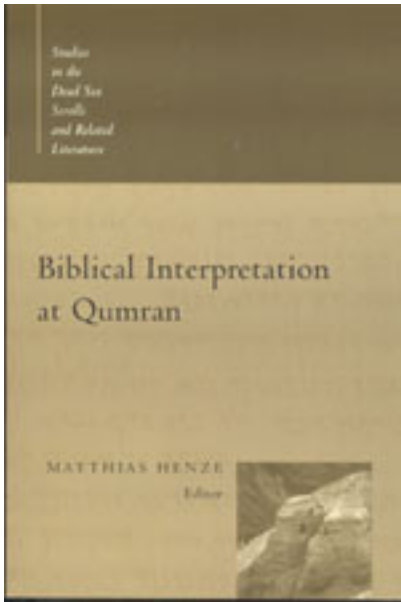


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Biblical Interpretation at Qumran

Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature

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Bilhah Nitzan
Tel-Aviv University
Tel-Aviv, Israel 69978

This collection of essays on biblical interpretation in Qumran, edited by Matthias Henze, constitutes an important contribution to this subject. The principal forms and methods of biblical interpretation elaborated in the various essays, and exemplified in specific scrolls, may serve as a key for studying works related to the Bible in both Qumran and in other postbiblical works.

The forms and methods of biblical interpretation exemplified in this book may be divided into two major types: (1) those dealing with the meaning of specific verses or biblical subjects; (2) those used to create new works. At times these two methods are integrated in the same work. I shall survey the essays of this book according to these rubrics, which is different from their order in the book.

The essay by Moshe J. Bernstein and Shlomo A. Koyfman, “The Interpretation of Biblical Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Forms and Methods” (61–87), is outstanding for elucidating the halakic interpretation of biblical law, distinguishing between internal interpretation and external interpretation on the basis of their formal aspects. The internal mode of interpretation is represented in the *Temple Scroll*, which clarifies the halakic meaning of the laws by harmonizing different biblical verses dealing with the same law in a rewritten form of the Torah (66–70). The external mode applies where “the law is

conjoined with its interpretation through the use of citation, almost always with a formula ‘as it is written’ or ‘as its states’ ” (71). In terms of method, these authors accept Schiffman’s definition of the distinction between *perush* and *midrash* (75–77). *Perush* “represents the way in which the author *reads* the biblical texts straightforwardly,” as in internal interpretation and in terms of the explicit meaning of biblical terms (e.g., in 4Q251 9:1–2 the מלאה of Exod 22:28 is wine and דמע is grain). The *midrash* is “an exegesis in which a corroborative passage in Scripture plays a part.” The midrashic methods found in the legal interpretations of the Qumran scrolls is exemplified widely by Bernstein and Koyfman through the use of rabbinic terminology. Thus, homogenization (*binyan av*) applies when the biblical regulation is extended to an analogous circumstance (79–82); for example, analogical reasoning demands that, if new grain has a festival (Pentecost), new oil and new wine should have one as well, by placing them at fifty-day intervals from each other (11QTemple Scroll 19–23, 43). Metaphorical analogy refers to a case where a biblical commandment is read metaphorically and applied to another situation (83), such as the application of the prohibition against misleading a blind person (Deut 27:18) to a father who misleads a prospective son-in-law by not informing him of the potential bride’s defects (4Q271 3:8–9 and parallels). *Gezera shava*, argument from analogous expression, involves some other factor, such as linguistic similarities in their biblical formulation (84–86), for example interpreting the phrase “a distant way” (Num 9:9–14; Deut 12:21; 14:24) to refer to a three-day (walking) journey, based on Exod 3:18; 8:23–24 (11QTemple Scroll 43:12; 52:14).

