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CHAPTER 1

Jewish Hermeneutics in the First Century

Jewish interpreters, no matter how different their exegetical methods, agreed on four basic points. In the first place, they held in common a belief in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. This meant for them that the words of the Bible had their origin in God and were, in fact, the very words of God — a doctrine qualitatively different from all Greek notions about a divine possession or an inspirational factor seizing the poets and seers, whose words, while lofty, remained purely human. Secondly, they were convinced that the Torah (whether the Written Torah alone, or both Written and Oral) contained the entire truth of God for the guidance of humans. The transmitted texts for the Jew of the first century, therefore, were extremely rich in content and pregnant with many meanings.¹ Thirdly, because of the many possibilities of meaning in the texts, Jewish

1. From the school of R. Ishmael (second-generation Tannaim, c. 90-130 C.E.) we have the maxim: "Just as the rock is split into many splinters, so also may one biblical verse convey many teachings" (*b Sanh* 34a). *Bemidbar Rabbah*, the latest of the pentateuchal Midrashim, dating no earlier than the eleventh or twelfth century C.E. in its codified form, expands this to insist, based on the numerical value of לגלגל ("standard") in Cant 2:4, that the Torah "can be expounded in forty-nine different ways" (*Num R* 2.3) and, based on the value of יין ("wine"), that "there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah" (*Num R* 13.15-16). Philo (cf. *De Prof* 458) and the men of Qumran indicate their agreement that there are multiple meanings in the words of Scripture.

interpreters viewed their task as one of dealing with both the plain or obvious meanings and the implied or derived meanings. And finally, they considered the purpose of all biblical interpretation to be the translation into life of God's instruction — that is, making the words of God meaningful and relevant to the lives and thought of the people in their present situations. These are matters that were axiomatic to all Jewish exegetes no matter what other allegiances they may have espoused or whatever interpretive procedures they may have used, and they will be repeatedly illustrated in the discussion that follows.

Sources

The work of interpreting the Bible within Judaism proceeded on many fronts and in various ways. The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (the Septuagint, LXX) during the two centuries or so before Christ was an enterprise in interpretation, for every translation inevitably involves interpretation and reflects the particular translators' understanding of the text. The doctrines of resurrection and angelology, for example, were rising to prominence during this time and find explicit expression in the translation. The addition to Job 42:17 in the LXX is an instance of this: "And it is written, he [Job] will rise again with those whom the Lord raises up"; likewise, also the clarifications felt necessary in the cases of Isa 26:19, reading in the LXX "they shall live," and Dan 12:2, reading "they shall awake."² An emphasis on angels is evident in the LXX's wording of "the angels of the nations" for the MT's "the children of Israel" in Deut 32:8, and "at his right hand were his angels with him" for "at his right hand was a fiery law for them" in Deut 33:2; as well as in the transposition of "angels" (ἁγγέλους) for the possibly enigmatic "God/gods" (אלהים) of Ps 8:6.

Anthropomorphisms, as might be expected, are also recast in the LXX translation, and alterations are made to avoid difficulties.³ Likewise, the titles of the books of the Pentateuch in the LXX, the grouping of Samuel-Kings into the four books of the Kingdoms, the retitling of Chronicles ("Things Omitted") and Lamentations, and the reclassification of the books of the Old Testament into a chronological sequence "show at least

2. In Isa 26:19 ἀναστήσονται translates יחי, and in Dan 12:2 ἐξεγερθήσονται translates יקיצו.

3. Cf. E. J. Bickermann, "The Septuagint as a Translation," *PAAJR* 28 (1959) 1-39.

an incipient attempt at interpretation which seems to have originated with the translators of the Pentateuch, and to have been carried on by their successors."⁴ But that the LXX should be looked on as a theological commentary, as has sometimes been suggested, and thereby used as a primary source for a knowledge of the hermeneutical procedures of the day, is an overstatement of the facts. As Jellicoe points out in speaking of the various "translational units" in the LXX and their respective philosophies of translation:

Style and method vary considerably, but this is no more than would be expected in a production which extended over some decades and which was the work of different hands. Liberties are taken at times, more so with the later Books, but here literary rather than theological interests seem to be the governing principle.⁵

For our purposes, therefore, the LXX will not be considered of major significance in determining the exegetical practices of first-century Judaism. Nor, for similar reasons, will the Greek translation of the Old Testament by Aquila, produced at the close of our period of interest. While the distinctive tendencies of each of these translations can be established, the translators did not provide us with prefaces setting forth their principles of interpretation. Nor are their productions so free as to allow deductions regarding the exegetical methods of their day.

The Targums, however, are important in the determination of early Jewish exegetical practice, for their purpose in rendering the Hebrew into Aramaic was not just to give a vernacular translation of the Bible, but "to give the sense and make the people understand the meaning" — as did the Levites in Neh 8:8. In giving "the sense," the Targumists attempted to remain as faithful as possible to the original text and yet to bring out the meaning of what the text had to say for their hearers. The Targums, therefore, "lie halfway between straightforward translation and free retelling of the biblical narrative: they were clearly attached to the Hebrew text, and at times translated it in a reasonably straightforward way, but they were also prepared to introduce into the translation as much interpretation as seemed necessary to clarify the sense."⁶ As interpretive paraphrases or ex-

4. S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968, 316.

5. *Ibid.*

6. J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature. An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, 13.

planatory translations, they frequently incorporated later theological concepts and their own *haggadoth* for purposes of clarification and edification.⁷

The Synagogue was the home of the Targums, for there a reader read from the Hebrew Scriptures and an interpreter paraphrased the text into Aramaic to bring out its meaning and explicate its significance for the congregation. The process is described in *Mish Meg* 4:4:

He who reads in the Law may not read less than three verses. He may not read to the interpreter more than one verse at a time [from the Law], or, in the Prophets, not more than three verses. But if these three are three separate paragraphs, he must read them out one by one. They may leave out verses in the Prophets, but not in the Law.

Evidently Targums originally existed among the Jews for all the biblical books, except those that already contained sizable Aramaic portions (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel). They are extant today in five collections (*Neofiti*, *Targum Jonathan Fragments*, the *Cairo Geniza Targum Fragments*, *Onkelos*, and *Pseudo-Jonathan*), none of which in their existing forms can be dated to pre-Christian or Christian times and all of which evidence varying textual traditions both among them and within them. In addition, Targums have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (*4QtgLev*, *4QtgJob*, and *11QtgJob*). A great deal of work remains to be done in dating, collating, and interpreting targumic materials. Nonetheless, informed opinion believes that the targumic traditions that have been codified into our existing Targums represent both Palestinian (i.e., *Neofiti*, *Targum Jonathan*, the *Cairo Geniza Targum Fragments*, and *Pseudo-Jonathan*) and Babylonian (i.e., *Onkelos*) Jewish hermeneutics of a very early time, possibly originally coming from various pre-Christian synagogues. As such, they are of great significance to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis. Perhaps, in fact, as Miss Bloch suggested, it was the synagogue targumim that provided the basis for the later rabbinic *haggadah*.⁸

7. On the Targums generally, see Bowker, *ibid.*, 3-28; on the Fragment Targum and the so-called *Pseudo-Jonathan* (both Palestinian, as is also *Neofiti I*), see M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966.

8. R. Bloch, "Note méthodologique pour l'étude de la littérature rabbinique," *RSR* 43 (1955) 194-227. Cf. also G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*. Leiden: Brill, 1961, 9ff.; M. McNamara, *New Testament and the Palestinian Targum*, 35ff.

Rabbinic or talmudic literature is an extensive and varied body of traditional Pharisaic material that was codified, in the main, during the period from the end of the second century through the sixth century C.E. It is divided by subject matter into either *halakah*, having to do with behavior and the regulation of conduct, or *haggadah*, which concerns discussions about theological and ethical matters, including everything that is not strictly halakic in nature — though distinctions are not always clearly in evidence, for halakic pronouncements colored the expressions of *haggadah* and *haggadic* exegesis often embodies considerations pertinent for *halakah*.⁹ The literature exists in a few main collections, with a number of peripheral codifications in addition.¹⁰

The Mishnah is the basic halakic document, containing sixty-three tractates (*Massektoth*) of material not necessarily attached to a text of Scripture and organized under six major headings (*Sedarim*). It was codified by Rabbi Judah "the Prince" (*ha Nasi*), who, according to tradition, was born the year Rabbi Akiba died at the hands of the Romans in 135 C.E. All of the later halakic developments in Judaism were built on or related to the Mishnah. The Tosephta closely resembles the Mishnah in its organization and content and, as its name implies ("addition"), has traditionally been regarded as a supplement to the Mishnah. Its authorship is ascribed to Rabbi Hiyya, a pupil of Judah the Prince, though various features in its manner of treatment have left the question of provenance unresolved in many minds.

