Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah

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PREFACE

The papers in this volume were originally presented at the Eighth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 7–9 January, 2003. The theme around which the symposium was organized is the question of what can be learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls relative to early rabbinic literature, and from rabbinic literature relative to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Stated differently, what lines of continuity and discontinuity connect and differentiate the two literary corpora and their respective religious cultures and social structures? However, beyond the matter of determining the specific relations of the Dead Sea Scrolls to early rabbinic Judaism is the broader comparative/contrastive question of how to view the varieties of Second Temple Judaism from the perspective of their successors, following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and vice versa, since for much of modern scholarship, that event marks not only a historical watershed, but a divide of scholarly interests and competencies.

In the more than fifty years since the first discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many conferences and resulting volumes have been devoted to the relationship of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple history and literature, and the New Testament/early Christianity. So far as we are aware, this is the first such conference and volume devoted solely to the relation of the Scrolls to early rabbinic Judaism. It is not necessary here to speculate on the reasons for previous relative inattentiveness to this perspective, but we do note the resulting large gap that the studies included herein seek partly to fill. In fact, given the enormous possibilities for considering the many ways that the two bodies of literature might elucidate one another (e.g., in matters of language, liturgy, scriptural interpretation, legal and social history, theology, and eschatology), the following papers only begin to scratch the surface. Nevertheless, they do so in very important regards; some focus on specific case studies with broader implications (Fraade, Noam, Schiffman, Schremer, and Shemesh), while others raise far-reaching issues of historical and comparative methodology (Baumgarten, Doering, Regev, and Werman). It will be noted that most of the studies deal with questions of sectarian and rabbinic law (mishpat for the former,
halakkah for the latter). This area itself has been relatively avoided in much of previous Dead Sea Scroll scholarship, but it has more recently been rendered unavoidable by the publication of increasing numbers of legal texts from Qumran (e.g., the Temple Scroll, 4QMMT, the Cave Four fragments of the Damascus Document), with their interesting lines of concordance with and discordance from the legal substance and rhetoric of early rabbinic texts. While much more remains to be investigated and debated in this regard, we hope that the following studies will model the questions and directions that need to be pursued.

We should note that some of the papers presented at the original symposium, those by David Weiss Halivni, Menahem Kister, Paul Mandel, and Moshe Tur-Paz, are for various reasons not included in this volume. For the full program, with abstracts of symposium papers, see <http://orion.msc.hji.ac.il/symposiums/8th/main.shtml>.

We would like to thank Esther Chazon and the Orion Center staff for organizing and hosting the conference. Co-editor Ruth Clements co-edited the volume and prepared the indices; research assistant Nadav Sharon prepared and checked the Hebrew text; and Orion Intern Jeremy Penner helped proofread the manuscript. Neither the symposium nor this volume would have been possible without the generous support of the Orion Foundation, the Sir Zelman Cowan Universities Fund, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Finally, we owe our appreciation to Florentino García Martínez, the editor of the STDJ series, and to the editorial staff of Brill Academic Press, especially Wilma de Weert and Mattie Kuiper, for shepherding this volume into print.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB Anchor Bible
ABRL Anchor Bible Reference Library
AGJU Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJSR Association for Jewish Studies Review
AOAT Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ASOR American Schools of Oriental Research
BA Biblical Archaeologist
BETL Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologarum lovaniensium
BHT Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib Biblica
BJS Brown Judaic Studies
BZ Biblische Zeitschrift
CBET Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
ConBNT Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CRINT Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSJH Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CSCO Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
DJD Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSJ Dead Sea Discoveries
EBib Etudes bibliques
EJ Encyclopedia Judaica
HAR Hebrew Annual Review
HBS Herders biblische Studien
HSS Harvard Semitic Studies
HTR Harvard Theological Review
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JAAR Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS Journal of Jewish Studies
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>JLCRS</td>
<td>Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion Series</td>
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<td>JANES</td>
<td>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</td>
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<tr>
<td>JQR</td>
<td>Jewish Quarterly Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSJ</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods</td>
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<td>JSJSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement Series</td>
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<td>JSNSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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<td>JSPSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series</td>
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<td>JSQ</td>
<td>Jewish Studies Quarterly</td>
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<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
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<td>LTK</td>
<td>Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche</td>
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<td>MGWJ</td>
<td>Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</td>
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<td>NovTSup</td>
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<td>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</td>
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<td>PEQ</td>
<td>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</td>
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<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue biblique</td>
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<td>ResQ</td>
<td>Revue de Qumrán</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLEJL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and its Literature</td>
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<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
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<td>SBLSymS</td>
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<td>SBS</td>
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<td>ScrHier</td>
<td>Scripta Hierosolymitana</td>
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<td>SJLA</td>
<td>Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity</td>
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LOOKING FOR NARRATIVE MIDRASH AT QUMRAN

