Philo of Alexandria *On Planting*

Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series

VOLUME 5

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Philo of Alexandria
On Planting

Introduction, Translation, and Commentary

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This book is dedicated
to the memory of
Jan den Boeft,
esteemed colleague and friend

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Contents

General Introduction to the Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–c. 50 CE) was a member of one of the most prominent families of the large and influential Jewish community in Alexandria. We know more about his brother and his family than we do about Philo. His brother, Julius Gaius Alexander, held a responsible governmental position (Josephus, *AJ* 18.159, 259; 19.276–277, 20.100) and may have been a substantial property owner (*CPJ* 420a and 420b) as well as the manager of the Egyptian estates of Julia Augusta, the mother of the emperor Tiberius (*CPJ* 420b). He had probably become known to the emperor's family through Herodian intermediaries (Josephus, *AJ* 19.276–277). His *praenomen* and *nomen* suggest that the family was associated in some way with Julius Gaius Caesar. It may be that Caesar granted Roman citizenship to Alexander's grandfather for assistance during the Alexandrian War (48–47 BCE). Alexander made the most of his position and contacts and became exceptionally wealthy (Josephus, *AJ* 20.100). He once loaned 200,000 drachmas to Agrippa I (Josephus, *AJ* 18.159–160). He covered nine of the temple doors in Jerusalem with gold and silver (*BJ* 5.201–205), an act of patronage that attests his immense resources as well as his commitment to Judaism. The rabbis later report that he had a Torah scroll with the names of God in gold letters (Sop. 1.9 and Sep. Torah 1.9).

Alexander's social and economic standing is confirmed by the roles of his two sons. The archive of Nicanor suggests that Marcus Julius Alexander, Alexander's younger son, was active in the import-export business that moved goods from India and Arabia through Egypt to the West. He married Berenice, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and later partner of the emperor Titus, but died prematurely c. 43 CE (Josephus, *AJ* 19.276–277). His older brother Tiberius Julius Alexander had one of the most remarkable careers of any provincial in the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. Tiberius moved through a series of lower posts until he held governorships in Judea, Syria, and Egypt. When he backed Vespasian in the Flavian's bid for the throne, his career quickly rose to its apex: he served as Titus's chief of staff during the First Jewish revolt in 66–70 CE (Josephus, *BJ* 5.45–46; 6.237) and as prefect of the praetorian guard in Rome after the war (*CPJ* 418b). While his career strained his relationship with his native Judaism to the breaking point (Josephus, *AJ* 20.100; Philo, *Prov*. and *Anim*.), it attests the high standing of the family.

The most famous member of this remarkable family was paradoxically probably the least known in wider circles during his life. This is undoubtedly due to

the contemplative nature of the life that he chose. His choice was not total. He may have had some civic function in the Jewish community. At least this would help to explain why the Alexandrian Jewish community selected him to serve on the first Jewish delegation to Rome after the pogrom in Alexandria in 38 CE, a delegation that probably included his brother and older nephew (*Legat*. 182, 370; *Anim*. 54). The political arena was not, however, where his heart lay; he gave his heart to the life of the intellect (*Spec*. 3.1–6). He undoubtedly received a full education that included training in the gymnasium, the ephebate, and advanced lectures in philosophy and rhetoric. His philosophical training was of enormous importance to his intellectual formation. While he knew and made use of different philosophical traditions such as Stoicism and Pythagoreanism, his basic orientation was Platonic. Middle Platonism (c. 80 BCE–c. 220 CE) had become a vibrant intellectual movement in Alexandria in the first century BCE, especially in the work of Eudorus (fl. 25 BCE). Philo became convinced that Plato and Moses understood reality in similar ways, although he was unequivocal about who saw it most clearly. His commitment to Judaism is evident in his training in the LXX: he knew it with the intimacy of one who lived with it from the cradle. He also knew the works of some of his Jewish literary predecessors such as Aristobulus, Pseudo-Aristeas, and Ezekiel the tragedian. He was aware of a significant number of other Jewish exegetes to whom he alluded in his commentaries, but always anonymously (*Opif*. 26, 77, and *Migr*. 89–93). The most probable social setting for his literary work is a private school in which he offered instruction in much the same way that philosophers and physicians did. This was likely in his own private residence, but a setting in a house of prayer (synagogue) cannot be ruled out.

One of the ways that he taught was through writing. His treatises constitute one of the largest Greek corpora that has come down to us from antiquity. We know that he wrote more than seventy treatises: thirty-seven of these survive in Greek manuscripts and nine (as counted in the tradition) in a rather literal sixth-century Armenian translation. We also have excerpts of another work in Greek and fragments of two more in Armenian. The lost treatises are known from references to them in the extant treatises, gaps in his analyses of the biblical texts in the commentary series, and *testimonia*.