The Gemaras, Palestinian and Babylonian, are built directly on the Mishnah, and seek, verse by verse, to relate its halakic statements to Scripture, to support them by Scripture, and to illustrate them by both Scripture and the teachings of the rabbis. The name Gemara denotes "teaching," and thus the Gemaras contain, in addition to legal discussions on every aspect of Jewish life, "homiletical exegesis of Scripture; moral maxims, popular proverbs, prayers, parables, fables, tales; accounts of manners and customs, Jewish and non-Jewish; facts and fancies of science by the learned; Jewish and heathen folklore, and all the wisdom and unwisdom of the unlearned."¹¹ The Palestinian Gemaras are the earlier, the shorter (though treating more tractates), and generally the simpler; the Babylonian Gemaras were codified

9. Cf. R. Loewe, "The 'Plain' Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis," in *PIJSL*, I, ed. J. G. Weiss. Jerusalem: Hebrew University/Magnes Press, 1964, 150.

10. For introductory discussions of rabbinic literature, see H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1931, and J. Bowker, *Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 40-92.

11. J. H. Hertz, *The Babylonian Talmud: Nezikin I* (1935), xviii.

during the fourth through the sixth centuries, are longer (though omitting discussion on a number of tractates), and generally more ingenious in their exegesis of Scripture.¹²

The Midrashim are writings dealing principally with the exegesis of Scripture, as distinct from the Mishnah, where the material is recorded independently of Scripture for the most part. The Tannaitic Midrashim are largely halakic in nature, though not entirely; the Homiletic Midrashim are made up of a number of synagogue sermons; and Midrash Rabbah, meaning the "Great Midrash," is a complete commentary on the Pentateuch and the five Megilloth (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther).

In addition to these larger collections of traditional halakic and haggadic materials, rabbinic literature includes a number of more individual and somewhat peripheral writings. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, a narrative midrashic treatment, and *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, a haggadic tractate similar to the famous *Pirke Aboth* ("Sayings of the Fathers"), are two of the most illustrious.

A major problem in the use of rabbinic materials for the elucidation of first-century practice is, of course, the lateness of the codifications. Yet we are dealing with a religious mentality that took great pride in the preservation of the traditional. And while changes due to development or differing circumstances cannot be denied, this desire to preserve the traditional — barring other considerations — minimizes the severity of the problem. Four strands of rabbinic material, in fact, are particularly relevant for our consideration here:¹³

1. Practices and rules deemed by Johanan ben Zakkai and his followers to be very ancient, or, as George F. Moore spoke of them, to be "customs the origin of which was lost in antiquity."¹⁴ Often these are introduced by such a phrase as "Our rabbis taught" or "It has been taught," though the context must be noted in each case as well.
2. Actions and teachings of certain named teachers who lived before

12. "Talmud" is used in a number of ways. Usually it designates the Mishnah and the Babylonian Gemaras together, as distinct from the Midrashim and the other writings. Narrowly, however, it refers to the Gemaras, Palestinian and Babylonian — though it can also be used broadly to mean "talmudic" or "rabbinic" literature generally.

13. Cf. my *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964, 1-6.

14. G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 3 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-30, 1.29; cf. 3.6ff.

the first destruction of Jerusalem, or who personally had their roots in that earlier period.¹⁵ The chief representative here is *Pirke Aboth*, with its haggadic statements attributed to teachers up to 70 C.E. in chapter one and to Johanan ben Zakkai and his disciples, whose roots were firmly planted in the pre-destruction period, in chapter two. Yet there are other passages of this type scattered throughout the rabbinic materials.

3. Passages and portions that have no reason to be a reaction to either religious opposition (particularly Christianity) or political oppression, and which do not seem to have been influenced by a particular local situation or passing fancy but have parallels elsewhere in the literature. It is at this point that the subjective factor in interpretation enters most. Yet here are portions that must not be overlooked.
4. Ancient liturgies, confessions and prayers: the *Shema*, the *Shemoneh Esreh* ("Eighteen Benedictions" or "Prayers"), and, perhaps, the broad outlines of Maimonides' codification of 613 Commandments.¹⁶

The apocalyptic writings of Judaism that were composed in the two centuries (or so) before Christ and the century immediately following also have some bearing on matters pertaining to early Jewish exegesis,¹⁷ for in their interpretive retelling of biblical stories and their extensions of biblical teachings they reflect some of the nonconformist exegetical principles of the day. I refer particularly to such works as *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*,¹⁸ *Assumption of Moses*, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*. Though a few of these works may have been composed by Pharisaic authors (probably *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*), most must

15. While it may never be proved, there seems little reason to doubt that "the authorities in whose names statements are quoted are a help, if not an infallible index, to fixing their date" (L. Finkelstein, "The Book of Jubilees and the Rabbinic Halaka," *HTR* 16 [1922] 39).

16. My debt to A. Lukyn Williams, *Talmudic Judaism and Christianity*. London: SPCK, 1933, 38-43, is clearly evident at points 1, 2 and 4 above.

17. For introductions to the Jewish apocalyptic writings, see J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1983. Also R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2: *Pseudepigrapha*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1913, 1963.

18. On the *Similitudes* or *Parables of Enoch* (i.e., *1 Enoch* 37-71) and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* as probably not being pre-Christian in their present form, see my *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*. London: SCM, 1970, 12-14 and 83-85.

now be seen to have been within an Essene cycle of influence — whether originally written by Essenes (or “proto-Essenes”) or taken over by them.

A kindred body of literature, and one of great significance for the history of interpretation, are the Dead Sea Scrolls. Together with the vast majority of scholars in the field, I take the distinctive writings of Qumran to reflect one strand of Essene mentality in Palestine and to have been written during the first century B.C.E. and early first century C.E.¹⁹ About one-fourth of the approximately six or seven hundred identifiable manuscripts (a few relatively intact, though most are fragmentary) are biblical texts, with all of the Hebrew canon represented except Esther. This is important material for dealing with the transmission of the Hebrew text and tracing out variant readings during the first Christian century.

Of more importance for our purposes, however, are the *peshar* commentaries found at Qumran, which deal with portions of Habakkuk (1QpHab), Micah (1QpMic), Zephaniah (1QpZeph), Genesis (4QpGen^a), Isaiah (4QpIsa^{a-e}), Hosea (4QpHos^{a, b}), Nahum (4QpNah), and the Psalms (4QpPs^{a, b}). Likewise of importance are such texts as the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen), the Florilegium Fragment (4QFlor), the Testimonia Fragment (4QTes), Serek Sirot 'Olat Hassabbat (4QSir), Miqṣat Ma'ase Tōrah (“Works of the Law” — 4QMMT), the Melchizedek Scroll (11QMelch), and the Temple Scroll (11QTemple), as well as the targumic-like treatments of Leviticus (4QtgLev) and Job (4QtgJob). For in these materials we are given a glimpse into the exegetical mind-set and practices of a certain Jewish sectarian group that existed at a time roughly contemporary with the rise of Christianity.

In addition, the Manual of Discipline (1QS, 1QS^a) and the Cairo Damascus Covenant (CD and the Zadokite Fragments 4QD^{a-g(h)} and 6QD) take us into the structure and very heart of the community's *raison d'être*; the Psalms of Thanksgiving (1QH) reflect something of the piety and self-consciousness of (evidently) the community's founder; and the War Scroll

19. For an early, brief, and altogether reliable discussion of the evidence, see W. F. Albright, “Postscript,” *BASOR — Supplementary Studies*, Nos. 10-12 (1951) 57-60; see also such early authors as M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. New York: Viking, 1956; F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*. London: Duckworth, 1958; J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea*, tr. J. Strugnell. London: SCM, 1959. The points raised in opposition to this view were probably most clearly highlighted and pertinently demolished by Roland de Vaux in his review of G. R. Driver in “Essenes or Zealots? Some Thoughts on a Recent Book,” *New Blackfriars* 47 (1966) 396-410.