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1. Introduction

One of the most important fields of study in which the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic literature have shed light on one another is that of scriptural interpretation, or *midrash*, as the term is variously employed in both textual corpora. Whereas in the early days of their initial discovery, the *pesharim* were thought to characterize Qumran scriptural interpretation, now, with a more complete view of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we appreciate not just the *volume* of texts that stand in an interpretive relation to what was to become canonical Scripture, but, even more importantly, the great *variety* of types and methods of scriptural interpretation found at Qumran, even within single texts. While there is dispute as to precisely which of these texts and types of scriptural interpretation are specific to the sectarian Qumran community and which circulated more broadly among Jews of the Second Temple period,¹ there is reason to believe that the variety itself is characteristic of both the Qumran community and the larger cultural context of Second Temple Judaism.

Since early rabbinic literature, beginning with the so-called “tannaitic” textual collections, likewise displays a great volume of texts and variety of types of scriptural interpretation, comparisons between the two corpora both in their general contours and specific forms and contents have been undertaken from the beginnings of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship until the present, without abatement, notwithstanding their chronological separation. It is not my intent here to survey those efforts, but rather to focus on one aspect of the comparison that has not been

sufficiently noted. However, before doing so, I shall enumerate several guiding principles of the comparative enterprise more generally.\(^2\)

1. Since phenomena are only worthy of comparison to the extent that they are neither fully identical nor entirely different, comparisons that admit only to characteristics of congruence or of incongruence are inherently misleading and self-serving. It is precisely in light of similarities that differences warrant notice and explanation, and in light of differences that similarities bear significance. In other words, similarity and dissimilarity are mutually instructive, and to acknowledge one without the other is to distort the comparative endeavor.\(^3\)

2. Even if we could exhaustively list in one column the many points of similarity and in another column the many points of difference between the two corpora, we should not hope to be able to tally the two columns and come up with an overall score, triumphantly declaring similarity or dissimilarity to be the winner. Such an exercise would more likely be driven by ideological motivations than any ability to weight, score, and tally the list in an objective and non-reductive manner. As much comparative insight can be gained from difference as from similarity. Here much can be cautiously learned from some previous attempts, largely theologica driven and exaggerated, to comparatively link the New Testament and early Christianity to the Dead Sea Scrolls.\(^4\)

3. In comparing and contrasting the two textual corpora, we need to attend not only to their contents, but also to their textual forms, hermeneutical strategies, and rhetorical functions; that is, not only to the shared traditions but to the *morphological* means by which those traditional understandings of Scripture are performatively both connected to Scripture and communicated to their respective studying communities. Traditions are never communicated or engaged by their tradents apart from ideologically freighted and socially formative rhetorical embodiments. The medium may not alone be the message, but it certainly contributes mightily to it.\(^5\)

4. In comparing the two corpora we need to resist the impulse to connect them in direct linear, evolutionary succession or development;\(^6\) that is, to seek in the Dead Sea Scrolls the missing links between rabbinic literature and its prerabbinic antecedents, as if these two corpora were the only shows in town. Aside from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the vast majority of Second Temple Jewish writings of which we know have only survived because one or more Christian churches deemed them worthy of preservation and transmission, subject to varying degrees of translation and editing, for their own self-serving interests. We have little way of knowing how much more extensive and diverse the forms of Second Temple Jewish interpretive creativity might actually have been. Therefore, it is better to engage, at first, in *analogical* comparisons and contrasts between the textual corpora that have survived, than to assume any genetic relations between them. How does each one cast the others in sharper comparative and contrastive relief? We need to ask not only, what are the *common* denominators that emerge, but what are the *distinctive* features of each, and how can those common and distinctive features together be critically understood?

