foote Moore once aptly defined as "an atomistic exegesis**, which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words, independently of the context or the historical occasion, as divine oracles; combines them with other similar detached utterances; and makes large use of analogy of expression often by purely verbal association" (*Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 1.248).

"The expositions in the texts from **Qumran** are usually introduced by the term "**peshet**," which stems from the Aramaic word *pishar* meaning "solution" or "interpretation." There

are also instances where "midrash" appears in the texts (e.g., IQS 6.24; 8.15, 26; CD 20.6; 4QFlor 1, 14), though in these cases the word is used in a non-technical sense to mean only "interpretation" generally. The Dead Sea sectarians considered themselves to be the elect community of the final generation of the present age, living in the last days of "messianic travail" before the eschatological consummation. Theirs was the task of preparing for the coming of the messianic age. And so **to them applied certain prophecies in Scripture that were considered to speak of their present situation.**

"While the rabbis sought to contemporize Holy Writ so as to make God's Torah relevant to their circumstances, the **Dead Sea covenanters** looked upon Scripture from what they accepted was a revelatory perspective (based on the interpretations of the Teacher of Righteousness) and **emphasized imminent, catastrophic fulfillment.** Their maxim seems to have been: "This is That"--that is, **our present situation is depicted in what is written in Scripture.** Qumran's pesher interpretation of the Old Testament, therefore, is neither principally "commentary" nor "midrashic exegesis," though it uses the forms of both. As Cecil Roth pointed out: "It does not attempt to elucidate the Biblical text, but to determine the application of Biblical prophecy or, rather, of certain Biblical prophecies; and the application of these Biblical prophecies in precise terms to current and even contemporary events" ("The Subject Matter of Qumran Exegesis," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 [1960]: 51-52).

"The most prominent Jewish **allegorist** of the first century was **Philo of Alexandria**, whose expositions of Scripture were produced during the life of Jesus and the earliest days of the church. Though a Jew, Philo was the inheritor of Stoic and Platonic ideas. And though a critic of the content of these philosophies, he used their basic categories of thought and methods in presenting to his Grecian audience what he believed to be the truth of the Jewish Torah. So he usually **treated the Old Testament as a body of symbols given by God** for man's spiritual and moral benefit, which must be **understood other than in a literal or historical fashion.** The *prima facie* meaning must normally be pushed aside--even counted as offensive--to make room for the intended spiritual meaning underlying the obvious; though, as noted above, at times he seems willing to consider literalist and allegorical exegesis as having a parallel legitimacy. In the main, however, exegesis of Holy Writ was for Philo an esoteric enterprise which, while not without its governing principles, was to be disassociated from literalist interpretation.

"But though **Philo** was the most prominent **Jewish allegorist** of the first Christian century, he **was not alone.** The *Letter of Aristeas* includes one instance of a mild allegorical treatment in its portrayal of the High Priest Eleazer's defence of the Jewish dietary laws (see 150-70; esp. 150: "For the division of the hoof and the separation of the claws are intended to teach us that we must discriminate between our individual actions with a view to the practice of virtue"). Jacob Lauterbach has identified **two groups of Palestinian Pharisees** active prior to the time of Rabbi Judah "the Prince" (the compiler of the Mishnah in the latter part of the second century C.E.), the *Dorshe Reshumot* and the *Dorshe Hamurot*, **who used a type of allegorical exegesis in their interpretations of Scripture** ("Ancient Jewish Allegorists," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 [1911]: 291-333, 503-31). And Joseph Bonsirven and David Daube have presented significant data in support of the thesis of an **early Pharisaic allegorical exegesis within Palestine itself** (Bonsirven, "Exegese allegorique chez les rabbins tannaïtes," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 23 [1933]: 522-24; Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 [1949]: 239-64). In addition, the **Dead Sea Scrolls include a number of examples of allegorical interpretation,** representative of which is the treatment of Habakkuk 2:17 in IQpHab 12:3-4: "'Lebanon' stands here for the Communal Council; 'wild beasts' for the simple-minded Jews who carry out the Law" (see also IQpMic. 8-10; CD 6.2-11; 7.9-20). **But though allegorical**

**exegesis was widespread amongst Jews of the first century, it was not dominant in Palestine.**

**"The Jewish roots of Christianity make it *a priori* likely that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament would resemble to some extent those of then contemporary Judaism. This has long been established with regard to the hermeneutics of Paul *vis-a-vis* the Talmud, and it is becoming increasingly clear with respect to the Qumran texts as well.** Indeed, there is little indication in the New Testament itself that the canonical writers were conscious of varieties of exegetical genre or of following particular modes of interpretation. At least they seem to make no sharp distinctions between what we would call historico-grammatical exegesis, midrash, peshet, allegory, or interpretations based on "corporate solidarity" or "typological correspondences in history." **All of these are used in their writings in something of a blended and interwoven fashion.** Yet there are discernible patterns and individual emphases among the various New Testament authors.

"In almost all of the New Testament authors one can find **some literalist**, straightforward exegesis of biblical texts. **Occasionally some allegorical** interpretation is also present. The **peshet** method, however dominates a certain class of material, namely that representative of Jesus' early disciples: principally Peter's preaching recorded in the early chapters of Acts, the Gospels of Matthew and John, and 1 Peter. Here these authors seem to be **taking Jesus' own method of using Scripture as their pattern.** By revelation they had come to know that "this" manifest in the work and person of Jesus "is that" of which the Old Testament speaks. Yet other New Testament writers, notably **Paul and the author of Hebrews**, can be characterized by a **midrashic type** of biblical interpretation (except where Paul uses a peshet approach in describing his own apostolic calling). Midrashic interpretation in the hands of these authors starts with Scripture and seeks to demonstrate christological relevance by means of a controlled atomistic exegesis.

This extended quote should demonstrate that the NT disciples were in fact not innovative or unusual in their approaches to exegesis.

***Second, let's look at the accepted rabbinical exegetical rules of the day (e.g. Hillel) and see if they were used.***

There were a number of rabbinical exegetical rules practiced around the time of Jesus, most notably those of Hillel.

"Seven exegetical rules were, according to later rabbinic tradition, expounded by the great teacher Hillel (c. A.D. 10). They represent general hermeneutical principles of inference, analogy and context that were probably in use before that time. They may be derived, as D. Daube argues, from rules of Hellenistic rhetoric current in Alexandria in the first century B.C." [Ellis, in [OTEC](#):87].

Longenecker describes the rules for us [[BEAP](#):34-35]:

1. *Qal wahomer*: what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important case.
2. *Gezerah shawah*: verbal analogy from one verse to another; where the same words are applied to two separate cases it follows that the same considerations apply to both.

3. *Binyan ab mikathub 'ehad*: building up a family from a single text; when the same phrase is found in a number of passages, then a consideration found in one of them applies to all of them.

4. *Binyan ab mishene kethubim*: building up a family from two texts; a principle is established by relating two texts together; the principle can then be applied to other passages.

5. *Kelal upherat*: the general and the particular, a general principle may be restricted by a particularisation of it in another verse; or conversely, a particular rule may be extended into a general principle.

6. *Kayoze bo bemaqom 'aher*: as is found in another place; a difficulty in one text may be solved by comparing it with another which has points of general (though not necessarily verbal) similarity.

7. *Dabar halamed me'inyano*: a meaning established by its context.

Now, did Jesus and/or the NT authors argue using these rules? ***Most definitely.***

Just to cite some of the passages where these principles are used (for discussion, see BEAP, [NWNTI:117-118](#), and [OTEC:87ff](#)):

**Rule 1** (*Inference a fortiori*): Matt 12.11ff, Luke 12.24,28; 2 Cor 3.7-11; Heb 9.13ff; Luke 6.3-5; Rom 5.15,17; Rom 11.24; I Cor 6.2f; I Cor 9.9; Heb 2.2ff; Heb 10.28f; Heb 12.24ff; John 10.31-38.