(1QM) and various other apocalyptic portions deepen our understanding of the community's eschatological expectations. In all, we have material here that has given a fresh impetus to the study of both early Judaism and early Christianity, with particular relevance for the study of nonconformist Jewish exegesis in the first Christian century.

Philo of Alexandria is also an important source in the study of early Jewish exegesis, though it is difficult to ascertain exactly the degree of his importance since it is not entirely clear just how representative he was of Hellenistic Judaism generally or of Hellenistic Jews in Palestine in particular. Even his dates of birth and death are uncertain. We know that he was alive in 39-40 C.E., for he was part of the Jewish delegation from Alexandria to Gaius at Rome of that time. Very roughly, we can speak of Philo as having lived from 20 B.C.E. to 50 C.E. Of the thirty-eight extant titles confidently attributed to him, four are treatises on special problems in philosophy, three deal with contemporary Jewish events at Alexandria, and thirty-one are in the form of either a running commentary on certain books of the Pentateuch or discussions of certain topics selected from the Pentateuch. While there are scattered references to Scripture in the nonbiblical discussions, it is in his detailed and extensive treatments of the Pentateuch that his exegetical methodology is spelled out.²⁰

Literalist Interpretation

Jewish exegesis of the first century can generally be classified under four headings: literalist, midrashic, pesher, and allegorical. Admittedly, such a fourfold classification highlights distinctions of which the early Jewish interpreters themselves may not have always been conscious. In dealing with a system that thinks more holistically, functionally, and practically than it does analytically — and that stresses precedent more than logic in defense of its ways²¹ — any attempt at classification must inevitably go beyond that system's explicit statements as to its own principles. Nevertheless, as we will attempt to show in what follows, the Jewish treatment

20. On Philo, see the almost classic treatments by J. Drummond, *Philo Judaeus*, 2 vols. London: Williams & Norgate, 1888, and H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947. A briefer and reliable summary of Philo's life and work can be found in S. G. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*. Richmond: John Knox, 1965.

21. Cf. R. Loewe, "Plain Meaning of Scripture," 153.

of Scripture falls quite naturally into one or the other of these four categories.

It need not be argued at any length that Judaism often took the words of the Old Testament quite literally. Rabbinic literature contains a number of examples of where the Scriptures are understood in a straightforward fashion, resulting in the plain, simple, and natural meaning of the text being applied to the lives of the people — particularly in the application of deuteronomic legislation. Frequently, in fact, the interpretation is quite woodenly literal, as, for example, the teaching of the School of Shammai that “in the evening all should recline when they recite [the *Shema*], but in the morning they should stand up, for it is written, ‘And when thou liest down and when thou risest up.’”²² The School of Hillel is recorded as countering this by insisting, “they may recite it every one in his own way, for it is written, ‘And when thou walkest by the way.’”²³ The Hillelian interpretation, of course, is favored in the passage. But even here, the rebuttal is based on an almost as wooden use of the biblical text. Again, on the treatment of the “stubborn and rebellious son” of Deut 21:18ff., a hyperliteralism comes to the fore:

If either of them [his parents] was maimed in the hand, or lame or dumb or blind or deaf, he cannot be condemned as a stubborn and rebellious son, for it is written, “Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him” — so they were not maimed in the hand; “and bring him out” — so they were not lame; “and they shall say” — so they were not dumb; “this our son” — so they were not blind; “he will not obey our voice” — so they were not deaf.²⁴

Literalist interpretation, it is true, is not as prominent in the talmudic literature as is what will later be identified as midrashic exegesis. Simeon Lowy suggests that “the reason for this may be that this type of commentary was expected to be known by everyone; and since there were no disputations about it, it was not recorded.”²⁵ It is, however, in evidence to a reasonable extent in the Talmud — principally in the ear-

22. *Mish Ber* 1:3, on Deut 6:7.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Mish Sanh* 8:4, on Deut 21:19-20.

25. S. Lowy, “Some Aspects of Normative and Sectarian Interpretation of the Scriptures (The Contribution of the Judean Scrolls towards Systematization),” *ALUOS* 6 (1969) 99.

lier tannaitic halakah — and was considered basic to all further exegetical developments. As Lowy further points out, “the Rabbis considered the plain interpretation of the laws, based mainly upon a literal understanding, as being of equal value with ‘things which even the Sadducees agree upon’, and that these should therefore be learned in the elementary school.”²⁶

Philo, too, while known most for his allegorical interpretations, understood certain biblical passages in a literalist fashion. Most familiar in this regard is his insistence that though allegorical exegesis is proper, it must not set aside the literal practice of the Law.²⁷ He believed, for example, that circumcision should be understood allegorically, yet he also insisted that it should be practiced literally.²⁸ He insisted on the eternality of the Law,²⁹ and he rebuked those who did not keep it.³⁰

In his treatment of the biblical accounts of creation, a curious disparity of attitude seems to appear. For while he usually felt free to reject the literal meaning of the creation accounts entirely — asserting that God’s planting a garden in Eden, his creation of Eve from a rib of Adam, and the speaking of the serpent are “mythical nonsense,”³¹ “incurable folly,”³² and “of the nature of myth”³³ — in *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin* he accepts the stories in their literal sense, arguing that God put the man into the garden of Eden to tend it, that Adam gave names to the various animals, and that the serpent spoke.³⁴ And he advances as equally valid both a literal and an allegorical interpretation of God’s planting a garden in Eden, his creation of Eve, and his making of garments for Adam and Eve.³⁵ Philo’s attitude in *Quaestiones et Solutiones* may be apologetically motivated in view of the different type of reader there addressed, as Wolfson suggests;³⁶ or it may reflect more truly his thought regarding “the parallel legitimacy of literal and allegorical exegesis, the peaceful coexistence of which he can countenance,” as Loewe be-

26. *Ibid.*, 131, n. 10, citing *b Sanh* 33b and *b Hor* 5a, b.

27. *De Migrat Abr* 89-94.

28. *De Migrat Abr* 92.

29. *De Vita Mos* 44.

30. *De Exsecrat* 138-39.

31. *Leg All* 1.14, 43.

32. *De Plant* 8, 32.

33. *Leg All* 1.7, 19.

34. *Quaes et Sol Gen* 1.14, 20-22, 32.

35. *Quaes et Sol Gen* 1.6, 25, 53.

36. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.122.

lieves.³⁷ With regard to the historical events in the Pentateuch, the one qualification of their literal truth made by Philo is that their literalness must be rejected whenever such an acceptance of the words of God compels one "to admit anything base or unworthy of their dignity" — which, as Wolfson comments, "leaves a great deal to the reader [as well as, of course, to Philo] to decide for himself if a story in its literal sense is base and unworthy of the dignity of the words of God."³⁸

The situation is somewhat similar in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where preoccupation with one type of interpretive procedure (in this case, of course, *peshar* interpretation) so overshadows all others that one could easily get the impression that the covenanters of Qumran never understood the Old Testament literally. Yet in the opening lines of the Manual of Discipline the members commit themselves not only to "the rule (*serek*, or 'order') of the community" but also "to do what is good and right before him [God], as he commanded through Moses and through all his servants the prophets."³⁹ It is perhaps not without significance that the *peshar* commentaries from Qumran are primarily on prophetic material: the "former prophets," the "latter prophets," and the Psalms. Evidently deuteronomic legislation, while having to be adapted somewhat to their unique situation, was taken for the most part quite literally — if not hyperliterally.⁴⁰

Since at least the fourth century C.E., the exegetical term *peshat* has been associated with literalist interpretation as opposed to any more elaborate type of exegesis. The word comes from the verb פשט, which in the Old Testament means "to strip off" (a garment), "flatten," or "to make a dash" (either "from" or "against"). The War Scroll from Qumran uses it in a manner closely parallel to its biblical meaning to signify "stripping" the slain and "deploying into battle order."⁴¹ In association with Aramaic, it came to mean in the late Hebrew of the tannaitic Mishnah and Gemaras "to stretch out, extend, make plain," and as such was used more or less synonymously with the verb פירש to mean "to interpret."