Shani Berrin, in her essay on “Qumran Pesharim” (110–33), does not content herself with defining this genre as “contemporizing exegesis” or “eschatological commentary” but suggests a wider definition that encompasses characteristics of form, content, method, and motivation (110). In terms of the formal aspect, she suggests comparing the introductory formula *peshet* with its etymological equivalent, *pattar*, used in the rabbinic midrash *petira* to interpret biblical verses on particular matters (113). In terms of content, she notes that, even though both the Qumranic *peshet* and the rabbinic *petira* refer to history, there is an important difference between them: the specifically eschatological focus of the *peshet* (114–17). From the methodical viewpoint, she explains that the *peshet* is not just a revelation “from the mouth of God” of the mysteries of the prophetic words regarding “all that was to come” to a chosen reader (1QpHab 2:7–10; 7:3–5) but rather indicates a synthesis of revelation and exegesis. She adds that the hermeneutical principles and techniques used by the authors of the *pesharim* have been clarified by Brownlee, Elliger, and Nitzan (126–30). The motive of the *peshet* genre is still a debated point among scholars. Berrin judges the *peshet* in light of the halakic exegesis at Qumran, seeing both in terms of the twofold aspects of *nigleh* (the basic biblical text) and *nistar* (its esoteric meaning) that the author seeks to uncover (130–33).

The interpretation of specific biblical subjects in the Qumran scrolls and other Second Temple compositions is dealt with in essays by John J. Collins and James C. VanderKam. Collins, in his essay “Interpretation of the Creation of Humanity in the Dead Sea Scrolls” (29–43), deals with the following question: Were human beings created as creatures with wisdom and knowledge to distinguish between good and evil (Gen 1:27), or was such knowledge considered a sin (Gen 3:5, 7)? Reading Ben Sira 17:1–12, Collins concludes that “wisdom and knowledge were unequivocally good things from the point of view of a wisdom teacher like Ben Sira” (33). Thus, Ben Sira (15:11–20) answered the question, “how is the reality of human sin to be explained?” by emphasizing human free will, for “God does not do what he hates.” Like Ben Sira, who “seems to read Genesis in light of everything he believes to be true,” so too the author of a certain wisdom text from Qumran deals with this issue according to his understanding of Genesis. Based upon his deterministic-dualistic point of view, the author of 4QInstruction (4Q415–418; 4Q423; 1Q26) distinguishes between two kinds of human beings: “spiritual people” and “spirit of flesh.” The first is associated with Enosh, to whom God endowed knowledge to recognize the difference between good and evil, giving him as an inheritance a book of meditation (“the Vision of Hagu”). By contrast, the “spirit of flesh” did not inherit this book because the nature of his creation did not endow him with the possibility to distinguish between good and evil (4Q417 1 i 16–18). Collins concludes that the nature of interpretation as represented by authors of the Second Temple period, like that of modern theorists, is never a neutral matter. “It always depends on the presuppositions we bring to the text” (42).

VanderKam, in “Sinai Revised” (44–60), deals with the self-image of the community as presented in 1QS and the scriptural sources thereof. Through his investigation of the terminology related to this subject in 1QS, he found that the Qumran community modeled itself after the Israel of the wilderness period, particularly after the likeness of Israel as it encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exod 19–20; 24). For example, the unity of the Qumran community is characterized in light of the unity of Israel during the Sinai ceremonies by the use of several terms; for example, the title *yahad* for the community may have been derived from Exod 19:8 and 24:3, which express the unity and harmony of Israel in accepting God’s commandments. The characterization of the members of the community as “those who devote themselves” (1QS 1:7; 5:1) and as “a congregation” (1QS 5:20; 1QSa passim) follows the unity of Israel in devoting their possessions to the building of the tent of meeting, as described in Exod 35:20–21. These and additional characteristics of the community derived from the Sinai tradition are compared with rabbinic and ancient Christian uses of this same tradition. Each stream revised the Sinai tradition according to its own philosophy regarding the ideal Israel.