**Rule 2** (*Inference from similar words*): Mark 2.23-28; Luke 6.1-5; Rom 4.3,7; Heb 7.1-28; Jas 2.21ff.

**Rule 3** (*General principle from one verse*): Mark 12.26; Jas 5.16ff.

**Rule 4** (*General principle from two verses*): Rom 4.1-25 (Abe and David); I Cor 9.9, 13 (from Deut 25.4 and 18.1-8); Jas 2.22-26 (Abe and Rahab).

**Rule 5** (*Inference from a general principle*): Mark 12.28-34; Rom 13.9ff (from Lev 19.18).

**Rule 6** (*Inference from an analogous passage*): Mark 14.62 (anlgy of Dan 7.9 with Ps 110.1); Gal 3.8-16 (anlgy of Gen 12.3 and 22.18); Heb 4.7-9 (anlgy of Josh 1.13-15 with Ps 95.7-11); Heb 8.7-13 (anlgy of Exod 19.5ff with Jer 31.31-34).

**Rule 7** (*Interpretation from the context*): Matt 19.4-8; Rom 4.10f; Gal 3.17; Heb 4.9f; heb 11.1-13; Heb 11.35-40.

Ellis sums up some of these NT practices [[OTEC:91](#)]:

"As a whole the examples show that **the principles attributed to Hillel were also used by the messianic Judaism represented by Jesus and the New Testament writers.**

Certain of the principles, especially the association of biblical texts containing similar ideas (rule 6) or common words and phrases (rule 2) are important for the formation of large commentary patterns in the New Testament. They are also evident in other techniques such as a string of quotations (Rom 11.8-10; 15.9-12; 1 Cor 3.19f; Heb 1.5-

13; I Pet 2.7f) and merged or composite quotations (Rom 3.10-18; II Cor 6.16ff; I Cor 2.9) that often have appended to one text a snippet from another.

That these latter techniques (i.e., composite, conflated citations) are not unique to early Jewish Christians, can be seen from a simple example or two of usage in non-Christian Jewish lit. Strings of quotations abound in rabbinic and Qumranic sources:

RABBINIC: b. Berakot 6a: "R. Aha b. Raba said to R. Ashi: This accounts for one case, what about the other cases? - He replied to him: [They contain the following verses]: For what great nation is there, etc.; And what great nation is there, etc.; Happy art thou, O Israel, etc.; Or hath God assayed, etc.; and To make thee high above all nations."

RABBINIC: b. Pesahim 7b-8a: "The School of R. Ishmael taught: In the evening of the fourteenth leaven is searched for by the light of a lamp. Though there is no proof of this, there is an allusion to it, because it is said, 'seven days shall there be no leaven [in your houses]'; and it is said, 'and he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found [in Benjamin's sack]'; and it is said, 'And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with lamps'. and it is said, 'The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching [all the innermost parts of the belly]'"

QUMRAN: 4QTest strings together Deut 5.28f, Deut 18.18f, Num 24.15-17, Deut 33.8-11, and Josh 6.26.

QUMRAN: 4QFlor strings together 2 Sam 7.10-14, Ps 1.1, and Ps 2.1f

Composite quotations can also be seen in *Mekilta*, *Pisha* I on Exod 12.1, and its liturgical use in the period. In fact, the Shema itself is a conflation of Dt 6.4-9; 11.13-21; Num 15.37-41. And the pesher on Isaiah at Qumran has composite quotations from Zech 11.11 [4QpIsa(c), frag 21, ll. 7-8] and Hosea 6.9 [4QpIsa(c), frag 23, col ii, l. 14].

So, we have to say that the NT authors were certainly in line with standard Jewish hermeneutical principles.

***Finally, we might try to 'reality-check' the NT exegesis for 'conservativeness' over against the rabbinics, Qumran, etc.***

The point here is simply to get some feel for the 'weirdness index' of the various strands of 1st century Judaism, with which to compare the NT authors. This will admittedly be subjective in the extreme, but perhaps it will help level-set our understanding of 1st-century 'acceptable' exegetical praxis. The method is simply to pick a sample or two of what might be considered 'creative' use of the OT from each of our sectors of Jewry.

RABBINIC: The Babylonian Talmud has this passage:

"Six things are a good sign for a sick person, namely, sneezing, perspiration, open bowels, seminal emission, sleep and a dream. Sneezing, as it is written: 'His sneezings flash forth light'. (Job 41.10) Perspiration, as it is written, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread'. (Gen 3.19) Open bowels, as it is written: 'If lie that is bent down hasteneth to be loosed, he shall not go down dying to the pit'. (Is 51.14) Seminal emission, as it is written: 'Seeing seed, he will prolong his days'. (Is 53.10) Sleep, as it is written: 'I should have slept, then should I have been at rest'. (Job 3.13) A dream, as it is written: 'Thou didst cause me to dream and make me to live'. (Is 38.16) [*b. Berakoth* 57b, Soncino]

RABBINIC: Goppelt [[TYPOS](#):29,30] relates a story from *Mek. Exod* 17.11: "Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (ca. A.D. 100) interprets the holding high of Moses' hands in Exod 17:11 as symbolic of holding fast in the

future to the teaching given through Moses." And in the same document, at Exod 15.27, Eleazer continues: "And they encamped there by the water.' This teaches that the Israelites busied themselves with the words of the Torah, which were given to them at Marah."

RABBINIC: One midrash passage from *Mid. Teh. Buber* [cited in MTJL:62]:

"R. Sh'muel taught in the name of R. Y'huda: 'If somebody tells you when the end, the Redemption, will come, believe him not, for it is written: *For the day of vengeance was in My heart* (IS 63.4). The heart did not reveal it to the mouth; how could the mouth reveal it?"

RABBINIC: A 'messianic' passage from *b. Shabbath* 113b:

"And at meal-time Boaz said unto her [ruth], Come hither: Said R. Eleazar, He intimated to her, The royal house of David is destined to come forth from thee, [the house] whereof 'hither' is written, as it is said, Then David the king went in, and sat before the Lord, - and he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hither?"

QUMRAN: E.P. Sanders gives us an interesting example of 'creative' exegesis at Qumran [[JPB:334-335](#)]:

"Lev 23.37f states that at the 'appointed feasts' the priests are to offer sacrifices 'apart from sabbath offerings', 'apart from votive offerings', and 'apart from freewill offerings'. That is, on these occasions the special offerings are in addition to any other offerings, such as sabbath offerings and freewill offerings. The *Covenant of Damascus* **reverses the evident meaning of the text**: 'Let no one offer on the altar of the Sabbath [any offering] except the burnt-offering of the Sabbath; for thus it is written, 'apart from your Sabbath-offerings'" (CD 11.17f). By simply prefacing 'apart from sabbath offerings' with 'let no one offer...except', CD rules that when sabbath and festival overlapped, only the sabbath offerings were to be made. This opens up endless possibilities."

PHILO: From *Questions on Genesis* (92):

"Why it is said that the days of man shall be a hundred and twenty years? (Genesis 6:4).

"God appears here to fix the limit of human life by this number, indicating by it the manifold prerogative of honour; for in the first place this number proceeds from the units, according to combination, from the number fifteen; but the principle of the number fifteen is that of a more transparent appearance, since it is on the fifteenth day that the moon is rendered full of light, borrowing its light of the sun at the approach of evening, and restoring it to him again in the morning; so that during the night of the full moon the darkness is scarcely visible, but it is all light.

"In the second place, the number a hundred and twenty is a triangular number, and is the fifteenth number consisting of triangles.

"Thirdly, it is so because it consists of a combination of odd and even numbers, being contained by the power of the faculty of the concurring numbers, sixty-four and fifty-six; for the equal number of sixty-four is compounded of the uniting of these eight odd numbers, one, three, five, seven, nine, eleven, thirteen, fifteen; the reduction of which, by their parts into squares, makes a sum total of sixty-four, and that is a cube, and at the same time a square number...But again from the seven double units there arises the unequal number of fifty-six, being compounded of seven double pairs, which generate other productions of them, two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen; the sum total of which is fifty-six.