37. R. Loewe, "Plain' Meaning of Scripture," 148. Loewe cites Philo's use of παρεμφαίνειν ("to indicate alongside") in allegorical contexts (e.g., *De Abr* 36, 200; *Quis Rer Div Heres* 23, 112; *De Somn* 2.29, 195, 324) in support of his thesis of parallel legitimacy.

38. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.123.

39. *IQS* 1.1-3.

40. Josephus's comment about the Essenes, of which the covenanters at Qumran were a part, is: "They are stricter than any other of the Jews" (*War* 2.147).

41. *IQM* 7.2; 8.6.

At times *peshat* is used in the tannaitic writings in association with a fairly straightforward and natural interpretation of Scripture,⁴² though this is not always the case. Even when literal expositions are given, they are not always stated to be *peshat* interpretations.⁴³ Evidently, the early rabbis felt that their exegesis — whatever their methods might later be called, and however we might classify them — was a setting forth of the essential meaning of the biblical texts and therefore to be identified as either *peshat* or *midrash*, with the two terms considered to be roughly equivalent.⁴⁴ It is not, however, the nomenclature of the tannaitic rabbis so much as their practice that is of importance here. And in regard to their practice, it must be concluded that early Jewish exegesis used a literalist treatment of Scripture as well as more developed and elaborate forms of interpretation.

Midrashic Interpretation

The central concept in rabbinic exegesis, and presumably in that of the earlier Pharisees as well, was *midrash*. The word comes from the verb שׁוּרַר ("to resort to," "seek"; figuratively, "to read repeatedly," "study," "interpret"), and strictly denotes an interpretive exposition, however derived and irrespective of the type of material under consideration. The expositions of the Gemaras and the Midrashim, therefore, while using various exegetical methods, are referred to as either *midrash halakah* or *midrash haggadah* — the term *midrash* covering the full range of hermeneutical devices involved; the terms *halakah* and *haggadah* referring to the type of materials treated.

It was in the Babylonian Talmud, some time during the early part of the fourth century C.E., that midrashic exegesis was consciously distinguished from literalist exegesis and questions were raised regarding their relationship.⁴⁵ From this later perspective *midrash* designates "an exegesis

42. Even the Babylonian Talmud, when based on tannaitic materials, sometimes continues this use of the term; cf. *b Kidd* 80b, on Deut 13:6.

43. Cf. R. Loewe, "'Plain' Meaning of Scripture," 177.

44. Cf. W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditions-literatur*, 2 vols. Leipzig: Mohr, 1: *Tannaiten* (1889), 2: *Amoräer* (1905); J. Z. Lauterbach, "Peshat," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 9 (1905) 652-53; R. Loewe, "'Plain' Meaning of Scripture," 157-85.

45. See *b Sanh* 100b; *b Hul* 6a; *b Erub* 23b; *b Yeb* 24a. Bacher proposes that it was Abbaye ben Kahana (a third-generation Palestinian Amoraite of the fourth century) who first distinguished *midrash* from *peshat* exegesis (*Exegetische Terminologie*, 2:112-13), as *b Sanh* 100b represents him doing.

which, going more deeply than the mere literal sense, attempts to penetrate into the spirit of the Scriptures, to examine the text from all sides, and thereby to derive interpretations which are not immediately obvious."⁴⁶ For the tannaitic period, that is, during the first two centuries C.E. through the time of Judah "the Prince," the distinction between *peshat* as the literal sense and *derash* as a derivative exposition of hidden meanings seems not to have been consciously invoked. In the Mishnah, the Palestinian Gemaras, and the earlier Midrashim, the verbs פשט and דרש are used in roughly synonymous fashion. For, as J. Z. Lauterbach pointed out, "the Tannaim believed that their Midrash was the true interpretation and that their 'derash' was the actual sense of Scripture, and therefore 'peshat.'"⁴⁷

Nevertheless, while acknowledging that *midrash* had a more comprehensive meaning in the tannaitic period than it later acquired in contradistinction to *peshat* — and that, therefore, earlier rabbis were not as conscious of distinctions in exegetical methods as their later counterparts — it yet remains possible to postulate a basic continuity of practice between the earlier Tannaim and the Amoraim. That there were developments in methodology as well as in terminology is certainly true. Nowhere are such developments better illustrated than in the progression from the seven rules of exegesis attributed to Hillel, to Rabbi Ishmael's thirteen *middoth*, to the much later thirty-two associated with the name of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Galili.⁴⁸ But in discussing an earlier situation it is often necessary to use terminology that has become refined through many years of experience. And this is legitimate, so long as we do not assume that the fullness of later developments was present in the earlier prototypes or try to foist such back.

It is to Hillel, whose teaching antedates the rise of Christianity by a generation or so,⁴⁹ that the Talmud attributes the seven basic rules of rab-

46. S. Horowitz, "Midrash," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 8 (1904) 548. For a good treatment of *midrash*, though from this later perspective entirely, see A. G. Wright, "The Literary Genre Midrash," *CBQ* 28 (1966) 105-38 and 417-57.

47. J. Z. Lauterbach, "Peshat," 653.

48. For listings of these three sets of *middoth*, see H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 93-98.

49. For the view that Hillel was the father of Gamaliel, who was the teacher of Saul of Tarsus (the apostle Paul), see E. Schürer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, tr. J. MacPherson. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890, Div. II, Vol. I, p. 363 and n. 164; H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 109; that Hillel was Gamaliel's grandfather, see R. T. Herford, "Pirke Aboth," in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles, 2.694; W. Bacher, "Gamaliel I," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 5 (1903) 558-59.

binic exegesis. Coming from Babylonia, Hillel studied in Palestine under Shemaiah and Abtalion, whom posterity remembered as great in exegetical ability and of whom we are told that they were proselytes.⁵⁰ Once, when it could not be decided by the religious authorities ("the Bene Bathyra") whether Passover, the fourteenth of Nisan, should take precedence over the weekly sabbath or the sabbath over Passover, when both came on the same day, Hillel was called in for his advice. He so impressed and convinced the authorities of the precedence of Passover over the sabbath, using in the process two (or perhaps three) logical arguments in his treatment of the biblical texts (i.e., the arguments *qal wahomer* and *gezerah shawah*), that they made him "the Prince" (*ha Nasi*) over the assembly.⁵¹ And, evidently based on this account, rabbinic tradition has ascribed all seven of the following *middoth* to him:

1. *Qal wahomer* (קל וחומר): what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important case.
2. *Gezerah shawah* (גזירה שוה): verbal analogy from one verse to another; where the same words are applied to two separate cases, it follows that the same considerations apply to both.
3. *Binyan 'ab mikathub 'ehad* (בנין אב מכתוב אחד): building up a family from a single text; when the same phrase is found in a number of passages, then a consideration found in one of them applies to all of them.
4. *Binyan 'ab mishene kethubim* (בנין אב משני כתובים): building up a family from two texts; when a principle is established by relating two texts together, the principle can then be applied to other passages.
5. *Kelal upherat* (כלל ופרט): the general and the particular; a general principle may be restricted by a particularization of it in another verse; or conversely, a particular rule may be extended into a general principle.
6. *Kayozé' bo bemaqom 'aher* (כיוצא בו במקום אחר): as is found in another place; a difficulty in one text may be solved by comparing it with another that has points of general (though not necessarily verbal) similarity.

50. See *b Pes* 70b. David Daube has proposed that their Hellenistic background may well explain certain features in rabbinic exegesis ("Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *HUCA* 22 [1949] 239-64).

51. There are three slightly different versions of the story in *Tos Pes* 4:1-3, *j Pes* 6.1, and *b Pes* 66a, with the Tosephta and Palestinian Gemara speaking of three arguments and the Babylonian Gemara of two.

7. *Dabar halamed me-'inyano* (דבר הַלְמַד מֵעִינָיו): a meaning established by its context.⁵²

Obviously, some of these rules are a matter of common sense and sound judgment, while others are pregnant with possibilities for abuse. Whether Hillel originated any or all of them or merely transmitted them cannot be determined. But with these *middoth* of Hillel the distinctive exegetical features of Pharisaic Judaism come clearly into view.