The treatises fall into five major groups: three separate commentary series, the philosophical writings, and the apologetic writings. The three commentary series are Philo's own literary creations; the philosophical and apologetic series are modern constructs that group conceptually similar but literarily independent treatises.

The heart of the Philonic enterprise lay in the three commentary series. Each of these was an independent work with a distinct rationale and form.

Philo set each series apart through explicit statements about the design of the series (for the Exposition of the Law), the use of secondary prefaces to link treatises together (for the Allegorical Commentary and Exposition of the Law), distinct approaches to the biblical text (for all three series), the literary forms of the treatises in the series (for all three series), and the different implied audiences (for all three series). The most elementary of the three is the eleven book *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* that cover Gen 2:4–28:9 and Exod 6:2–30:10. As the title suggests, Philo used a question and answer format to write a running commentary on the biblical text. The questions are often formulaic, but demonstrate a close reading of the biblical text which is cited in the question. The answers typically introduce both literal and allegorical interpretations. Philo rarely used secondary or tertiary texts in these answers. While earlier Jewish authors such as Demetrius (FF 2 and 5) and Aristobulus (F 2) used the question and answer device within larger works, they did not write zetematic works. The closest literary parallel to Philo's commentary series is the series of zetematic works which Plutarch composed. The pedagogical character of the format and the listing of multiple interpretations suggest that Philo's *Questions and Answers* were written for beginning students in his school who needed to learn how to read the text closely as well as become familiar with the range of possible interpretations.

The Allegorical Commentary shares some features in common with the *Questions and Answers*, but is profoundly different. Like the *Questions and Answers* these treatises use the question and answer technique in a running commentary. Unlike the *Questions and Answers*, the format is no longer explicit but is incorporated in a more complex form of exegesis. Literal readings are generally downplayed, although Philo sometimes includes them when he thinks they can contribute to the understanding of the text. The main focus, however, is on allegorical interpretations which are expanded through the introduction of secondary, or even tertiary, biblical texts (lemmata). While these expansions may give the treatises a meandering feel, in fact there is almost always a thematic unity that makes the treatise coherent. The scope is also different than in the *QG* and *QE*; the Allegorical Commentary provides a running commentary on Genesis 2:1–18:4 with some treatments of later texts in Genesis in the final treatises. Philo was by no means the first Jewish author to use allegory: earlier Jewish writers such as Aristobulus and Pseudo-Aristeas had used allegorical interpretation; however, they did not write allegorical commentaries. Philo's allegorical commentaries are closer in form to commentaries in the philosophical tradition, e.g., the Platonic *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary*, Plutarch's *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*, and Porphyry's *On the Cave of Nymphs*. Yet even here there are considerable differences; for

example, Philo's treatises have more thematic unity than his pagan counterparts. Philo also offered some hints that he saw a larger unity to his allegorical treatment of Genesis. He linked six of the treatises together with secondary prefaces. In particular, he linked four of the five treatises that dealt with the story of Noah together (*Agr., Plant., Ebr., Sobr.*). This suggests that Philo may have thought of the larger structure of the Allegorical Commentary in biographical terms: he devoted three treatises to Cain (*Sacr.*, *Det., Post.*), five to Noah (*Gig./Deus, Agr., Plant., Ebr.* 1–2, *Sobr.*), and five to Abraham (*Migr.*, *Her., Congr., Fug., Mut.*). Cain represented the embodiment of self-love, Noah who represented justice or perfection was part of Philo's first triad of virtuous ancestors, and Abraham who represented virtue through learning was part of Philo's second triad of ancestors. Philo prefaced these biographically oriented works with treatments on creation and the primeval history (*Leg.* 1–3 [originally 4 or 5 books], *Cher.*) and concluded it with a work on dreams that addresses multiple texts throughout Genesis (*Somn.* 1–2 [originally 5 books]). His work on *Conf.* is a transitional text moving from Noah to Abraham. The goal of this allegorical interpretation was the ascent of the soul or the experience of God achieved through virtue and contemplation. If the *Questions and Answers* were for beginning students, the Allegorical Commentary was most likely composed for advanced students or other exegetes in the Jewish community. It certainly places much greater demands on the reader, as any modern reader who has worked through these treatises can attest.