"In the fourth place, it is compounded of four numbers, of one triangle, namely fifteen; and of another square, namely twenty-five; and of a third quinquangular figure, thirty-five; and of a fourth a sexangular figure forty-five, by the same analogy: for the fifth is always received according to each appearance; for from the unity of the triangles the fifth number becomes fifteen; again the fifth of the quadrangular number from the unit makes twenty-five; and the fifth of the quinquangular number from the unit makes thirty-five;

and the fifth of the sexangular number from the unit makes forty-five...But every one of these numbers is a divine and sacred number, consisting of fifteens as has been already shown; and the number twenty-five belongs to the tribe of Levi. And the number thirty-five comes from the double diagram of arithmetic, geometry, and harmony; but sixteen, and eighteen, and nineteen, and twenty-one, the combination of which numbers amounts to seventy-four, is that according to which seven months' children are born. And forty-five consists of a triple diagram; but to this number, sixteen, nineteen, twenty-two, and twenty-eight, belong: the combination of which makes eighty-five, according to which nine months' children are produced.

"Fifthly, this diagram has fifteen parts, and a twofold composition, peculiarly belonging to itself; forsooth when divided by two it gives sixty, the measure of the age of all mankind; when divided by three it gives forty, the idea of prophecy; when divided by four it gives thirty, a nation; when divided by five, it makes twenty-four, the measure of day and night; when divided by six, it gives twenty, a beginning; when divided by eight, we have fifteen, the moon in the fulness of brilliancy; when divided by ten, it makes twelve, the zodiac embellished with living animals; when divided by twelve, it makes ten, holy; when divided by fifteen, it gives eight, the first ark; when divided by twenty, it leaves six, the number of creation; when divided by twenty-four, it makes five, the emblem of the outward sense; when divided by thirty it makes four, the beginning of solid measure; when divided by forty, it gives three, the symbol of fulness, the beginning, the middle, and the end; when divided by sixty, it makes two, which is woman; and when divided by the whole number of a hundred and twenty, the product is one, or man...And every one of all these numbers is more natural, as is proved in each of them, but the composition of them is twofold, for the product is two hundred and forty, which is a sign that it is worthy of a twofold life; for as the number of years is doubled, so also we may imagine that the life is doubled too; one being in connection with the body, the other being detached from the body, according to which every holy and perfect man may receive the gift of prophecy.

"Sixthly, because the fifth and sixth figures arise, the three numbers being multiplied together, three times four times five, since three times four times five make sixty; so in like manner the next following numbers four times five times six make a hundred and twenty, for four times five times six make a hundred and twenty.

Seventhly, when the number twenty has been taken in, which is the beginning of the reduction of mankind, I mean twenty, and being added to itself two or three times, so as to make twenty, forty, and sixty, these added together make a hundred and twenty. But perhaps the number a hundred and twenty is not the general term of human life, but only of the life of those men who existed at that time, and who were to perish by the deluge after an interval of so many years, which their kind Benefactor prolonged, giving them space for repentance; when, after the aforesaid term, they lived a longer time in the subsequent ages.

APOCRYPHA: In the very sober book *I Maccabees*, at 7.16, the author quotes Ps 79.2-3 [[HL:IIW:150-151](#)]:

"So they trusted him [Alcimus]; but he sized sixty of them and killed them in one day, in accordance with the word that was written, "The flesh of your faithful ones and their blood they poured out all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them"

This psalm is about the dead Jerusalemites at the Babylonian captivity(!) was not taken to be eschatological by ANY segment of Judaism!

PSEUDEPIGRAPHA: These works are noted for their expansions and embellishments to the biblical text and for ascribing 'new experiences' to most of the main biblical characters. They are NOT known for their 'fidelity' to the intent of the biblical authors!

JOSEPHUS: Alexander describes J's usage of the text in his *Contra Apion* thus [[HI:IIW](#):113, 115]:

"There he stresses the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the care with which they have been transmitted, the veneration in which they are held by Jews ('Although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable'; cf. Deut. 4:2). Josephus' claims, however, do not entirely square with his actual practice: he does regularly add and omit, and as an interpreter frequently exercises a heavy hand. This discrepancy between theory and practice has troubled many scholars."

"(on Gen 22.1-19) He also reports at some length on Isaac's reactions to Abraham's speech (*Ant* i, 232), and has God clarify his motives for imposing the test (*Ant* 1,233). Such changes come about quite naturally when a narrator attempts to recast a story in his own words. The vivid little detail that Abraham and Isaac embraced each other after Isaac's deliverance (*Ant* i, 236) is another example of a natural aggadic addition."

I have not picked the 'worse' examples by any stretch of the imagination(!), but these should be adequate to generate the impression that the "wildest" pieces of exegesis on the part of the NT authors are bland and extremely modest when compared to the likes of the above!

**SUMMARY: Overall then, I am forced to conclude that the NT authors were not in any way departing in radical fashion from their non-Christian counterparts in 1st century Judaism, in the areas of (1) textual usage or (2) exegetical practice. Instead, they were *squarely within* acceptable praxis, and indeed, may have constituted the most exegetically conservative of the groups at the time.**

.....  
**The THEOLOGICAL ISSUE**-----

Here the question is: Do they use **similar theological understandings of the text**? In other words, do the other Jews of the period (list above) **understand messianic texts** and overall theological themes **in the same ways**?

The approach here will be to see if:

1. Non-Christian Jewry accepted the same OT passages as being messianic;
2. Non-Christian Jewry identified specific humans with some messianic figure;
3. Non-Christian Jewry had their OWN problem of 'plurality in the Godhead' and/or with a supra-human messiah;
4. Non-Christian Jewry used 'typological' exegesis;
5. Non-Christian Jewry accepted Jesus as Messiah.

***In this case, the obvious answer to ALL of these is CLEARLY "yes".***

**1. Acceptance of the same OT passages as being messianic: I have demonstrated (in detail) that this was indeed the case [elsewhere](#).**

But let me make a couple of additional comments:

First, the **Rabbinical material refers to three times as many messianic passages as does the NT!** The NT writers could have tapped into a massive 'gold mine' of messianic traditions, but only used a small subset of these (perhaps controlled by the teaching of Jesus, cf. Luke 24.25-27). The rabbi's saw **MANY more** 'messianic' interpretations than did the NT Christians (even though some of the passages indeed differ).

Second, the Psalms were routinely seen as messianic by ALL 1st century "Judaism." The rabbinical citations alone show this for rabbinical Judaism. For Qumran, this is obvious from their use of the pesher method on them:

"Like the New Testament, some Qumran documents view the Psalms, as well as the Prophets, as prophetic in content. This perspective is attested, for example, in the reference to David as having uttered his psalms as 'prophecy' (see 11QPs(a) 27.11) as well as in the composition of pesharim devoted to some of the Psalms and Prophets." [\[HI:EMDSS:23\]](#)

"As for the Psalms, their use [in the NT] is primarily **in line with the Scrolls' view of them as prophetic texts in need of fulfillment.**" [\[\[HI:SASQ50:262\]](#).

In other words, the common objection that Christians twisted purely historical references in the Psalms into messianic prophecies is simply misguided. The rabbi's, the Covenanters, and the Messianic believers ALL shared these common understandings of messianic traditions in the Old Testament.

## **2. Did non-Christian Jewry identify specific humans with some messianic figure? Absolutely!**

As I documented earlier, the [range of messianic expectation was very, very wide](#)--from a strictly human nationalist hero to a veritable "God-man" (Neusner's phrase). But most of them had a conception in mind, as they identified specific human individuals as 'candidates'.

This is very obvious from the string of messianic figures that arose (and were accepted by large segments of the population!) for two centuries on either side of Jesus of Nazareth. Messianic and semi-messianic Prophetic figures abounded in this period, and can be documented from the sources of the day.