Methods of interpretation used to create new compositions are also dealt with by several scholars. The issue of how to distinguish between canonical versions of the Bible and “rewritten Bible” is presented by Michael Segal in “Between Bible and Rewritten Bible” (10–26). The significance of this issue arises from the fact that in both types there is an intervention by a later commentator in the ancient biblical source. Segal sees the scope of the book as a major criterion for distinguishing between another edition of the same work and a rewritten composition. In the first type, the general scope of the biblical book is kept. Thus, despite the fact that harmonization or other types of intervention are included within its MT scope, it is considered an authoritative version of the same biblical work. Examples of this are the Samaritan Book of the Torah, 4Q364–367 *Reworked Pentateuch*, and the LXX version of Jeremiah. The authors of rewritten Bible tend to focus on selected subjects of the particular biblical book or books, which they adapt to their specific purposes. Thus, the *Temple Scroll* and *Jubilees* were intended to create authority for their legal interpretation of the law. This was done through the “voice” that dictates the book; for example, the narrative of *Jubilees* is dictated to Moses by the Angel of Presence, a figure not appearing in the Pentateuch, and its revised laws are performed by the ancestors or even by angels. The revised laws of the Pentateuch in the *Temple Scroll* are dictated directly by God, in the first person. It should be noted, however, that the authors of the rewritten books included in the canonical Bible itself, namely, Deuteronomy and Chronicles, did not use the aforementioned techniques to obtain religious authority. The adaptation of the biblical laws and history to later circumstances and ideology, as explicitly articulated in these books, was accepted by the majority of the Jewish nation, whereas those of *Jubilees* and the *Temple Scroll* were initiated by and confined to specific limited circles within Second Temple Judaism.

The principal method used by the Qumranic authors to create works dealing thematically with specific postbiblical subjects is treated George J. Brooke’s “Thematic Commentaries on Prophetic Scriptures” (134–57). By investigating these works systematically, Brooke demonstrates their specific characteristics. The most important of these are the following: (1) prophetic verses from one or several books are often organized with attention to the sequence of the scriptural texts themselves; (2) the verses dealt with in these works are chosen selectively; (3) the prophetic scriptures dealt with in this genre focus on unfulfilled messages concerned with eschatological matters. In my opinion, there is an additional noteworthy characteristic: the method of interpretation is generally a midrashic one, as the eschatological message is not only studied from the primary biblical verses but is proved explicitly by additional verses. Thus the definition “eschatological midrash,” suggested by John M. Allegro and adapted by Annette Steudel, seems the most appropriate definition of these Qumran sectarian works.

Use of biblical sources to resolve later national or political issues is dealt with in the essay by Monica Brady, “Biblical Interpretation in the ‘Pseudo-Ezekiel’ Fragments (4Q383–391) from Cave Four” (88-110). In this work, some of Ezekiel’s prophecies are quoted or paraphrased in new dialogues between a pseudepigraphical figure and the Lord. Thus, the prophecy of the dry bones (Ezek 37) is quoted briefly, concerning the question “when will these things come to be and how will they be recompensed for their piety?” (4Q385 2:2–3). The same holds true for other passages, such as the heavenly vision of Ezek 1. At times allusions from other biblical books are dealt with in the same work in new contexts. This kind of postexilic genre is a “modernized” discussion of biblical prophecies.

Other types of “modernization” of biblical ideas or genres are dealt with in the essays by Peter W. Flint and Matthias Henze. Flint, in “The Prophet David at Qumran” (158–67), discusses the interpretation of David’s poetical inspiration as prophecy in 11QPsalms Scroll (11QPs^a 27), where he is seen as composing additional psalms. Henze, in “Psalm 91 in Premodern Interpretation and at Qumran” (168–93), discusses the biblical and postbiblical usage of Ps 91. In a close reading of this psalm, he analyzes it as a dialogue between a worshiper seeking asylum in the temple and the priests. By contrast, in later traditions—Qumranic (11QApocryphal Psalms), Christian (Luke 10:17–19), and rabbinic (*b. Sebu.* 15b; *y. ‘Erub.* 10:11 [26c])— this composition became an apotropaic antidemonic psalm.

The variegated forms and methods of biblical interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other postbiblical works dealt with in this book demonstrate the intensive activity done during the Second Temple period by which biblical laws, philosophy, prophecy, and wisdom were adapted to new circumstances and ideological viewpoints.