In the first part of the second century C.E., Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, in opposition to the innovations in exegesis of Rabbi Akiba, developed Hillel's *middoth* into thirteen rules.⁵³ Probably much later, the thirty-two rules attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Galili were formed.⁵⁴ In so doing, rabbinic Judaism developed on the basis of Hillel's original seven exegetical norms "an atomistic exegesis, which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words independently of the context or the historical occasion, as divine oracles; combines them with other similarly detached utterances; and makes large use of analogy of expressions, often by purely verbal association."⁵⁵ In halakic matters, where tradition was more firmly rooted to an earlier period, the rules were applied quite moderately. But in haggadic exegesis, which was more dependent on later developments and had less to fear about the consequences of its explanations for practical living, excesses were frequent. Probably the most fanciful treatments are those stemming from the final four *middoth* attributed to Rabbi Eliezer:

29. *Gematria*: (a) computation of the numeric value of letters; (b) secret alphabets or substitution of letters for other letters.

30. *Notrikon*: breaking up a word into two or more, exposition of the single letters to stand for just as many words that commence with them.

31. *Mukdam shehu' me'uhar ba-'inyan*: something that precedes that is placed second.

52. Quoted from J. Bowker, *Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 315. For a more extensive explication, citing numerous examples, see J. W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*. Assen: van Gorcum, 1954, 66-75. The listing of the seven *middoth* is found in *Aboth de R. Nathan* 37, *Tos Sanh* 7:11, and the introduction to *Sifra* 3a, though some texts of *Sifra* omit the fourth.

53. I.e., about 110-30 C.E.

54. R. Eliezer ben ha-Galili ("the Galilean") is dated between 130 and 160 C.E., though for indications of a later date for the thirty-two *middoth* see R. Loewe, "Plain Meaning of Scripture," 152.

32. *Mukdam u-me'uhar shehu' beparashioth*: many a biblical section refers to a later period than the one that precedes, and vice versa.⁵⁶

Doeve is quite right in saying that "the liberty obtaining in haggadic exegesis is often so great and the method of going to work so dependent on the ingenuity of the exegetist, that it is out of the question to attempt to give a consistent system of norms for this exegesis."⁵⁷

It is also pertinent to note that not only did these exegetical *middoth* affect the manner of interpreting the biblical texts, but they also at times had an effect on the wording of the texts themselves. As Asher Finkel points out,⁵⁸ the Babylonian Talmud contains instances of where the rabbis used dual readings of a text and dual meanings of a word for exegetical purposes: (1) by reading different vowels with the consonants,⁵⁹ (2) by inserting or omitting a weak consonant,⁶⁰ (3) by the transposition and change of gutturals,⁶¹ (4) by the alteration of letters that sound alike or look alike,⁶² and (5) by even allowing the Greek reading to determine the Hebrew text.⁶³ While *peshet* interpretation at Qumran, as we shall see, had its effect on the biblical text, it is significant to note here that midrashic exegesis did as well.

Midrashic interpretation, in effect, ostensibly takes its point of departure from the biblical text itself (though psychologically it may be motivated by other factors) and seeks to explicate the hidden meanings contained therein by means of agreed on hermeneutical rules in order to contemporize the revelation of God for the people of God. It may be characterized by the maxim "that has relevance to this" — that is, what is written in Scripture has relevance to our present situation. As Renée Bloch described it:

55. G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, 1.248.

56. Cf. H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 97-98.

57. J. W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics*, 64.

58. A. Finkel, "The Peshet of Dreams and Scriptures," *RevQ* 4 (1964) 368-69.

59. E.g., *b Ber* 64a, on Isa 54:13, reading *bonayikh* ("your builders") for *banayikh* ("your sons"); *b Ber* 48b, on Exod 23:25, reading *ubarekh* (imperative of "to bless") for *uberakh* (perfect waw-consecutive).

60. E.g., *b Meg* 13a, on Esth 2:7, reading *lebayith* ("housewife") for *lebath* ("daughter"); *b Shab* 119b, on Isa 26:2, reading *se'omer* ("the one who reads") for *somer* ("keeper").

61. E.g., *b Ber* 32a, on Num 11:2, reading *'al* instead of *'el*; *b Ber* 30b, on Ps 29:2, reading *beherdath* ("with trembling of") for *behadrath* ("in the splendor of").

62. E.g., *b Ber* 57a and *b Meg* 15b, where the diacritical points over "S" and "s" are altered to suit the exegete's purposes; *b Yoma* 75a, on Num 11:32, reading *wayyishatu* ("they slaughtered") for *wayyistehy* ("they spread").

63. E.g., *b Suk* 35a, on Lev 23:40, reading *ḥadap* for *hadar*.

Jewish Hermeneutics in the First Century

1. Its point of departure is Scripture; it is a reflection or meditation on the Bible.
2. It is homiletical, and largely originates from the liturgical reading of the Torah.
3. It makes a punctilious analysis of the text, with the object of illuminating obscurities found there. Every effort is made to explain the Bible by the Bible, as a rule not arbitrarily but by exploiting a theme.
4. The biblical message is adapted to suit contemporary needs.
5. According to the nature of the biblical text, the midrash either tries to discover the basic principles inherent in the legal sections, with the aim of solving problems not dealt with in Scripture (*halakhah*); or it sets out to find the true significance of events mentioned in the narrative sections of the Pentateuch (*haggadah*).⁶⁴

Or, as Birger Gerhardsson defines it:

Midrash is normally composed out of already-existing material, accepted as authoritative because it comes from the Scripture or the tradition. Using this raw material, the new is evolved. Naturally new terms, new phrases, new symbols and new ideas are introduced but the greater part is taken from that which already exists in the authoritative tradition. Midrash starts from a text, a phrase or often a single word; but the text is not simply explained — its meaning is extended and its implications drawn out with the help of every possible association of ideas.⁶⁵

In days when the Sadducees (until their demise) rejected the validity of the Oral Law and the faithful required guidance for living in an alien milieu, it was considered necessary to establish the Pharisaic traditions on a solid footing in Scripture and to explicate Holy Writ to cover every situation of life. And this halakic concern extended over into haggadic matters, so that the same exegetical methods were followed there as well. The purpose of rabbinic midrash was often noble, and its practice at times moderate — more so in the earlier period than later. But in that its *middoth* both allowed and later encouraged imaginative as well as truly creative treat-

64. Reproduced by G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 7. Point two, of course, assumes the validity of Bloch's understanding of the synagogue targumim as the basis for rabbinic haggadah; see p. 9 above.

65. B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son (Matt. 4:1-11 and Par.): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash*. Lund: Gleerup, 1966, 14.

ments of the biblical text, its interpretations often went beyond the bounds of what would today be identified as proper.

Pesher Interpretation

The exposition in the materials from Qumran is usually introduced by the term *pesher*, a word meaning "solution" or "interpretation" and coming from the Aramaic פִּשְׁרָא. There are also instances where the exegetical term *midrash* is used in the Qumran texts, most significantly for our purpose in the first lines of the commentaries on Pss 1:1 and 2:1-2,⁶⁶ though in these cases the word seems to have the nontechnical meaning found in the earlier rabbinic writings. The Dead Sea sectarians considered themselves the divinely elected community of the final generation of the present age, living in the days of "messianic travail" before the eschatological consummation. Theirs was the task of preparing for the coming of the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come. And to them applied certain prophecies in the Old Testament that were considered to speak of their situation and circumstances. While it is true in general that "the members of the community conceive[d] of themselves as repeating in a later age the experience of their remote forefathers in the days of Moses,"⁶⁷ it must also be recognized, as F. F. Bruce has pointed out, that they did not think of the particular prophecies in question as the message of God that was significant in an earlier period and now, *mutatis mutandis*, also relevant to them. Rather, they looked on these selected passages as being exclusively concerned with them.⁶⁸ And therefore, following a large number of the prophetic statements cited, there is the recurrence of the expression פִּשְׁרָא עַל, which may be translated "the interpretation of this is," "this refers to," or "this means."