Josephus (see [\[HI:PFLST\]](#) for full details) describes the following prophetic figures:

Essene Prophets:

- Judas (War 1.78-80; Anti 13.311-13)
- Menahem (Ant 15.373-79)
- Simon (War 2.112-13; Ant 17.345-48)

Sign Prophets:

- Theudas (Ant 20.97ff)
- The Egyptian (War 2.261-63; Ant 20.169ff)
- Unnamed figures under Felix (War 2.258-60; Ant 20.167-68)
- Unnamed Prophet of 70 CE (War 6.283-87)
- Jonathan the Sicarius (War 7.437-50; Life 424-25)
- Unnamed Figure under Festus (Ant 20.188)

Other Figures:

- Onias (Ant 14.22-24)
- Jesus Son of Ananias (war 6.300-309)
- Pharisees Pollion and Samaias (Ant 14.172-76)

There were also messianic "kings" that show up, and that attracted followers from the Jewish populace. [This material is available in detail in [NWNTI:242-252](#), and [BPM:chapter 3](#)]:

1. Judas (of Sepphoris, Galilee), son of Hezekiah the "brigand chief".
2. Simon of Perea, a former royal servant.
3. Athronges the shepherd of Judea.
4. Judas (of Gamala) the Galilean (mentioned in Acts 5.37).
5. Menahem (grand)son of Judas the Galilean.
6. John of Gischala son of Levi.
7. Simon bar Giora of Gerasa.

And to show that the Rabbi's were not exempt from this (apart from their involvement in prophecy as noted in Josephus above), let me cite the famous rabbinic passages in which the tradition of R. Aqiba ascribes messiah-hood to Bar Kobia:

"R. Simeon b. Yohai taught, 'My teacher Aqiba used to expound, 'There shall step forth a star out of Jacob [Num 24.17]--thus Koziva steps forth out of Jacob! **When R. Aqiba beheld Bar Koziva, he exclaimed, 'This is the king Messiah'**" [*y.Taan.* 4.8]

"R. Yohanan said, 'My teacher used to expound, 'There shall step forth a star out of Jacob [Num 24.17]--thus, read not *kokab* [star], but *kozeb* [liar]'. 'When R. Aqiva beheld Bar Koziva, he exclaimed, **'This is the king Messiah'**" (*Lam. R.* 2.4)

In both passages, Aqiba is disagreed with by R. Torta, but the point is still obvious: one of the most famous rabbi's in early Jewish history called a human being (not the nation Israel or the 'elect remnant') the "messiah".

Early Jewish Christians were simply NOT the only ones that identified a human individual with the messianic promises--the rabbi's did, Qumran did, the general Jewish populace did.

### ***3. Did non-Christian Jewry have their OWN "problem" of 'plurality in the Godhead' and/or with a supra-human messiah?***

***Absolutely!***

I have cited the specific passages, and discussed elsewhere the "[plurality tensions](#)" within the [Tanakh/OT](#), within the [Pseudepigrapha, and within Rabbinic Judaism](#).

What I would like to do here is simply to offer a few summary statements by scholars on two points: (1) the supra-human expectation of SOME strands of messianic hope; and (2) the continuity between pre-Nicene Christian "plural-tarianism" and the Jewish milieu of the 1st century.

***First***, let me offer two quotes on *the 'deity' of the messianic figure* (emphases mine):

The first is from Jacob Neusner, famed scholar of rabbinics ["Mishnah and Messiah", [JTM:275](#)]:

"We focus upon how the system laid out in the Mishnah takes up and disposes of those critical issues of teleology worked out through messianic eschatology in other, **earlier versions of Judaism**. These earlier systems resorted to the myth of the **Messiah as savior** and redeemer of Israel, a **supernatural figure** engaged in political-historical tasks

as king of the Jews, **even a God-man** facing the crucial historical questions of Israel's life and resolving them: the Christ as king of the world, of the ages, of death itself."

And the second is from Qumran scholar John Collins [[SS:168-169](#)]:

"The **notion of a messiah who was in some sense divine had its roots in Judaism**, in the interpretation of such passages as Psalm 2 and Daniel 7 in an apocalyptic context. This is not to deny the great difference between a text like 4Q246 and the later Christian understanding of the divinity of Christ. But **the notion that the messiah was Son of God in a special sense was rooted in Judaism**, and so there was **continuity between Judaism and Christianity** in this respect, even though Christian belief eventually diverged quite radically from its Jewish sources."

**Secondly**, I want to offer this extended quote from Ellis, who gives more detail on this 'continuity' [[OTEC:112-116](#)]:

"The New Testament writers' conception of corporate personality [for example, King:Nation, Tribe:Person, Messiah:Remnant] **extends to an understanding of God himself as a corporate being**, a viewpoint which underlies their conviction that Jesus the Messiah has a unique unity with God and which later comes into definitive formulation in the doctrine of the Trinity. The origin of this conviction, which in some measure goes back to the earthly ministry of Jesus, is complex, disputed and not easy to assess. One can here only briefly survey the way in which the early Christian understanding and use of their Bible may have reflected or contributed to this perspective on the relationship of the being of God to the person of the Messiah.

**"Already in the Old Testament and in pre-Christian Judaism the one God was understood to have 'plural' manifestations.** In ancient Israel he was (in some sense) identified with and (in some sense) distinct from his Spirit or his Angel. Apparently, Yahweh was believed to have 'an indefinable extension of the personality,' by which he was present 'in person' in his agents. Even the king as the Lord's anointed (= '**messiah**') **represented 'a potent extension of the divine personality.'**

**"In later strata of the Old Testament and in intertestamental Judaism certain attributes of God** - such as his Word or his Wisdom- were viewed and **used in a similar manner.** In some instances the usage is only a poetic personification, a description of God's action under the name of the particular divine attribute that he employs. **In others, however, it appears to represent a divine hypostasis**, the essence of God's own being that is at the same time distinguishable from God.

**"From this background**, together with a messianic hope that included the expectation that Yahweh himself would come to deliver Israel, **the followers of Jesus would have been prepared, wholly within a Jewish monotheistic and 'salvation history' perspective, to see in the Messiah a manifestation of God.** In the event, they were brought to this conclusion by their experience of Jesus' works and teachings, particularly as it came to a culmination in his resurrection appearances and commands. Although during his earthly ministry they had, according to the Gospel accounts, occasionally been made aware of a strange otherness about Jesus, only after his resurrection do they identify him as God. Paul, the first literary witness to do this, probably expresses a conviction initially formed at his Damascus Christophany. John the Evangelist, who wrote later but who saw the risen Lord (and was a bearer of early traditions about that event), also describes the confession of Jesus as God as a reaction to the resurrection appearances. Yet, such **direct assertions of Jesus' deity are exceptional** in the New Testament and **could hardly have been sustained among Jewish believers apart from a perspective on the Old Testament that affirmed and/or confirmed a manifestation of Yahweh in and as Messiah.**

"The New Testament writers usually set forth Messiah's unity with God by identifying him with God's Son or Spirit or image or wisdom or by applying to him biblical passages

that in their original context referred to Yahweh. They often do this within an implicit or explicit commentary (midrash) on Scripture and **thereby reveal their conviction that the 'supernatural' dimension of Jesus' person is not merely that of an angelic messenger but is the being of God himself.**

"The **use of Scripture** in first and second century Judaism, then, marked a watershed in the biblical doctrine of God. At that time it **channeled the imprecise monotheism of the Old Testament and early Judaism in two irreversible directions.** On the one hand Jewish-Christian apostles and prophets, via 'corporeal personality' conceptions and Christological exposition, set a course that led to the trinitarian monotheism of late Christianity. On the other hand the rabbinic writers, with their exegetical emphasis on God's unity, brought into final definition the unitarian monotheism of talmudic Judaism."

To these let me add:

First, from Daube's excellent work, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 325ff:

"Before quoting the paragraph in question, let us recall that as early as in the Pentateuch we come across **two conceptions of the exodus, one according to which God himself rescued the nation and another represented by statements such as that 'he sent an angel and hath brought us forth out of Egypt'**. (Num 20.16). **The opposition between these different schools of thought continues throughout Biblical and Rabbinic times.** Isaiah says 'the angel of his face saved them', but the LXX translates 'neither a messenger nor an angel but he himself saved them' (Is 63.9); and Exodus Rabba (on 12.23) observes that 'some say he smote the Egyptians through an angel, and some say the Holy one did it himself'. Considering the whole atmosphere of the Jewish Passover-eve service, it is only natural that the prevalent doctrine should here be that of God's direct intervention.