The third series, the Exposition of the Law, is different yet. It is not a running commentary, but a systematic exposition of the entire Pentateuch. Unlike the *Questions and Answers* and Allegorical Commentary, the Exposition of the Law rarely cites the biblical text—except for an occasional word or phrase—but paraphrases or summarizes it and provides a commentary on the summary. The treatment may include both literal and allegorical readings and in some cases regularly alternates between them, esp. in the biographies. The scope of the Exposition of the Law is also quite different: it extends beyond Genesis and Exodus to include the entire Torah. Philo wrote an introduction to the Exposition in the form of a biography in the two volume *Life of Moses*. The work is similar in function to Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* which introduces readers to the *Enneads*. Philo organized his understanding of the law in three parts (*Praem.* 1–3; cf. also *Abr.* 2–5; *Mos.* 2.45–47). The first part dealt with creation, demonstrating the harmony between the cosmos and the law (*Opif.*). The second part is the historical or biographical section that consists of biographies that show how the ancestors embodied the law before it was given to Moses (*Abr., Ios.* [the works on Isaac and Jacob are lost]). The third and most complex part is the legislative. Just like some later rabbis, Philo worked through the decalogue

(*Decal.*) and then used each of the ten commandments as a heading to subsume the remaining legislation in the Torah (*Spec.* 1–4). Unlike the later rabbis, he added a series of appendices under the headings of virtues (*Virt.*). He brought the series to a conclusion in a treatise *On Rewards and Punishments* in direct imitation of the end of Deuteronomy. The series was probably intended for a broader audience—both Jews and interested pagan readers—that included but was not limited to the school. It may be that Philo offered public lectures at his school or in a house of prayer.

If the three commentary series accentuate Philo's role within the Jewish community, the last two groups of his treatises reflect his efforts to relate to the larger world. The philosophical works use Greek sources and philosophical genres to address some of the major philosophical issues Philo and his students confronted. So, he wrote two dialogues (*Prov.* 1–2, *Anim.*) that featured his nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander; two discourses that examined a famous Stoic proposition (*Prob.* and the lost *Improb.*), a thesis that set out arguments pro and contra (*Aet.* 1 and 2 [lost]), and an arithmology (*Num.* [only extant as an Armenian fragment]). The biblical text recedes and is replaced by citations from non-Jewish authors. These were probably for advanced students in his school.

The apologetic works were probably written—for the most part—in connection with the events of 38–41 CE. They were designed to assist Philo in his efforts to represent the Jewish community to the authorities. He wrote a work that was probably intended to help him with the embassy (*Hypoth.* [only extant in two Greek fragments]), a treatise holding out exemplars of Judaism (*Contempl.* and a parallel treatment on the Essenes now lost), and a five-volume treatment of the mistreatment of the Jews by Roman authorities who were punished by God (*Flacc., Legat.* [the five volumes were probably 1. Introduction and Pilate; 2. Sejanus, 3. Flaccus, 4. Embassy, 5. Palinode). These works were likely intended for non-Jews or Jews dealing with non-Jews who probably comprised the largest audience.

This expansive corpus is the single most important source for our understanding of Second Temple Judaism in the diaspora. While some of the esoteric and philosophical aspects of his writings reflect a highly refined circle in Alexandria, the corpus as a whole preserves a wide range of exegetical and social traditions which enable us to reconstruct a number of beliefs and practices of Jews in the Roman empire. The difficulty that we face is the limited evidence from other Jewish communities.

This can be partially solved by expanding the comparisons to early Christian writings which were heavily indebted to Jewish traditions. As is the case with virtually all Second Temple Jewish texts composed in Greek, Philo's corpus was

not preserved by Jews but by Christians who found his writings so irresistibly attractive that they gave him a *post mortem* conversion. In some *Catenae* he is actually called "Philo the bishop." A number of important early Christian authors are deeply indebted to him: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose in particular. While there is no solid evidence to show that New Testament authors knew his writings, they certainly knew some of the same exegetical traditions that he attests. His writings therefore serve both as a witness to exegetical traditions known and used by first-century Christians and as a source for some second-century and later Christians.

One of the factors that made Philo so attractive to Christians was the way that he combined Greek philosophy, especially Middle Platonism, with exegesis. The eclectic nature of his thought and the size of his corpus make his writings a particularly important source for our understanding of several Hellenistic philosophical traditions. The combination of Middle Platonism and Jewish exegesis also makes Philo important for the study of Gnosticism, especially for those scholars who argue that the second-century Christian Gnostic systems had significant antecedents in Jewish circles.