At the first Orion Symposium in 1996, I offered a modest contribution to this comparative enterprise entitled “Looking for Legal Midrash at Qumran,” subsequently published in the proceedings of that con-

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\(^2\) For a fuller methodological treatment, with more extensive bibliography on comparison, see the contribution by Lutz Doering in this volume.


\(^6\) See below, n. 54.
ference. In that paper, I argued that notwithstanding the strong likelihood that Qumran law derived from Scripture, at least in part through a process of exegesis which in many cases can be reconstructed, the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls do not, in the main, preserve or transmit their rules in exegetical form. That is, they frame their legal discourse in terms of its legal product rather than its exegetical process. Thus, what we would recognize in form as midrash halakah from the “tannaitic” midrashic collections of commentaries is generally not to be found, with some notable exceptions, at Qumran. These formal and rhetorical differences, I argued, should not be dismissed as merely incidental to the textual practices and, hence pedagogical purposes, of these writings. Rather, they are keys to our understanding of their differing attitudes toward scriptural text and authority on the one hand, and of their functional roles among their respective textual communities on the other. In what follows, I will ask a similar set of questions deriving from an initial comparison between early rabbincic midrash aggadah and forms of narrative interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls, without pretending to be the least bit exhaustive of either.

2. Defining Midrash Aggadah

In looking for midrash aggadah at Qumran, I have something more specific in mind than simply the interpretation of non-legal scriptural verses, of which there is obviously much. Rather, I wish to consider a particular and prominent aspect of rabbinic narrative midrash and ask why it is relatively absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls. In so doing, I will focus on our earliest rabbincic midrashic collections (Mekila to Exodus, Sifra to Leviticus, Sifte to Numbers and Deuteronomy), usually referred to as either “tannaitic midrashim” or “midrash haAlakah,” both of which designations are recognized as misnomers. Although many characteristic features of midrash aggadah only become prominent in later midrashic collections, those features are generally recognizable,

7 See n. 5 above.

8 The first term is misleading since these collections, while containing earlier traditions, were produced in their present form by amorous editors (most likely in the mid- to late-third century). The second term is imprecise since, while concentrating on the legal sections of the torah, these collections contain large sections of narrative midrash, especially in the case of the Mekilas and the Sifte to Deuteronomy, which are approximately half midrash aggadah.

albeit sometimes in more nascent forms, in the so-called “tannaitic midrashim.”

Here I wish to highlight three features of midrash aggadah in its textual embodiments, the first two of which are shared by midrash halakah in the same collections, even if in varying degrees: 1) These midrashim take the structural form of running commentary; that is, formal citation of a base lemma followed by its explication, whether simple or complex. 2) They are dialogical and intertextual in their articulation, e.g., through the rhetoric of questions and answers, the interpretation of one verse by using others from elsewhere in Scripture, the adducing of multiple interpretations, and the editorial staging of exegetical disputes, often unresolved, between named or anonymous sages. 3) In seeking to resolve seeming contradictions, ambiguities, repetitions, and gaps within the narrative text being explicated, they often construct a more replete version of the biblical narrative, the latter referred to by scholars of midrash as the sippur darshani, or exegetical story: a “rewritten” biblical story produced through the explicit process of scriptural interpretation. While each of these traits finds some degree of antecedent in Second Temple forms of scriptural interpretation, including those in the Dead Sea Scrolls, their combination, I would argue, is unique to rabbincic midrash aggadah.

3. Contrasting Midrash Aggadah to Second-Temple Forms of Narrative Interpretation

To overly simplify the matter, Second Temple forms of scriptural interpretation can be divided roughly into two categories: expositional and compositional. The first, usually in the form of a commentary,

9 For the most recent and sophisticated analysis of the rabbinic exegetical story, with ample references to scholarly antecedents, see J. Levinson, The Texte Told Tales: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbincic Midrash (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2005 [Hebrew]). On the relation of “rewritten” Bible to rabbinic midrash as commentary, see S. D. Fraade, “Rewritten Bible and Rabbinic Midrash As Commentary,” in Current Trends in the Study of Midrash (ed. C. Bakhos, JSSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 59–78.