"The Credo from Deuteronomy contains the declaration: 'And the Lord heard our voice, and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terribleness and with signs and with wonders.' The authors of the Passover Haggadah see in the repetition of 'the Lord'- 'the Lord heard our voice and the Lord brought us forth' instead of simply 'and he brought us forth' -an indication of God's personal activity; and, as usual, they support their contention by other texts from Scripture. **This is what they say by way of comment: 'Not through an angel, and not through a seraph, and not through a messenger, but the Holy one in his glory and himself;** as it is written (in Exodus'-- 12.12), For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and I will smite all the firstborn, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment, I the Lord.' Then they go on to explain that each of the four clauses of the supporting text is intended to announce the carrying out of these deeds by God himself. I 'For I will pass through Egypt-this means, I and not an angel; and I will smite all the firstborn-this means, I and not a seraph; and I will execute judgment-this means, I and not the messenger; I the Lord-this means, I am and no other.'

"It will be noted that, whereas the **first part of the Midrash has 'not through an angel, and not through a seraph, and not through a messenger', the second speaks of 'the messenger', not 'a messenger': 'I and not the messenger'**. This way of putting the matter may well have arisen when Christianity had to be combated: 'the messenger' probably is Jesus. **There are versions of the Midrash with more anti-Christian or anti-gnostic interpolations, such as the addition 'and not through the Word'."**

And then from volume two in Michael Brown's excellent trilogy, *Answering Jesus Objections to Jesus*, p7f:

"Maybe the problem lies with an overemphasis on the often misunderstood--and frequently poorly explained--term Trinity. Perhaps it would help if, for just one moment, we stopped thinking about what Christians believe--since not everything labeled "Christian" is truly Christian or biblical--and pictured instead an old Jewish rabbi unfolding the mysteries of God. Listen to him as he strokes his long, gray beard

and says, "I don't talk to everyone about this. These things are really quite deep. But you seem sincere, so I'll open up some mystical concepts to you."

"And so he begins to tell you about the ten Sefirot, the so-called divine emanations that act as "intermediaries or graded links between the completely spiritual and unknowable Creator and the material sub-lunar world." When you say, "But doesn't that contradict our belief in the unity of God?" he replies, "God is an organic whole but with different manifestations of power-just as the life of the soul is one, though manifested variously in the eyes, hands, and other limbs. God and his Sefirot are just like a man and his body: His limbs are many but He is one. Or, to put it another way, think of a tree which has a central trunk and yet many branches. There is unity and there is multiplicity in the tree, in the human body, and in God too. Do you understand?"

**"Now think of this same rabbi saying to you, "Consider that in our Scriptures, God was pictured as enthroned in heaven, yet at the same time he manifested himself in the cloud and the fire over the Tabernacle while also putting his Spirit on his prophets. And all the while the Bible tells us that his glory was filling the universe! Do you see that God's unity is complex?"**

"And what if this rabbi began to touch on other mystical concepts of God such as "the mystery of the three" (Aramaic, *raza'di-telatha*), explaining that in the Zohar there are five different expressions relating to various aspects of the threefold nature of the Lord? What would you make of the references to "three heads, three spirits, three forms of revelation, three names, and three shades of interpretation" that relate to the divine nature? The Zohar even asks, "How can these three be one? Are they one only because we call them one? How they are one we can know only by the urging of the Holy Spirit and then even with closed eyes." These issues of "the Godhead" are deep!

My point should be obvious: Even in the major controversial issues such as the deity of the messiah and the plurality within God, the Christians were **still** not radically out of synch with the Judaism of the day! (We will see later where the uniqueness came from, but it was NOT from the theological backdrop, to be sure).

#### ***4. Did non-Christian Jewry use 'typological' exegesis in the same ways NT Christian Jews did?***

**Absolutely!**

And I have documented this [elsewhere](#) as being present throughout the Tanaakh and other Judaica of the times.

We were (again) not unique in this at all.

#### ***5. Did any Non-Christian Jewry find NT arguments persuasive and exegesis 'acceptable'? ("As measured by" accepting Jesus as Messiah?!)***

***Obviously so!*** [Or we would not be having this conversation, now would we? (smile)]

If the New Testament can be trusted at all, we know:

1. Every author in the NT (with the POSSIBLE exception of Luke) was a Palestinian Jew.
2. Large numbers of Palestinian and Diaspora Jewry accepted Jesus as Messiah within the first 10 years of the resurrection.
3. Many Priests became believers (Acts 6.7).
4. There were Pharisees among the believers, including Rabbi Saul of Tarsus, (Act 15).

5. The [Jerusalem church \(and its geographical successor\) continued as a vital community](#) for centuries.
6. The NT church continued its practice and belief WITHIN Judaism for decades and decades (e.g., temple worship, circumcision of Jews, vows), until they were "liturgically expelled" from the synagogue.

In fact, *every social strata of Jewry* around is represented in the early Jewish church!

Fiensy [[BAFCSP:226ff](#)] lists some of the various classes of folk known to be in that group:

1. The Wealthy or Semi-wealthy (Simon of Cyrene, Barnabas, Ananias & Sapphira, Mary mother of John Mark, Manaen, Levi/Matthew)
2. The lower class (some of the disciples, James)
3. Ordinary temple priests (but not from High Priestly family)
4. One Levite (Joseph Barnabas, Acts 4.36)
5. Submerged classes (e.g. beggars, impoverished widows, and healed people)
6. Women of various classes
7. Hebraists (Jews who spoke both Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek) and Hellenists (Jews who only spoke Greek).
8. Pharisees (Acts 15.5)

So, we can safely say that at least some Jews found the NT-type arguments persuasive and the methods 'acceptable', and this phrase 'some Jews' would have included those from all of the other "Judaisms" of the day.

.....

**Let me quickly summarize the above pieces, before moving on to the next of your questions. What we have seen so far:**

1. The Jewish believers reflected an *awareness* of a mixture of text types--just as ALL of their contemporaries did.
2. The Jewish believers reflected a *usage* of a mixture of text types--just as ALL of their contemporaries did.
3. The Jewish believers used the *same interpretive approaches* that ALL of their contemporaries did.
4. The Jewish believers used the *same exegetical rules* as the Rabbi's.
5. The Jewish believers were *probably more 'conservative'* and 'uncreative' in their Tanakh/OT exegesis than their contemporaries, including the rabbi's.

6. The Jewish Christians believed in the prophetic significance of the Psalms--shared with the major contemporary groups of the day.
7. The Jewish believers had *views on the main messianic passages that were shared* by some or all of their contemporaries.
8. The Jewish believers saw the messianic prophecies fulfilled in a specific human being--and their contemporaries were willing to make similar identifications.
9. The Jewish believers had a 'plurality problem'--that was *inherited* from Judaism and indeed, *shared* with the other 'Judaisms' of the day (and actually, later as well).
10. The Jewish believers used typological exegesis on occasion--just like their contemporaries.
11. The NT authors saw in Jesus of Nazareth the promised Messiah, as did *many* of their fellow Jews from all walks of life.

To be sure, Jewish believers in Jesus in the first century WERE DIFFERENT from their counterparts--but the difference was NOT due to radical discontinuities in reverence for the bible or in exegetical methods. [We shall note at the end of this article where the difference lay, and we will see that it was similar to the differences between the Pharisees and the Qumran covenanters.]

**But at this point, we can simply conclude that the early Jewish Christians were as faithful to their heritage and as honest with their religious background as ANY of the other Jewish groups of the day.**

Before I summarize all of this, let me know go through some more of your eMail and address one other question.

