

- c. This raises the much vexed question of the "hermeneutical circle." Is there any such thing as an "objective" reading of Scripture? *Yes, a relative objectivity (a willingness to have assumptions challenged)*

## II. History of Interpretation

### A. Jewish Interpretation

1. The beginning of Jewish interpretive practice is frequently linked to Ezra the scribe and thus placed in the context of post-exilic Judaism. The ministry of Ezra and his associates was to translate the Hebrew text of the OT into Aramaic, the common language of Palestine in his day (Neh. 8: 8). Such a procedure obviously would involve interpretation as does any work of translation. Thus, Ezra and his friends read "and gave the sense" (Neh. 8: 8).

From this beginning, we may identify a number of sources which illustrate various developments within Judaism:

- a. Targums--Aramaic paraphrases of the OT. The Targumists sought to remain faithful to the original texts while at the same time making clear the relevance of the text to the present readers. The Targums, therefore, stood somewhere between a straightforward translation and an interpretive paraphrase. Targums exist for all the biblical books except those which contain sizeable portions of Aramaic (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel).
- b. Dead Sea Scrolls--the literary remains of the Qumran community. The materials from are thought to have originated during the first century B.C. and the early first century A.D. About one fourth of the manuscripts discovered there are from biblical books. Every book of the OT is represented except Esther. More important for the study of hermeneutical practice are a number of commentaries, primarily on prophetic books, and some other works which reflect the distinctive theology and practice of the community (e.g., The Manual of Discipline, the War Scroll).
- c. Rabbinic Judaism--the talmudic literature. This literature is traditional Pharisaic material collected during the period from the end of the second century A.D. to the end of sixth century. This literature exists in two basic forms: midrash and Mishna. The midrashim are biblical commentaries, the oldest of which are on the Pentateuch. The Mishna comprises materials which are not direct commentaries. Here the subject matter is grouped according to topic. The expansion of the Mishnaic materials by the rabbis led to the formation of the Palestinian Talmud (about 450 A.D.) and to the Babylonian Talmud (about 550 A.D.).
- d. Alexandrian Judaism--Hellenistic Judaism. The city of Alexandria was a major center Greek culture; it was also a major center of diaspora Judaism. Traditionally it was here that the OT was translated into Greek (the Septuagint). Perhaps the single most important representative of Alexandrian Judaism was the Platonizing Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 10 B.C. - A.D. 40). Philo's allegorical approach to the interpretation of the Pentateuch