CHAPTER 13

"PRE-SCRIPTURE," SCRIPTURE (REWITTEN), AND
"REWITTEN SCRIPTURE": THE BORDERS OF SCRIPTURE

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP recognizes three undisputed facts: First, virtually all the books now recognized as the Hebrew Scriptures did not begin as authoritative "Scripture" but are the late literary results of a complex evolutionary process of composition and were redacted from sources that were national or religious literature, thus "pre-Scripture." Second, the biblical books experienced successive literary growth, even new updated editions, while already recognized as Scripture; thus all of Scripture is rewritten. And third, there were new, interpretive books that were composed using the Scriptures as their basis, but understood by the author as a new, non-scriptural, exegetical work, thus "rewritten Scripture." This last had a double function: (a) to acknowledge and implicitly proclaim that a certain book recognized as scriptural was an important fundamental work to use as a basis for, and lend authority to, updated interpretation on the one hand, and (b) on the other hand to steer current and future interpretive views in a certain direction.

Thus, there were ancient literary traditions that one day would become Scripture; there were books that were clearly considered authoritative Sacred Scripture (though their text could still develop), and there were new compositions based on the scriptural text but understood by the author (and presumably at least originally by the community) as a new non-scriptural work, a work we could categorize as Scripture-based religious literature.¹ This chapter will explore the three types of literature² to discern the boundaries between them as well as the criteria for distinguishing them from each other, and to suggest a correlation between "pre-Scripture" and "rewritten Scripture."

Since this chapter attempts to survey all the Law and the Prophets in a short space, it must paint with broad, impressionistic strokes, leaving out many details and nuances addressed in other chapters. But four brief assumptions should articulated:

First, the Torah was recognized as authoritative Scripture by at least the end of the fourth century B.C.E., since it was translated into Greek in the early third century. The

¹ A specific example is Ben Sira: more than a half century later, his grandson says in the Prologue (7-12) that "my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and Prophets [i.e., the Scriptures, ... wrote] something pertaining to instruction and wisdom..." He thus distinguishes Scripture from religious "literature," and his grandfather was composing literature (though it would later be seen as Scripture by certain Jews and Christians).

² James VanderKam has alerted scholars to study the "spectrum leading from authoritative texts to writings intimately related to them, to works that cite authoritative books, to ones that only allude to scripture or employ scriptural language," in "To What End? Functions of Scriptural Interpretation in Qumran Texts," in Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich (ed. Peter W. Flint, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam; VTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 302–20, esp. 304.
Prophets, which included Psalms and eventually Daniel, were similarly recognized during the next century or so.

Second, the forms of the scriptural text that are witnessed in the scrolls, the MT, the SP, and the LXX were circulating and used as authoritative during the last three centuries of the Second Temple period B.C.E. and thus must be considered genuine forms of Scripture.

Third, thus, the types of editorial work observable in those witnesses must be considered legitimate and within the bounds of scriptural transmission. They serve as criteria for acceptable features of revision within the boundaries of legitimate scriptural development.

Fourth, this chapter will focus only on the Law and the Prophets, since, though the books of the Ketuvim were known literature toward the end of the Second Temple period, there is little textual evidence for them and little evidence that they were widely considered Scripture yet.

I. Scripture (Rewritten)

Many if not virtually all books of the Bible are themselves “rewritten Scripture.” They have a history of being rewritten; their composition was achieved through a series of developing stages of rewriting. The manuscript evidence retrieved from the latter half of the Second Temple period as well as the evidence of the LXX, the NT, and the writings of Josephus witness to “new and expanded” editions for a number of the books which now comprise the Bible.3

The features of the “rewriting” tolerated within the bounds of legitimate revision of the scriptural books can be deduced from the examples of revision within manuscripts generally admitted to be scriptural, that is, the forms of the scriptural texts encountered in the scrolls, in the MT, in the SP, and in the LXX. Those features of rewriting can then be articulated and can help serve to discern the boundaries between Scripture and “rewritten Scripture.”

In analyzing the changes in variant forms of scriptural texts it is good to keep in mind the four different and mutually independent levels of variation previously described: orthography, individual textual variants, isolated insertions, and new editions. The first two generally play no part in the discussion, since they are seldom significant enough to demonstrate intentional rewriting of a book; focus should be primarily on new editions and to a certain extent on texts with a number of major isolated insertions.

A. Evidence in the Scrolls of the Rewriting That Produced Revised Editions

The previous chapters have shown that the scrolls, the MT, the SP, and the Hebrew Vorlagen of the OG each display rewritten forms of various books, so a brief review here will serve sufficiently. First, five scrolls exhibit evidence of new editions or major insertions:

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3 It is important to remember that in antiquity it was the book, not a specific form of the book, that was Scripture or canonical; see Bruce Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 269–70; and Ch. 17.II.C.1.