*The questioner continued:*

**"I heard one scholar say that the LXX was holy scripture for the Jews for 200 years. Is that true, and what does that mean? I get the impression from the Rabbis that Hebrew was the language of the torah and even the language of God. And I agree that if there is some Hebrew faithful source extant or not, it would be that which we would derive our understanding from.**

Your scholar friend is essentially correct.

The LXX was cited as scripture by Diaspora Jewry consistently in pre-Christian times, was used in synagogues through the 6th century AD, and was used at Qumran in pre-Christian times similarly. Although it was consistently corrected and refined through its heyday (not without major protest from Diaspora Jewry), this was paralleled by Jewish efforts to define/determine the most precise Hebrew text. The disowning of the LXX was never "official", although it was highly disparaged in the later Rabbinical writings.

Without getting into all the intricacies of the history of translations, let me walk us through an overview of the history/logic of the LXX:

1. First of all, we have to note that a Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanakh/OT will be as necessary to Diaspora Jews as an Aramaic translation (i.e., the Targums) will be to most of the Palestinian Jews at the time of Jesus. The Aramaic translations were used alongside of the Hebrew texts in Palestinian synagogues. [[WTOT:53](#)]. Compare Schiffman [[FTT:89](#)]:

"We cannot be certain of the language of prayer in Hellenistic synagogues. In all probability, at least the greatest part of the worship service was conducted in *koine* Greek, the dialect of the Hellenistic world. Evidence points to the use of psalms as part of the service, clearly in imitation of the Temple ritual. As for the reading of the Torah, it is virtually certain that Greek Bible texts, of which the Septuagint is an example, were in use. It is not known for sure, though, whether the formal Torah reading was conducted in Greek or took place from the Hebrew text with the Greek, much like the later Aramaic targums, serving as a translation. "

2. The non-coordinated nature of Diaspora worship would have given rise to multiple Greek versions--BEFORE the LXX was created. So, in the *Letter of Aristeas* (314), the author complains about the quality of "earlier inadequate versions of the Law".

3. Something must have prompted an action-point. Either the Alexandrian ruler wanted an 'authorized version' of the Torah, local communities wanted a 'Jerusalem-sanctioned' version, someone needed to deal with intra-Judaism quibbles, or Jerusalem wanted to exercise some religious control or guidance over Diaspora Jewry. For any (or all) of the reasons, the LXX version of the Pentateuch was created from a Palestinian Hebrew text in the middle of the 3rd century b.c.

4. The first LXX was ONLY for the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the bible), but quickly more of the Tanakh/OT was translated. We have several early witnesses to this:

a. Textual witnesses [[Tov, OT:TCHB:136](#)]:

"[T]he translation of the Torah was carried out in Egypt in the third century BCE. This assumption is compatible with the early date of several papyrus and leather fragments of the Torah from Qumran and Egypt, some of which have been ascribed to the middle or end of the second century BCE (4QLXXLev(a), 4QLXXNum, Pap. Fouad 266, Pap. Rylands Gk. 458).

b. Literary witnesses:

"The translations of the books of the Prophets, Hagiographa, and the apocryphal books came after that of the Torah, for most of these translations use its vocabulary, and quotations from the translation of the Torah appear in the Greek translations of the Latter Prophets, Psalms, Ben Sira, etc. Since the Prophets and several of the books of the Hagiographa were known in their Greek version to the grandson of Ben Sira at the end of the second century BCE, we may infer that most of the books of the Prophets and Hagiographa were translated in the beginning of that century or somewhat earlier. There is only limited explicit evidence concerning individual books: Chronicles is quoted by Eupolemos in the middle of the second century BCE, and Job is quoted by Pseudo-Aristeas in the beginning of the first century BCE. The translation of Isaiah contains allusions to historical situations and events which point to the years 170-150 BCE [[Tov, OT:TCHB:137](#)]

"Originally the LXX was a Jewish translation, and hence was quoted by Jewish historians (Demetrius, Eupolemus, Artapanus, Josephus), poets (Ezekiel) and philosophers (Philo)." [HI:MIKRA:163; the details of the less known of these are given in HI:MIKRA, Chapter 14 (van der Horst): "The Interpretation of the Bible by the Minor Hellenistic Jewish Authors".]

5. Somewhere around the middle of the second century BC, complaints apparently arose about the "quality" of even this 'official' translation. Concerns were being voiced about disagreements between the various texts and translations (*long* before the NT controversies erupted). Part of this was predictable, since the Hebrew text itself was undergoing development.

We know, for example, that the Hebrew master-copy that would have been used for the LXX version of the Torah would NOT have been the same even a century later. So Bickerman [HI:JGA:105]:

"It is obvious, however, that none of the Hebrew manuscripts available around 260 BCE could have offered a text identical to that found in our printed Bibles, since the latter essentially follows the edition made in Jerusalem three centuries after the publication of the Septuagint. Toward the end of the second century BCE we find pseudo-Aristeas complaining that copies of the Torah were being penned carelessly and "not as ought to be."...It should come as no surprise consequently that the Septuagint often agrees with the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Book of Jubilees, the Qumran manuscripts, and similar variants of the Vulgate text, as against the Torah text later fixed by Jewish bookmen..."

We have noted above that there were different Hebrew text types floating around at the time, that would themselves have given risen to variants in the LXX. This is widely recognized.

"At times, they [the LXX translators] **translated from Hebrew texts which differed from those current in Palestine**, a matter much clearer thanks to the evidence provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls. At other points, the Septuagint reflects knowledge of Palestinian exegetical traditions which are enshrined in rabbinic literature." [Schiffman, ETT:93-94]

"The **diversity of the first-century Greek OT text** has been documented by the discovery and publication of 8HevXIgr, a fragmentary Greek scroll of the Minor Prophets. This text differs from the LXX at several points, and agrees with at least three of the recensions (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) at several points" [Evans, NWNTI:74]

"It is true that in the past scholars have attributed to the translators of the LXX various major alterations of an editorial nature in order to explain the differences between LXX and MT, but a greater awareness of the translators' aims and methods, and the new evidence from Qumran for the existence of **a plurality of Hebrew text types prior to the standardisation of the consonantal text in the later first century AD**, suggest that it is most unlikely that any of the LXX translators acted in a high-handed way with the texts they were rendering into Greek" [Brock, HI:IIW:90]

6. Somehow, by the end of the second century BC, the leaders in Palestinian Jewry become aware of, and concerned about, the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew 'originals'.

"[B]y the end of the second century BC there had emerged an awareness that the original Greek translations of 'the law, prophets and other writings' did not represent the Hebrew originals sufficiently accurately. It was this dissatisfaction which gave rise to the series of 'corrections' of the LXX, bringing it into closer line with Hebrew..." [HI:IIW:90]

Ben Sira voiced this in the 1st century BCE (*Prologue to Ecc.*, 15 NRSV):

"You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attentions, and to be indulgent in cases where, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly. For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. No only this book, but

even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original."

So, what occurs is that *Jerusalem* decides not to ABOLISH the LXX at this time, but rather to 'correct it,' designed to bring the Greek more in line with the various Hebrew texts of the time. (Remember, the Hebrew text was not really "finalized" until later).

7. This creates an interesting and "political" dilemma for pre-Christian Jewry [[HL:IIW:91f](#)]:

"The earliest Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible of course did not have the benefit of a century or more's reflection on the proper role of the biblical translator, and this was why their work was considered in some circles to be in need of revision. The **dilemma posed for diaspora Judaism by this new awareness of the differences between the LXX and its Hebrew original in fact gave rise to two courses of action: alongside those who set out to 'correct' the LXX texts**, bringing them into closer line with an authoritative text form of the Hebrew, **there were others who cut the Gordian knot by claiming an authority for the LXX Pentateuch equal to that of the Hebrew original**. The first witness to this approach is provided by the so-called 'Letter' of Aristea to Philocrates, probably dating from the later second century BC. The author cleverly **undercuts the position of the would-be revisers** by making a number of significant points. At the outset he acknowledges that copies of the Hebrew Pentateuch at Alexandria were not very accurate; it was an awareness of this state of affairs that led to the embassy to **Jerusalem where the High Priest provided, not only an authoritative Hebrew manuscript from which to work, but also the translators--representing every tribe-- to do the work**. As a crowning point, it is asserted that, **so accurate was their translation, that any subsequent revision (*diaskeua*) was totally unnecessary**. The accompanying curse laid on those who dare to make any such changes was clearly aimed at those who were beginning to undertake the work of 'correcting' the LXX.

