

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism
Spring 2009
Handout #9 (May 26, 2009)
“Midrash and Interpretation”

scripture: authoritative texts believed to contain divine truth

Tanak: the tripartite canon of Scriptures, fixed by the sages (Torah, Nevi'im [Prophets], and Ketuvim [Writings])

canon: lit., “rule” or “standard”: a fixed list of texts

Apocrypha (big “A”): texts included in various ancient scriptural collections, but not included in the rabbinic canon

targum: lit., “translation”: an Aramaic translation (or, often, a more free-form paraphrase) of a biblical book

aggadah: literally, “account”; rabbinic elaborations of the covenant story (according to the traditions of the oral Torah)

halakah: literally, “procedure”; rabbinic elaborations of the covenant rules (according to the traditions of oral Torah)

midrash: a form of biblical interpretation that allows for a passage of the Bible to be understood in relation to other passages of the Bible; also used to describe an entire commentary, following the structure of the biblical verses, written in this style

Midrash Rabbah: medieval collection of *midrashim* (literally, “Great Midrash” or “Total Midrash”), comprising various amoraic midrashim and later, post-amoraic midrashim (mainly Babylonian); individual books of midrash included in this collection are also known as “Great” (i.e., “Genesis Rabbah,” “Lamentations Rabbah,” “Song of Songs Rabbah”)

“the interpreters”: collective name for various second-century Greek-speaking Jews (*Aquila*, *Symmachus*, *Theodotion*) who executed Greek translations of the *Tanak* that differed significantly from the *Septuagint*