10 I adapt this categorization from D. Dimant, “Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (ed. M. J. Mulder; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 382–83. For a broader survey of the variety of forms of scriptural interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls, with reference to
begins with a biblical text and explicates its very language according to the progression of Scripture. The clearest and most extensive examples are Philo's allegorical commentaries and the Qumran continuous pesharim.11 Sometimes, smaller units of explicit citation and explication may be embedded for thematic reasons in a larger text whose form is not that of a commentary, as in the case, most notably, of the Damascus Document.

The second, and more widely evidenced form of scriptural interpretation, both in Second Temple Jewish literature in general and in the Dead Sea Scrolls in particular, is most commonly referred to by the term “rewritten Bible,” a designation not without problems. These writings retell scriptural narratives (or laws), weaving together biblical language with paraphrastic clarifications and/or extensive expansions, and so producing a self-contained composition in which the line between base Scripture and its retelling is blurred if not effaced.12 The most extensive examples are the biblical parts of Josephus’s Jewish Antiquities (1–11), Pseudo-Philo’s Biblical Antiquities, the Book of Jubilees, parts of 1 Enoch (especially chaps. 11–16 of the Book of the Watchers), and the Genesis Apocryphon. The last three are well-evidenced among the Dead Sea Scrolls (although generally not thought to have been produced exclusively by or for that community), as are many more fragmentary works, such as 4QRevised Pentateuch, which were unknown prior to the discovery of the Scrolls.13 To what degree such works of “rewritten


12 For a recent survey of this group of writings, see G. J. Brooke, “Rewritten Bible,” EDSS 2:777–81; as well as idem, “Between Authority and Canon: The Significance of Re-working the Bible for Understanding the Canonical Process,” in Rewriting the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran. Proceedings of a Joint Symposium by the Orient Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature and the Hebrew University Institute for Advanced Studies Research Group on Qumran, 15–17 January, 2002 (ed. E. G. Chazon, D. Dimant, and R. A. Clements; STDJ 58; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 85–104. On the problems with this nomenclature and on the ways in which these works understood themselves as revelation, see H. Najman, Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism [JSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 7–8, with further bibliography in notes. A preferable designation, “parabiblical literature,” was suggested by H. L. Ginzberg (Theological Studies 28 [1967]: 574), but never caught on.


looking for narrative midrash at qumran

Bible” found only among the Dead Sea Scrolls are narrowly sectarian in their provenance is unclear, but sectarian roots are certainly not to be presumed. At the very least, we can say that the prominent presence of these works among the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests that such narrative paraphrases and expansions were familiar to, and most likely met with approval from, the members of the sectarian community.

These writings vary widely in the extent to which they produce a close paraphrase of the underlying biblical text or an expanded, selected, and/or rearranged narrative composition; varying degrees of paraphrase and expansion may be combined within a single work. However, they were understood to relate to what had or was to become canonical Scripture, they generally display no explicit relation to that Scripture and its authority. In other words, since they are not textually structured in relation to the words of Scripture (as in a commentary), their self-conscious relation to Scripture—whether as complement, supplement, replacement, successor, or esoteric accompaniment—is generally not evident from the text on its own. In some instances, paraphrastic retellings of Scripture may be combined with bits of pesher-like commentary (e.g., 4Q252), but such crossovers are not common.14

Where we do have explicit interpretation of non-legal scriptural verses in the Dead Sea Scrolls, they tend to be of two types: 1) Interpretation of narrative sections of Scripture to provide backing for normative practice, as understood and lived within the Qumran community.15 2) Interpretation of narrative verses, prophetically understood, to reveal their eschatological fulfillment in the history and imminently expected vindication of the community.16 In other words, biblical narratives, to the extent that they are formally and explicitly engaged via interpretation, are most commonly understood to address either proper divine commanded conduct in the present, or imminent eschatological expectations for the future, or, we might say, the former in preparation for the latter.