In an early study of Qumran's exegetical practices, W. H. Brownlee distilled the essence of the exegesis in the Habakkuk Commentary to thirteen

66. 4QFlor 1, 14; see also 1QS 6.24; 8.15, 26; CD 20.6.

67. T. H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1956, 4; cf. W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964, 26, n. 33.

68. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts*. London: Tyndale; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960, 16-17. On the selected nature of the passages treated at Qumran, see C. Roth, "The Subject Matter of Qumran Exegesis," VT 10 (1960) 52 and 56, though without accepting the implications drawn from this for his first-century-C.E. Zealot identification.

propositions,⁶⁹ which have been found to be generally representative of the other commentaries as well. Brownlee's first point, that "everything the ancient prophet wrote has a *veiled, eschatological meaning*," has reference to the community's understanding of itself as God's righteous remnant in the period of eschatological consummation. Here Qumran distinguishes itself from rabbinic interpretation, for while in the talmudic literature there is a contemporizing treatment of Holy Writ that seeks to make God's Word relevant to the present circumstances and ongoing situations, among the Dead Sea covenanters the biblical texts were looked on from the perspective of imminent apocalyptic fulfillment. Brownlee's second point regarding "*forced, or abnormal construction of the biblical text*" concerns *1QpHab*'s more than fifty deviations from the MT (apart from the purely orthographic), of which several vary from all known versions of the LXX and Targums as well,⁷⁰ and the four cases where the Old Testament text is read as though it were multi-form — that is, not only as though each word had several meanings but also as if the text itself had more than one wording, one appearing in the quotation and the other in the commentary following.⁷¹

The problem of textual variations and dual readings at Qumran is difficult. In the present state of uncertainty regarding the history of the MT, the early recensions of the LXX, and the relation of the various targumic traditions to one another, a final solution seems for the present out of the question. Krister Stendahl, for example, tended to see *ad hoc* creations in many of these cases;⁷² while W. H. Brownlee was more cautious,

69. W. H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BA* 14 (1951) 60-62.

70. For a tabulation of the "Principal Variants," see W. H. Brownlee, *The Text of Habakkuk in the Ancient Commentary from Qumran*. Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1959, 108-13.

71. On the dual readings of Hab 1:8; 1:11; 1:15-16, and 2:16, see *ibid.*, 118-23; also K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*. Lund: Gleerup, 1954; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958, 186-89.

72. Stendahl's reaction, while favoring *ad hoc* creations, is rather mixed in saying: "The relation between DSH, the M.T. and the Versions is of great interest. In many cases DSH appears to be created *ad hoc*. What is more remarkable is that some of these readings are supported by one or more of the Versions" (*School of St. Matthew*, 189). Stendahl, of course, later builds on this *ad hoc* understanding in his treatment of Matthew's formula quotations — though he concludes this section on the textual variations in *1QpHab* by stating: "We must rather presume that DSH was conscious of various possibilities, tried them out, and allowed them to enrich its interpretation of the prophet's message, which in all its form was fulfilled in and through the Teacher of Righteousness" (*ibid.*, 190).

saying: "Though deliberate alteration may have played a part in the formation of the Hab. text utilized in DSH, it is probably resorted to but rarely. Many divergent texts were current from which one might well select the reading most advantageous to the purpose at hand."⁷³ Until further evidence is forthcoming on the state of the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts in this early period, we do well to withhold final judgment on the matter. It may be that in some cases *IQpHab* and other pesher commentaries from Qumran reflect *ad hoc* textual creations or deliberate corrections of existing versions by an expositor or group of expositors within the community. Or the phenomenon may be entirely one of selection among variants. All that can be said with certainty at the time is that pesher interpretation has affected the form of the biblical text on which it bases itself, however that text came about.

In the remaining eleven characteristics of his listing, Brownlee has clearly shown that the mode of exegesis used at Qumran is strikingly similar to that of rabbinic midrash. Thus many have labeled the major interpretive convention of the Qumran commentaries *midrash-pesher*, considering it comparable to rabbinic *midrash halakah* and *midrash haggadah* — and to be distinguished from them only in regard to literary form and content.⁷⁴

But though it is often done, it is not sufficient to define *pesher* as midrashic exegesis that displays a greater audacity in its handling of the text, coupled to an apocalyptic orientation.⁷⁵ Such a characterization is true as far as it goes, but it does not touch on the vital factor in Qumran hermeneutics. For central in the consciousness of the covenanters at Qumran was what might be called the *raz* (mystery)-*pesher* (interpretation) revelational motif, which is found explicitly stated in the commentary on Hab 2:1-2:

God told Habakkuk to write the things that were to come upon the last generation, but he did not inform him when that period would come to consummation. And as for the phrase, "that he may run who reads," the

73. W. H. Brownlee, *Text of Habakkuk*, 117-18.

74. Cf. W. H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation," 76; K. Stendahl, *School of St. Matthew*, 184. M. Black's comment is apropos: "*Midrash-pesher* is a modern invention probably best forgotten" ("The Christological Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament," *NTS* 18 [1971] 1).

75. E.g., K. Stendahl, *School of St. Matthew*, 193; W. H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation," 54-76.

interpretation (*pesher*) concerns the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God made known all the mysteries (*razim*) of the words of his servants the prophets.⁷⁶

And this is echoed in the treatment of Hab 2:3:

The last period extends beyond anything that the prophets have foretold, for "the mysteries of God are destined to be performed wondrously."⁷⁷

Furthermore, to read the Dead Sea Hymns of Thanksgiving not only as an expression of the Teacher of Righteousness himself — whether written directly by him or derived from his oral teaching⁷⁸ — but also with the *raz-pesher* motif in mind, is illuminating. For repeatedly there occurs the idea of having been given the interpretation of divine mysteries, which are then to be shared with the people. Representative of this theme is 1QH 4.26-29:

Through me hast Thou illumined the faces of full many, and countless be the times Thou hast shown Thy power through me. For Thou hast made known unto me Thy deep, mysterious things, hast shared Thy secret with me and so shown forth Thy power; and before the eyes of full many this token stands revealed, that Thy glory may be shown forth, and all living know of Thy power.⁷⁹

The covenanters of Qumran seem not so much conscious of following a rabbinic mode of exegesis as recreating the Danielic pattern of interpretation. In Dan 9:24-27, Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years is reinterpreted by the angel Gabriel to mean seventy heptads of years,⁸⁰ and in Dan 11:30 Balaam's prophecy regarding the "ships of Kittim" is used to denote a Roman fleet.⁸¹ In the Aramaic portion of Daniel (i.e., 2:4-7:28) there are thirty occurrences of the word פִּשְׁרֵי. And the greater part of the material in 2:4-7:28 can appropriately be classed as "Theme and Variations on the

76. 1QpHab 7.1-5.

77. 1QpHab 7.7-8, accepting T. H. Gaster's literal rendering of the maxim (*Dead Sea Scriptures*, 280, n. 25).

78. Cf. J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery*, 40.

79. Cf. also 1QH 1.21; 2.13.

80. See Jer 25:11-12; 29:10.

81. See Num 24:24.

Raz-Pesher Motif": Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the metallic human image, and Daniel's interpretation (ch. 2); Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the gigantic tree and its fall, and Daniel's interpretation (ch. 4); the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's banquet, and Daniel's interpretation (ch. 5); and Belshazzar's dream of the composite animal, and Daniel's interpretation (ch. 7). "In the Book of Daniel," as F. F. Bruce pointed out, "it is clear that the *raz*, the mystery, is divinely communicated to one party, and the *pesher*, the interpretation, to another. Not until the mystery and the interpretation are brought together can the divine communication be understood."⁸² And, as Bruce commented further:

This principle, that the divine purpose cannot be properly understood until the *pesher* has been revealed as well as the *raz*, underlies the biblical exegesis in the Qumran commentaries. The *raz* was communicated by God to the prophet, but the meaning of that communication remained sealed until its *pesher* was made known by God to His chosen interpreter. The chosen interpreter was the Teacher of Righteousness, the founder of the Qumran community.⁸³

Extensive consideration has been given to whether *pesher* interpretation as found in the Scrolls is to be classed as "commentary" or as "midrash." But the discussions have usually been carried on solely in categories pertinent to either a commentary form or a mode of exegesis and largely ignore that factor wherein the Dead Sea community felt itself to be distinctive. In fact, Qumran's *pesher* interpretation of the Old Testament is neither principally commentary nor midrashic exegesis. "It does not," as Cecil Roth pointed out, "attempt to elucidate the biblical text, but to determine the application of biblical prophecy or, rather, of certain biblical prophecies: and the application of these biblical prophecies in precise terms to current and even contemporary events."⁸⁴ The crucial question in defining *pesher* interpretation has to do with its point of departure. In contradistinction to rabbinic exegesis, which spoke of "that has relevance to this," the Dead Sea covenanters treated Scripture in a "this is that" fashion. Or, as Karl Elliger put it as early as 1953: "Their exegesis is, therefore, based not

82. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, 8. Cf. A. Finkel, "Pesher of Dreams and Scriptures," 357, who cites also the nine uses of *pesher* in Genesis 40-41 (the stories of Joseph's interpretation of the dream of the butler, the baker, and of Pharaoh himself).

83. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, 9.

84. C. Roth, "Subject Matter of Qumran Exegesis," 51-52.

only on the text but to an even greater degree and at decisive points on special revelation."⁸⁵

Biblical interpretation at Qumran, then, was considered to be first of all revelatory and/or charismatic in nature. Certain prophecies had been given in cryptic and enigmatic terms, and no one could understand their true meaning until the Teacher of Righteousness was given the interpretive key. In a real sense, they understood the passages in question as possessing a *sensus plenior*, which could be ascertained only from a revelational standpoint,⁸⁶ and they believed that the true message of Scripture was heard only when prophecy and interpretation were brought together. The understanding of the Teacher in regard to certain crucial passages and the guidelines he laid down for future study were to be the touchstones for all further exegesis,⁸⁷ and members were strictly forbidden to incorporate extraneous opinion "in any matter of doctrine or law."⁸⁸

We need not, however, suppose that interpretation at Qumran ceased with the Teacher himself, or that the Dead Sea texts preserve only interpretations given explicitly by him. Rather, he sounded the keynote and set the paradigms in his treatment of certain prophecies, and the membership met in study cells and communal sessions to carry on investigations along the lines set out for them by their teacher. Furthermore, in those meditations on the text among the Dead Sea covenanters, the exegetical methods developed during the period of Second Temple Judaism were used.

We must not deny midrashic modes of exegesis at Qumran. But we also must not allow them to take ascendancy in our definition of pesher interpretation. If we must use the term *midrash* of the Qumran exegetical

85. K. Elliger, *Studien zum Habakuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1953, 155 (tr. mine); see also 154-64. Elliger's main point is paralleled in the treatments of F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, 7-19; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations," 310; and G. Vermes, "The Qumran Interpretation of Scripture in Its Historical Setting," *ALUOS* 6 (1966-68) 90-97 — though the rather sharp dichotomy that Elliger draws between a revelational perspective and a midrashic mode of exegesis may legitimately be questioned.

86. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, "Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations," 332. On the *sensus plenior* in Roman Catholic theology, see R. E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*. Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955.

87. 1QH 2.11-13: "Thou hast set me as a banner in the vanguard of Righteousness, as one who interprets with knowledge deep, mysterious things; as a touchstone for them that seek the truth, a standard for them that love correction."

88. 1QS 5.15-16.

procedures, perhaps such a term as *charismatic midrash* should be used to distinguish it from the *scholastic midrash* of the rabbis.⁸⁹ As in Daniel 5 — where the interpretation is understood to be a divine revelation given through Daniel to the king, and yet is explicated in terms of a midrash on the cryptic מִנָּא מִנָּא תְּקֵל וּפְרָסִין — so with the community on the shores of the Dead Sea. Exegesis at Qumran stands between Daniel and the rabbis and is a matter of both revelatory stance and midrashic mode — though, it must be insisted, in that order.

Allegorical Interpretation

The most prominent Jewish allegorist of the first century was Philo of Alexandria, whose expositions of Scripture were produced during the lifetime of Jesus and the earliest days of the Christian Church. While a Jew, Philo was the inheritor of Stoic and Platonic ideas. And while a severe critic of the content of these philosophies, he — whether consciously or unconsciously — used their basic categories in the presentation of what he believed to be the truth of the Jewish Torah.

From Stoicism Philo inherited a tripartite division of philosophy that assigned the lowest place to logic and the more noble places to physics and ethics.⁹⁰ As a Jew, however, he had little interest in the thoroughly immanent God of Stoicism, and so had little interest in developing the Stoic category of physics. Rather, he assigned theology to the category of ethics — though he defined ethics as not only a knowledge of right conduct but a knowledge of the transcendent Maker of the world as given in the Torah revealed to Moses and as immanent in the Logos. From Platonism he inherited the “fundamental contrast between (a) the external world of passing sensation with its unreliable flux of ‘opinion’ based thereon, and (b) the inner world of unchanging reason and harmony, the realm of the eternal ‘ideas’ of goodness, truth, and beauty.”⁹¹

Philo’s attitude toward allegorical and literalist exegesis appears in a number of passages throughout his writings. He rejected entirely any literal interpretation where anthropomorphism was at issue, insisting that

89. Brownlee mentions H. L. Ginsberg’s reference to the Teacher of Righteousness as a “charismatic exegete” (“Biblical Interpretation,” 60n).

90. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.146.

91. F. C. Grant’s characterization of Platonism in “Plato, Platonism,” *Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. and ed. F. C. Grant and H. H. Rowley (1963), 777.

Num 23:19 makes it clear that "God is not as man" (οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὁ θεός)⁹² — endeavoring, thereby, to safeguard the transcendence of God against the anthropopathisms that he believed would inevitably follow a literal treatment of the anthropomorphisms.⁹³ Likewise, he was prepared to interpret allegorically anything that might derogate the dignity of the inspired words of God: anything that was nonsensical in the creation accounts, that was reprehensible in the legal portions, or that was trivial in the historical narratives of the Pentateuch.⁹⁴

In his endeavor to vindicate Jewish theology before the court of Greek philosophy⁹⁵ and in his desire to contemporize the sacred writings so as to make them relevant to present circumstances and experience,⁹⁶ Philo usually treated the Old Testament as a body of symbols given by God for man's spiritual and moral benefit, which must be understood other than in a literal and historical fashion. The *prima facie* meaning must normally be pushed aside, even counted as offensive, to make room for the intended spiritual meaning underlying the obvious⁹⁷ — though, as noted above, at times he seems willing to consider literal and allegorical exegesis as having "parallel legitimacy."⁹⁸ In the main, however, exegesis of Holy Writ was for him an esoteric enterprise, which, while not without its governing principles,⁹⁹ was to be disassociated from literal interpretation. And that this dichotomy was both conscious and deliberate with Philo is expressly indicated by his repeated distinctions between literal and allegorical interpretation,¹⁰⁰ his running debate with the literal interpreters of Al-

92. *Quod Deus Immut* 13, 62; *De Somn* I.40, 237. Cf. Wolfson, *Philo* 1.116-17.

93. *De Post Cain* 4; *Quod Deus Immut* 59; *De Sacrif Ab et Cain* 95. Cf. S. Sowers, *Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*, 22-23.

94. Cf. R. Loewe, "Plain' Meaning of Scripture," 147.

95. *Quis Rer Div Heres* 214; *Quod Omnis Prob Liber* 57; *De Mutat Nom* 167-68; *De Migrat Abr* 128; *De Spec Leg* IV.61; *Quaes et Sol Gen* II.6, III.5, IV.152.

96. S. Sowers, citing S. Sandmel and G. Kuhlmann, speaks of Philo's work as "a religious existentialism somewhat like the kind of interpretation fashionable because of Kierkegaard" (*Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*, 32, n. 9).

97. For Philo, "der buchstäbliche Sinn ist lediglich der Körper, der den allegorischen als die Seele umschliesst" (O. Michel, *Paulus und seine Bibel*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1929, 106). Cf. C. Siegfried, "Philo Judaeus," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 10 (1906) 7.