It is remarkable that in spite of the obvious importance of these writings and their complexity, no series of commentaries has been devoted to them. The present series is designed to fill that void. Each commentary will offer an introduction, a fresh English translation, and a commentary proper. The commentary proper is organized into units/chapters on the basis of an analysis of the structure of each treatise. Each unit/chapter of the commentary will address the following concerns: the context and basic argument of the relevant section, detailed comments on the most important and difficult phrases, passages where Philo treats the same biblical text, the *Nachleben* of Philo's treatment, and suggestions for further reading when appropriate. There will be some variation within the series to account for the differences in the genres of Philo's works; however, readers should be able to move from one part of the corpus to another with ease. We hope that in this way these commentaries will serve the needs of both Philonists who lack sustained analyses of individual treatises and those scholars and students who work in other areas but consult Philo's works.

Most of the volumes in this series will concentrate on Philo's biblical commentaries. It may seem strange to write and read a commentary on a commentary; however, it is possible to understand the second commentary to be an extended form of commentary on the biblical text as well. While Philo's understanding of the biblical text is quite different from our own, it was based on a careful reading of the text and a solid grasp of Greek philosophy. His commentaries permit us to understand how one of the most influential interpreters of

the biblical text in antiquity read the text. The fact that his reading is so different from ours is in part the fascination of reading him. He challenges us to enter into a different world and to see the text from another perspective.

Gregory E. Sterling
Yale Divinity School

Preface

This is the second translation and commentary on an allegorical treatise of Philo of Alexandria on which the two authors of the present work have collaborated. In the years 2008 to 2012 we prepared a translation and commentary on *De agricultura*, the treatise that precedes *De plantatione* in Philo's Allegorical Commentary. Encouraged by the positive response to its publication in 2013, we wondered whether we should continue working together and tackle the next treatise. This seemed a logical step to take. After all, already in the ancient world Eusebius had regarded these works as the two parts of a single treatise. They give exegesis of the same Pentateuchal verse and there is a clear affinity in their subject matter (although the second treatise does deviate towards its end).

We decided that we would like to push on, and so proposed the idea to the editor of the Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series, Greg Sterling. He enthusiastically welcomed the proposal, and so a new project was born. Work was commenced at the beginning of 2014. An important milestone was the meeting of the Philo of Alexandria Group at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in November 2015, when we had the opportunity to present the results of our initial research and to benefit from the advice and insights of our Philonic colleagues. Publication of the final version was delayed in 2018 when it was decided that David Runia would test out the draft version in an educational setting while giving a graduate course as a Visiting Professor at Yale Divinity School together with its Dean, Greg Sterling. During the past five years, while preparing the new work, we have continued to work closely together, benefiting from the advances in modern technology (email, skype, dropbox) that allow such highly effective communication between scholars living on two different sides of the globe.

Our method of working and the division of labour involved are basically the same as for the previous volume. Albert Geljon once again first prepared a literal Dutch translation, which assisted David Runia as he prepared a fresh English version. Both scholars contributed to the textual notes accompanying the translation. Albert Geljon is the primary author of the introduction and the commentary, but numerous additions have also been made by David Runia. The bibliography and indices are largely the work of Albert Geljon. Ultimately the entire work is a co-production of both authors, who readily take full and joint responsibility for the end product.

In the course of the preparation of this volume we have incurred many debts to both persons and institutions. First we wish to express our thanks to Gre-

gory Sterling (Yale) for supporting our proposal and accepting our work in the series that he launched over twenty years ago. The members of the Philo of Alexandria Group of the Society of Biblical Literature are to be thanked for their encouragement and constructive comments on our work. Over the years a group of scholars doing research on Philo has come to form a community, virtual much of the time but meeting each other in person at regular intervals. It is a community based on common interests and enthusiasms. In the course of time it has become a community of friends.

Albert Geljon would like to thank the Christelijk Gymnasium in Utrecht, the Netherlands, for the support that they continue to give his research. The school management and his colleagues made it possible for him to take a period of sabbatical leave in 2015, during which he attended the above-mentioned meeting in Atlanta. He was also given leave to attend the Annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Boston in 2017. David Runia wishes again to express his appreciation to both Queen's College at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Catholic University for the generous support that they offered him in doing his research during the past five years. He is also grateful to his co-teacher Greg Sterling and his students at Yale Divinity School for their attentive reading of the manuscript and their many creative ideas (with a special thanks to Chris Atkins for his list of errata and suggestions for additions to the commentary). Finally, both authors express their thanks to the publisher Brill (Leiden) and its friendly staff for publishing the book, and also to TAT (Utrecht) for typesetting it so well.

'type-setting' changed to 'typesetting', ok?

Utrecht and Melbourne
June 2019

Abbreviations

Generally, the abbreviations of biblical books, ancient texts and modern literature follow the guidelines set out in the *The SBL Handbook of Style*, Second Edition. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014, and in *The Studia Philonica Annual*, volume 30, 2018, pages 231–235.