15 E.g., CD 4:10–5:1.

16 E.g., CD 6:2–11.
Although both of these aspects of narrative interpretation are abundant in early rabbinic midrash aggadah, they by no means characterize it. Rather, what is striking about early rabbinic midrash aggadah, by contrast with narrative interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls, is the extent to which the former persistently combines and integrates explicit scriptural commentary with retold-biblical narrative composition. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, whether of sectarian provenance or not, these two forms are almost always kept separate. I shall give two examples of this contrast, selected simply from two more extensive, recent studies of mine.17

4. Example 1: Blessings and Curses Renewed

The Deuteronomic account of a covenantal ceremony of “blessings” and “curses,” to be performed by the Israelites upon crossing the Jordan River and arriving at Mt. Gerizim and Ebal (Deuteronomy 27–28), is famously difficult to understand, largely because several rituals or varied accounts of a single ritual appear to have been editorially combined. Precisely which blessings and curses, or rewards and punishments, were recited by whom upon whom, when and where, and in what manner, is hard to decipher from the composite biblical narrative. All traditional interpreters, beginning with inner-biblical readers, have sought to resolve these textual difficulties by integrating and harmonizing the various biblical traditions with one another.18

Josephus takes a crack at retelling the biblical account so as to produce a coherent narrative, as does the Mishnah, even though their accounts differ from one another according to the aspects of the biblical account they each choose to emphasize.19 By contrast, the Qumran community,


18 The relevant biblical passages are Deut 11:26–30; 27:11–13, 14–26; 28; Josh 8:30–35; cf. Lev 26:3–46. The account in Joshua would appear to be an inner-biblical attempt to make sense of the Deuteronomic passages by narrating the ritual that they prescribe. For further discussion of the interpretive challenges posed by the biblical texts, see Fraade, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,” 7–8.


For whom the Deuteronomic blessings and curses were clearly significant to their covenantal and sacro-historical self-understanding, evidences no interest in the biblical narrative of the blessings and curses as a past event per se; that is, they produce no direct interpretation of Deuteronomy 27–28 as depicting an historical event. Rather, the sectarians appear to have seen the one-time biblical ceremony as a model for the community’s own annual ceremony of covenantal renewal and confirmation of new members,20 and for its understanding of how the scriptural blessings will finally and redemptively play out for the elect “returnees” in the pending “end of days,” as predicted by Deut 30:1–3 (in combination with Deut 4:30). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, while the priests are largely absent from the biblical ceremony of blessings and curses, with the Levites reciting the curses of Deut 27:14–26,21 the Community Rule assumes that if the Levites recite the curses, the priests must recite the blessings, thereby giving the latter the lead role in the sectarian ceremony (1Q1 1:18–2:19):

On entering the Covenant, the Priests and Levites shall bless the God of salvation and all His faithfulness, and all those entering the Covenant shall say after them, “Amen, Amen!” Then the Priests shall recite the favours of God manifested in His mighty deeds and shall declare all His merciful grace to Israel, and the Levites shall recite the iniquities of the children of Israel, all their guilty rebellions and sins during the dominion of Belial. And after them, all those entering the Covenant shall confess and say: “We have sinned! We have [disobeyed]...” And the Priests shall bless

20 See 1Q1 1:16–2:18. That this annual ceremony most likely occurred in conjunction with the festival of Shavuot is indicated by 4Q966 (4QD1) 11:16–18 (= 4Q270 7 II 11–12). For a messianic battle version of the ceremony, see 1QMT 13:1–6. For an overview of ritual texts of blessings and curses at Qumran, see Binhah Nitzan, “Blessings and Curses,” *ESDS* 1:95–100.

21 In Josh 8:30–35, Joshua recites the blessings and curses. In 1QM 13:1–6, the priests, Levites, and elders together recite the blessings and curses.
all the men of the lot of God who walk perfectly in all His ways, saying: “May He bless you with all good and preserve you from all evil….” And the Levites shall curse all the men of the lot of Belial, saying: “Be cursed because of all your wickedness!” And after the blessing and cursing, all those entering the Covenant shall say, “Amen, Amen”... Thus shall they do, year by year, for as long as the dominion of Belial endures….