"This line of approach was taken a stage further by **Philo** who **claims** that those who know the two languages 'speak of the **authors not as translators, but as prophets and priests** of the mysteries, whose sincerity and singleness of thought has enabled them to **go hand in hand with the purest of spirits, the spirit of Moses**' (*Life of Moses* ii, 40; tr. Colson).

"By describing the translators as 'prophets' **Philo was claiming that the Greek translation has an authority equal to that of the original**: both original and translation are to be held in 'awe and reverence as sisters' (ibid.). On such a view (inherited by the early christian church) **any observable differences between the Greek and the Hebrew were no longer a matter of concern, requiring correction** on the ground that the translators had failed in what later generations saw as their proper role as merely *interpretes*, word for word translators: since they were in fact 'prophets', rather than *interpretes*, the translators could be regarded as having been in a position to act as authoritative expositors as well.

8. What is interesting about the Jerusalem approach was that it wanted to simply correct, not abolish, the Greek translations. There was nothing *per se* wrong with a local-language translation. Correspondingly, it undertook 'corrections' that were apparently **NOT motivated by Christian-Jewish controversy/polemic**. The initial controversy (above) was **Jerusalem-vs-Diaspora Jewry** (perhaps over the sore spot of "how much Hellenization is okay?").

Tov lists several Jewish revisions [[OT:TCHB:144ff](#)]:

1. kaige-Theodotion (end of 1st century BC)
2. Aquila (125 CE)

3. 7QLXXExod (Qumran)
4. 4QLXXNum (Qumran)
5. Pap. Oxy. 1007
6. Pap. Rylands Gk. 458.

9. And then the Jewish-Christian animosity cranks up.

"However, at the end of the first century C.E. **many Jews ceased to use the LXX because the early Christians** had adopted it as their own translation, and by then it was considered a Christian translation. This explains the negative attitude of many Rabbis towards the LXX"  
[HI:MIKRA:163]

*and at the same time, the Jews of Jerusalem finalize the consonantal text:*

"The Hebrew consonantal text was not frozen until sometime toward 100 CE, but once it was accepted as authoritative, all scrolls deviating from the standard recension were suppressed by the rabbinic authorities. Divergent manuscripts of the Septuagint, however, continued to circulate freely. Around 90 C.E., Josephus, in his paraphrase of pseudo-Aristeas, suggest that his readers 'amend' any text of the Septuagint manuscript that they possess if they find any addition or omission there" [[HI:JGA:106](#)]

(But this suppression is not as thorough as one might imagine, since Tov points out that the Hebrew exemplar that Aquila used for his very literal LXX revision was only "very close to the proto-Masoretic text." [HITCULXX:151].)

And the Jewish/Christian controversy/polemic shows up in these 'corrections' to the LXX as well [Tov, in HI:MIKRA:184]:

"Apparently Aquila made a special effort to replace renditions which had become 'Christian' terms. Thus the translation of *mascah* (*christos*) was replaced with *aleimmenos*. Partly because of this, his translation was well-liked among Jews, while avoided by Christians."

**10.** But the Jews still used the Greek translations in worship! Aquila, for example, was still in use in the synagogues in the 6th century ad [Tov, [OT:TCHB:144](#)]! We have palimpsests of this from the Cairo Geniza, and "in Emperor Justinian's conciliatory Codicil No. 146 [533 AD] this version is cited along with the inspired Septuagint as sanctioned for use in synagogues" [[WTOT:55](#)].

The above details and overview should indicate quite clearly that **Diaspora Judaism** saw the LXX versions (and revisions) as **absolutely inspired**. Philo, for example, put it at the same level as the Mosaic revelation!

But what about **rabbinic** or pre-rabbinic **Judaism**? Did they consider the Greek translation to be 'holy'--did it 'defile the hands' like the Hebrew scrolls did?

Strangely enough, in spite of the various complaints and in-fighting, **many of them absolutely did!**

The Talmud has this fascinating passage (*Megilla* 9a,b) in which we read (Soncino):

"MISHNAH. THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BOOKS [OF THE SCRIPTURE] AND *TEFILLIN* AND *MEZUZAHS* SAVE THAT THE BOOKS MAY BE WRITTEN IN ANY LANGUAGE WHEREAS *TEFILLIN* AND *MEZUZAHS* MAY

BE WRITTEN ONLY IN ASSYRIAN. R. SIMEON B. GAMALIEL SAYS THAT **BOOKS [OF THE SCRIPTURE] ALSO WERE PERMITTED [BY THE SAGES] TO BE WRITTEN ONLY IN GREEK.**

"R. SIMEON B. GAMALIEL SAYS THAT BOOKS [OF THE SCRIPTURE] ALSO ARE PERMITTED TO BE WRITTEN ONLY IN GREEK. R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Johanan: The halachah follows R. Simeon b. Gamaliel. R. Johanan further said: What is the reason of R. Simeon b. Gamaliel? Scripture says, God enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; [this means] that the words of Japheth shall be in the tents of Shem. But why not say [the words of] Gomer and Magog? - R. Hiyya b. Abba replied: The real reason is because it is written, Let God enlarge [yaft] Japheth: implying, let the chief beauty [yafyuth] of Japheth be in the tents of Shem.

Bar-Ilan gives this explanation of this passage [HI:MIKRA:32]:

"The languages commonly written in the land of Israel were: 'Old' and 'Square' Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Nabatean, Syriac, Tadmorite and Mandaic. It was **forbidden to write the Tora in any language but Hebrew** in the 'Assyrian' (square) script, although **there were Sages who permitted the Tora**, and even *tefillin* and *mezuzot* **to be written in Greek, which were nevertheless considered holy** (*M. Megilla* 1:8; *B.T. Megilla* 9a)."

This fact that the Greek translations of the Torah were '**holy**' is even more significant when contrasted with the Aramaic translations (targums), which were NOT accorded Scriptural status. Alexander described the lengths the rabbi's went to make sure the people did NOT accord 'holy' status to the Aramaic targumim [HI:MIKRA:238-239]:

"Every effort had to be made to **avoid confusing the targum with the written text of Scripture** [in the synagogue service]. The Scripture reader and the translator must be two different people. The Scripture reader had to be clearly seen to be reading from the scroll; the translator had to recite the targum from memory: he was not allowed to use a written text in synagogue, nor was he permitted to glance at the Tora scroll--'lest the people should say that the translation is written in the Tora' [*B.T. Megilla* 32a] Nor was the reader allowed to prompt him if he faltered...Scripture had absolute priority; **targum was only a bridge** to the understanding of Scripture."

It is important to note here that these targumic "translations" were delivered in synagogue from memory--there would have been written copies passed around/studied in schools and private use before coming to synagogue. Indeed, "The congregation was encouraged publicly to rebuke or to silence a translator who gave an unauthorized translation" [HI:MIKRA:240-241, referring to *M. Megilla* 4:9,10; *T. Megilla* 4(3):31; *B.T. Megilla* 25a/b].

.....

Now, it is in this context that the NT writers compose the NT documents. All of the NT dox were written prior to 70 AD (with the possible exception of the Revelation of John), by reasonably literate and practicing Jews. Therefore, at the time that Jesus is preaching and the post-Easter Jewish church is expanding, the following situation obtains:

1. There are multiple text-types in the Land and in the Diaspora. There are multiple Hebrew text-families and multiple Greek text-families. They are ALL used.
2. There is no fixed MT or proto-MT at the time.
3. There are some revisions to the LXX, but none apparently agreed upon by Diaspora Judaism.