98. See pp. 16-17 above.

99. Philo speaks of "canons of allegory" (*De Somn* I.73; *De Spec Leg* I.287) and "laws of allegory" (*De Abr* 68); cf. C. Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria als Ausleger der Alten Testaments*. Jena: Dufft, 1875, 165-68.

100. E.g., *De Spec Leg* II.147; *Quaes et Sol Exod* II.71; *De Plant* 74; *De Fuga* 181; *De Somn* I.15.

exandria,¹⁰¹ and his references to those who rejected his work as "pedantic professors of literalism."¹⁰²

Philo, it is true, was not universally admired, and he may not have been representative of the entirety of Hellenistic Judaism in many ways. But his exegetical methods were not unique to himself. C. Siegfried and H. A. A. Kennedy have shown that "there can be little question that Philo stood in a long succession of allegorical interpreters of the Old Testament. The practice had been reduced to a kind of science."¹⁰³ Clement of Alexandria mentions a second-century-B.C.E. Alexandrian Jew by the name of Aristobulus who used allegorical exegesis in a series of works on the Mosaic law.¹⁰⁴ *The Letter of Aristeas* includes one instance of a mild allegorical treatment in its portrayal of the High Priest Eleazer's defense of the Jewish dietary laws,¹⁰⁵ which, judging from Josephus's extensive paraphrase of that letter and his specific references to Aristeas,¹⁰⁶ was probably widely known.

Furthermore, Jacob Lauterbach has identified two groups of Palestinian Pharisees active prior to the time of Rabbi Judah "the Prince," the *Dorshe Reshumot* and the *Dorshe Hamurot*, who used a mild allegorical exegesis in their treatment of Scripture — and whose work was gradually repudiated, though not entirely purged, in the tightening up of Judaism at the end of the second century C.E.¹⁰⁷ And Joseph Bonsirven and David Daube have presented significant papers in support of the thesis of an early Pharisaic allegorical exegesis within Palestine itself.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the Dead Sea Scrolls

101. *De Fuga* 179-80; *Quod Det Pot Insid* 22; *De Somn* I.39, II.301. Cf. M. J. Shroyer, "Alexandrian Jewish Literalists," *JBL* 55 (1936) 261-84.

102. *De Somn* I.102; *De Cherub* 42.

103. H. A. A. Kennedy, *Philo's Contribution to Religion*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919, 32; see also 32-34. Cf. C. Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria*, 16-37.

104. *Stromata* V.14.97.

105. *Letter of Aristeas* 150-70. See esp. 150: "For the division of the hoof and the separation of the claws are intended to teach us that we must discriminate between our individual actions with a view to the practice of virtue."

106. *Antiquities* 12.11-118.

107. J. Z. Lauterbach, "The Ancient Jewish Allegorists in Talmud and Midrash," *JQR* 1 (1911) 291-333, 503-31.

108. Bonsirven cites several cases of an allegorical treatment of biblical legislation in the talmudic materials that fly in the face of prohibitions against the allegorical interpretation of halakic passages ("Exégèse allégorique chez les rabbins tannaïtes," *RSR* 23 [1933] 522-24). Furthermore, Daube develops a thesis that the whole system of rabbinic exegesis initiated by Hillel about 30 B.C.E. was based on hellenistic models of rhetoric ("Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation," 239-64), and argues that "in the eyes of the Rabbis, the Bible, since it enshrined the wisdom of God, contained various layers

include a number of examples of allegorical interpretation, representative of which is the treatment of Hab 2:17 in *1QpHab* 12.3-4: "'Lebanon' stands here for the Communal Council, and 'wild beasts' for the simple-minded Jews who carry out the Law."¹⁰⁹ But though allegorical exegesis was widespread among Jews of the first century, it was not dominant in Palestine.

Summation

Our survey of Jewish hermeneutics in the first Christian century has brought us to the point of summation. What can be concluded from this mass of varying opinions and differing strands of tradition?

In the first place, it is important to emphasize the areas and points of agreement, whatever differences might also have existed. All Jewish interpreters believed in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, that they were dealing with the very words of God, and that these words were pregnant with meaning for the people in their present circumstances. As to interpretive methodologies, there was in Palestine, at least, a commonality of exegetical tradition which, it seems, each group adopted and modified for its own purposes. Both the Pharisaic teachers and the nonconformist exegetes used literalist interpretation, particularly in halakic concerns. This may also have been true of Philo, though the evidence is not as certain. Both the Pharisaic teachers and the nonconformist exegetes also used midrashic modes in interpreting the biblical texts, usually, in the period of our interest, following the more restrained procedures of the seven *middoth* attributed to Hillel rather than those rules codified later — though Philo seems not to be conscious of such procedures. And both Pharisaic teachers and the nonconformist exegetes used, at times, a mild allegorical exegesis,¹¹⁰ as distinguished from the excesses of Philo in this area.

of meaning. . . . A word might have an ordinary sense and one or two allegorical senses at the same time" ("Alexandrian Methods of Interpretation and the Rabbis," *Festschrift Hans Lewald*. Basel: Helbing & Lichtenbahn, 1953, 38). Particularly noted for its mild allegorical treatment is Song of Songs Rabbah.

109. Cf. also *1QpMic* 8-10; *CD* 6:2-11; 7:9-20. "Lebanon" stands for the Communal Council: *Laban* means white; the Council dressed in white.

110. Determination of the extent of allegorical interpretation depends largely on how one defines "allegorical exegesis," and how one relates it to "allegory" and to what I prefer to call "poetic symbolism." Sidney Sowers, for example, finds allegorical exegesis in Wisdom of Solomon (*Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*, 16), but because of the

On the other hand, it is possible to view in first-century Judaism a number of distinguishable strands of developed and developing exegetical tradition. Broadly speaking, Pharisaic Judaism, from a practical need to tie the oral tradition more closely to Scripture and a theoretic recognition of various layers of meaning implicit in the biblical texts, rather unself-consciously built on its midrashic inheritance and continued the process of developing midrash exegesis into something of a science. The covenanters at Qumran, convinced that they were God's righteous remnant preparing the way for the Lord in the days of final travail and that God had revealed the interpretation of the prophetic mysteries to their Teacher, consciously and overtly based their interpretations on a revelational perspective.¹¹¹ They continued to use midrashic exegesis in their treatment of some of the texts, as was their earlier practice, but they subsumed this under their more charismatic approach. Philo, building on an Alexandrian Jewish exegetical tradition and incorporating large doses of Greek categories into his thought, developed allegorical exegesis to the point where it became almost his exclusive passion. Each of these, Pharisees, sectarians, and Philo alike, worked from distinctive doctrinal and ideological commitments, which produced distinctive features in their exegetical methodologies. In addition, for the Pharisees and the Dead Sea covenanters, their

presence of what I believe to be purely "poetic symbolism." James Barr disputes the criterion of history in distinguishing between allegorical and typological exegesis, and argues that allegorical interpretation was more widespread and more indeterminate from typology than is usually considered. But his definition equates "allegory" and "allegorical exegesis" (*Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments*. London: SCM; New York: Harper & Row, 1966, 103-11). Rudolf Bultmann lumps "allegory," "typology," and a "fulfilment motif" under the heading "allegorical exegesis" (*Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., tr. K. Grobel. London: SCM, 1952, 1.116-17, which I consider to be imprecise and confusing. Rather, I suggest that "allegory" be viewed simply as an extended metaphor (as a parable is an extended simile), whose intent is different from that of historical narrative, and that "allegorical exegesis" be understood as a reworking of what is *prima facie* historical material in order to bring out its hidden layer of symbolic meaning.

111. G. Vermes has aptly characterized the interpretation of Scripture at Qumran: "Firstly, the words of the prophets are full of mystery; they have a hidden significance which must be discovered by means of further revelation. Secondly, this hidden meaning alludes to what is to take place at the end of the world. Thirdly, the end of the world is near; the prophecy consequently applies to the writer's own generation. Fourthly, and most important of all, the person to whom all these mysteries were revealed was the Teacher of Righteousness himself" ("The Qumran Interpretation of Scripture," *ALUOS* 6 [1966-68] 91).

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commitments and methods had an effect on the form of the biblical texts on which they expended their energies — more so at Qumran than for the Pharisees, though nevertheless a factor for both. In effect, textual criticism to some extent proceeded on a theological basis.