Abbreviations of Philonic Treatises

Abr.	*De Abrahamo*
Aet.	*De aeternitate mundi*
Agr.	*De agricultura*
Cher.	*De Cherubim*
Conf.	*De confusione linguarum*
Congr.	*De congressu eruditionis gratia*
Contempl.	*De vita contemplativa*
Decal.	*De Decalogo*
Det.	*Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat*
Deus	*Quod Deus sit immutabilis*
Ebr.	*De ebrietate*
Flacc.	*In Flaccum*
Fug.	*De fuga et inventione*
Gig.	*De gigantibus*
Her.	*Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*
Hypoth.	*Hypothetica*
Ios.	*De Iosepho*
Leg. 1–3	*Legum allegoriae* 1, 2, 3
Legat.	*Legatio ad Gaium*
Migr.	*De migratione Abrahami*
Mos. 1–2	*De vita Moysis* 1, 2
Mut.	*De mutatione nominum*
Opif.	*De opificio mundi*
Plant.	*De plantatione*
Post.	*De posteritate Caini*
Praem.	*De praemiis et poenis*
Prob.	*Quod omnis probus liber sit*
Prov. 1–2	*De Providentia* 1, 2
QE 1–2	*Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum* 1, 2

QG 1–4	*Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim* 1, 2, 3, 4
Sacr.	*De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*
Sobr.	*De sobrietate*
Somn. 1–2	*De somniis* 1, 2
Spec. 1–4	*De specialibus legibus* 1, 2, 3, 4,
Virt.	*De virtutibus*

Other Abbreviations

ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller
HThR	*Harvard Theological Review*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods*
JSJSup	Supplememts to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	*A Greek-English Lexicon*. Edited by H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones. 9th ed. with revised suppl. Oxford, 1996.
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
PAPM	Les Œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie. Edited by R. Arnaldez, C. Mondésert and J. Pouilloux
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus: series Graeca, ed. J.P. Migne
PhA	Philosophia Antiqua
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RPh	*Revue de Philologie, de Littérature et d'Histoire Anciennes*
SAPERE	Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam REligionemque pertinentia
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SPhA	Studies in Philo of Alexandria
SPhilo	*Studia Philonica*
SPhiloA	*Studia Philonia Annual*
SPhiloM	Studia Philonica Monographs
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. J. von Arnim

VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
VCSup	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Unterschuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Introduction

1 The Place of the Treatise in the Philonic Corpus

Philo of Alexandria wrote a large body of writings and today we still possess nearly 50 treatises.[1] Most of them are exegetical works in which the Pentateuch is interpreted and explained. In addition, he also wrote some works that can be labelled as philosophical or historical, but these treatises too have significant connections with his religious beliefs. It is generally acknowledged that Philo composed three different series of exegetical writings, which differ in aim and scope.[2]

(1) The Exposition of the Law.[3] Having started this series by commenting on the creation account of Genesis 1, he describes the lives of the patriarchs, whom he sees as living laws who lived according to the law before the written law was given. He also discusses the ten commandments and the special ordinances set out in the Pentateuch. Usually, he offers a literal reading, to which an allegorical or symbolic exegesis is added.

(2) The Allegorical Commentary.[4] This series consists of a running commentary on Genesis, in which Philo explains the biblical text by means of allegory. In giving an allegorical exposition of a verse, Philo usually also involves the citation and interpretation of other texts, with the result that his line of thought is often difficult to follow.

(3) Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus. In this series the biblical text is discussed in the form of posing a question and giving an answer. Generally, Philo offers both a literal explanation and an allegorical interpretation. The writings of this series, parts of which has been lost, have been for the most part preserved in an Armenian translation only.[5]

The Allegorical Commentary as it has survived consists of 18 treatises in 21 books. As Gregory Sterling has argued, it has a literary integrity which is evidenced by its method and literary form. Each treatise should be seen as an

1 For a list of works that have perished see Runia 1992b, 78.

2 The first classifications of Philo's writings were made by Massebieau 1889 and Cohn 1899. Very good overviews are given by Morris 1987, 819–870 and Royse 2009.

3 The heading of this series is a modern invention based on Eusebius, who calls this series Τὰ εἰς τὸν νόμον ("The books on the Law," *Praep. ev*. 8.12.22).

4 This title is borrowed from the first work of the series *The Allegories of the Laws*. For the Allegorical Commentary see Cohn 1899, 393–402; Morris 1987, 830–840; Royse 2009, 38–45.

5 For the *Quaestiones* generally, see Hilgert 1991; Royse 2009, 34–38.

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