4. Quotes from the LXX as being "scripture" by non-Christian Jews abound in the various classes of Jewish literature (in Greek) of the period.

5. The rabbinic data indicates a continuing allowance (even preferential treatment) for Greek translations of Torah. These would have FULL 'inspired' status (i.e., defiling the hands).

Therefore, not only is your scholar friend's statement correct, but the behavior of the NT Jewish authors were very much in line with the culture and standards of the day.

.....

Now, what I have tried to demonstrate so far---from primary and secondary sources--was that *the early Jewish believers were in no way treating the Tanakh/OT inappropriately*. They used the same methods, same approaches, same textual mix, same religious guidelines toward God's word.

But they did 'end up at' a different place from the other peer-Judaisms of the day. We must now try to characterize WHAT differences emerged, and HOW such a distinctive 'flavor' of pre-Talmudic Judaism could have developed given the strong continuities and similar worldviews between Jewish Christianity and non-Christian Jewry (1st century).

To this we turn now...

In a nutshell, the main difference between the early Jewish messianic believers and other Jews of "other Judaisms" was their personal experience of God's in-breaking in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Another way of putting this would be that the Jewish people of the Land who encountered Jesus in his salvific ministry, *recognized* in that encounter that YHWH had 'visited His people'. Out of the many, many "possible messianic scenarios" afforded by the messianic prophecies in the Tanakh/OT, they *saw* one materialize--concretely, specifically, powerfully, authoritatively, vividly-- *in front of their very eyes* and in the middle of their troubled lives. They encountered their Awesome Covenant God, "meek and bearing salvation", in this brash and powerful figure from Nazareth.

They were never the same again.

They *experienced* the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. They *saw* how Israel would be delivered. They *understood* why 'making an end of unrighteousness' (Dan 9) was first in the eschatological program. They *knew* that God had begun to fulfill his many promises to His people, in this strange and wonderful Visitor. They *experienced* the "aftershocks of love" in the community created by the outpouring of the promised Spirit from the prophet Joel.

History had been split in half for them.

R. T. France points out that this element was the critical difference between these Jews and their peers [[JSOTGP3:123](#)]:

"Foremost among **the distinctive elements** of early Christianity was its **sense of history**. Other Jews might locate the decisive acts of God in the distant past of sacred history, or, with the apocalyptists and the men of Qumran, in the imminent future; **but for the Christians the decisive work of God was in Jesus the Messiah, whose recent life,**

**death and resurrection many of them had witnessed**, and whose deeds and words were the basis of their faith and the subject of those writings they called 'gospels'. So **while other Jews** looked to the scriptures to discover and **interpret the distant past**, or to **understand their present situation with a view to discerning what God was about to do**, the Christians turned to those same scriptures **as the pattern and promise which had already and recently been fulfilled**. Their interest, then, was not in the Old Testament in itself, but in the Old Testament as it is fulfilled in Jesus.

And this was not a function of their being particularly 'clever' or 'creative' at all! Indeed, the picture we get in the NT is very uncomplimentary of those early followers. But they watched Jesus, and His approaches to Scripture and His approaches to matters of interpretation, and His approach to matters of practice, and they learned and passed this on to others. It was, accordingly, **not THEIR action** or approaches that created this difference--**it was Jesus'**. So, Ellis [[OTEC:101](#)]:

"It has been argued above that, in terms of method, **the early Christian use of the Old Testament was thoroughly Jewish and had much in common with other Jewish groups**. Much more significant than method, however, was the interpretation of Scripture offered by Jesus and his followers. **In some respects this also agrees with previous Jewish interpretation, but in others it displays an innovative and unique departure**. Sometimes the New Testament writers (to whom we shall limit this survey), and Jesus as he is represented by them, set forth their distinctive views in a biblical exegesis; sometimes they appear, at least to us, simply to presuppose a 'Christian' exegetical conclusion. **They apparently derive their particular understanding of Scripture both from Jesus' teaching and from implications drawn from his resurrection from the dead**.

Longenecker points to both this continuity and this starting point of Jesus [[BEALE:384](#)]:

"[T]he early Christians used many of the **same exegetical procedures** as were common within the various branches of then contemporary Judaism, and that they did so quite naturally and unconsciously...that they seem to have **looked to Jesus' own use of Scripture as the source and initial paradigm for their own use**

It was **Jesus** who pointed His hearers and followers to the inspired text, and who explained that HE was the hermeneutical center of this awesome revelation: "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*" (John 5.39)

The issue began with Jesus...

..and it will continue to be Jesus.

I have surveyed in other places [the radical character](#), offers of divine renewal, and [authoritative claims of this Jewish Jesus](#), son of David, son of Man, Son of God. But it is quite clear today, that this Jesus spoke as if He **were** the very authority of God. Indeed, no one has seen this more clearly than Neusner:

"Here is a Torah-teacher who **says in his own name what the Torah says in God's name**...For what kind of torah is it that improves upon the teachings of the Torah without acknowledging the source--and it is God who is the Source--of those teachings? **I am troubled not so much by the message**, though I might take exception to this or that, **as I am by the messenger**...Sages...say things in their own names, but without claiming to improve upon the Torah. **The prophet, Moses, speaks not in his own name but in God's name, saying what God has told him to say. Jesus speaks not as a sage nor as a prophet**...So we find ourselves...with the difficulty of making sense, within the framework of the Torah, of a teacher who stands apart from, perhaps above, the Torah...**We now recognize that at issue is the figure of Jesus, not the teachings at all.**" [*A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, p.30f]

The early Jewish messianic believers were not wild-eyed fanatics. Nor were they opportunistic schemers. Nor were they even interested in such things. They had experienced first-hand the hope of Israel! They tried to share this access to the God of the Tanakh/OT with their loved ones. Paul can write:

*"Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; **we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.** (2 Cor 4.2)*

Ellis draws much of this together in [OTEC:121](#), and his words bear repeating:

"Biblical interpretation in the New Testament church shows in a remarkable way **the Jewishness of earliest Christianity**. It followed **exegetical methods common to Judaism and drew its perspective and presuppositions from Jewish backgrounds**. However, in one fundamental respect the early Christian hermeneutic **differed** from that of other religious parties and theologies in Judaism, that is, in the christological exposition of the Scripture **totally focused upon Jesus as the Messiah**. This different focus decisively influences both the perspective from which they expound the Old Testament and the way in which their presuppositions are brought to bear upon the specific biblical texts. Their perspective and presuppositions provide, in turn, the theological framework for the development of their exegetical themes and for the whole of New Testament theology.

**"First-century Judaism was a highly diverse phenomenon**, as becomes apparent from a comparison of the writings of Philo, Josephus, Qumran, the (traditions of the) rabbis and the early Christians. The **New Testament**, which as far as I can see was written altogether by Jews, is **a part of that diversity but also a part of that Judaism**. Its writers were Jews, but Jews who differed from the majority of the nation and who in time found the greater number of their company of faith not among their own people but among the Gentiles. And still today, apart from a continuing Judeo-Christian minority, the church remains a community of Gentiles, but Gentiles with a difference. For as long as **Gentile Christians** give attention to their charter documents, they can never forget that **as those who are joined to a Jewish Messiah they are in a manner of speaking 'adopted Jews'** or, in Paul's imagery, **branches engrafted into the ancient tree of Israel and a people who have their hope in the promise given to Abraham**. The centrality of the Old Testament in the message of Jesus and his apostles and prophets underscores that fact.

This is what the early Jewish Christians were "all about." We may use fancy theological words like 'christological exposition' or 'Christian exegetical conclusions', but all that is being said is that these precious Jews had been touched by the Exalted God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and the renewed humanity that was created by that work. Nothing else was as real, and as true, and as life-changing as this experience of God's intervention in history.

And they--using the tools of their peers, the texts of their peers, and the methods of their peers--could see this reality in the messianic passages and themes of their shared Mikra/Scripture...and this 'visitation of good news' had been promised by their God, and fulfilled in the appearing of the long-awaited Messiah--Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God.

Glenn Miller,  
April, 1998