Thus, the Qumran interest is not in interpretively engaging the biblical narrative as scriptural text and past, but in appropriating a blend of scriptural language so as to extend and reenact scriptural covenantal language and practice within their own time and place, thereby impressing upon the sectaries the urgency of repentant preparation for the ultimate and imminent fulfillmment of those prophetically construed blessings and curses.

Even though such Qumran texts as the Community Rule, Miqrat Ma’ase Ha-Torah, the Temple Scroll, and the War Scroll ingeniously appropriate the language of the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 27–28 (as well as Leviticus 26 and the Priestly Blessing of Num 6:24–26), together with many other scriptural passages (e.g., Deut 17:14–20), they never directly and exegetically engage the texts of Scripture, even though the reworking of those texts reveals an anterior exegetical process.

Rather, these Qumran texts creatively employ scriptural language and allusion for their own purposes of informing communal practice and eschatological self-understanding.

By contrast, the Mishnah’s narrative retelling of the one-time ritual of blessings and curses at Shechem includes four explicit scriptural citations, while the Tosefta’s includes three, but with more dialogical language and argument. In neither of these accounts, by contrast to the Community Rule, do the priests have a speaking role distinct from that of the Levites. Let us look at m. Soṭaḥ 7:5–27.

What is/was the manner of the Blessings and the Curses? When Israel crossed the Jordan and came to Mt. Gerizim and to Mt. Ebal in Samaria, alongside Shechem, by the terebinths of Moreh, as it is said, “Are they not beyond the Jordan […] by the terebinths of Moreh” (Deut 11:30). Elsewhere it says, “And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh” (Gen 12:6). Just as the terebinth of Moreh mentioned there (Gen. 12:6) is at Shechem, so too here (Deut 11:30) the terebinth of Moreh is at Shechem. Six tribes went up to the top of Mt. Gerizim and six tribes went up to the top of Mt. Ebal, and the priests and Levites and the Ark stood below in the middle. The priests surround the Ark and the Levites [surround] the priests, with all of Israel on either side, as it is said, “And all of Israel and its elders and its officers, and its judges stand on either side of the Ark,” etc. (Josh 8:33). They turned their faces toward Mt. Gerizim and began with the blessing, “Blessed is the person who does not make a graven or molten image.” And both these and these respond, “Amen!” They turned their faces toward Mt. Ebal and began with a curse, “Cursed is the person who makes a graven or molten image” (Deut 27:15). And both these and these respond, “Amen!”, until they complete the Blessings and Curses.


23 See especially 4QMT C. 21, שַׁמָּה יֵהְדֵה עַל כּוֹס וְשׁוֹבֵרָה, where the closest to a direct scriptural citation is in 4QMT C 12–16, introduced by בְּאָדַב וְאָדַב, where Deut 30:1–3 is selectively paraphrased, with the insertion of חַיֹּת וְשָׁמְיוֹן from Deut 4:30. For discussion of 4QMT’s use of Scripture, see Fraade, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,” 2–3, with reference to earlier treatments in 11 n. 28.

24 M. Soṭaḥ 7:5, citing Deut 11:30; Gen 12:6; Josh 8:33; Deut 27:15.


26 In S. ‘Olam Rab. 11, “Israel said blessings and curses.”

27 Hebrew text is from C. Albeck, Shishah Sadeh Mishnah (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958), 3:249–50, checked against MS Kaufmann. English translation is my own.

28 From this point until the mention of the “six tribes” the text makes an exegetical digression to identify the site of the covenantal ceremony with Shechem, which is not otherwise identified in MT as the location for this ceremony. The Samaritan Pentateuch adds to Deut 11:30: שָׁמַעְתָּם בְּאָדַב וְאָדַב (“opposite Shechem”). Cf. SfR Deut 56; S. Soṭaḥ 33b; y. Soṭaḥ 7:3 (21c), where the tone is more polemical: the Samaritan scribes did not need to change the biblical text since the same identification could be achieved through scriptural exegesis.

29 The verbs here change from perfects to participles, and will switch again.
Although the mishnaic retelling of the scriptural ceremony is quite paraphrastic, filling in and smoothing over many gaps and ambiguities in the scriptural narrative, its explicit but selective citation of scriptural language, in contrast to the Qumran texts, conveys the impression of being linked to its scriptural base text, yet without dependence for all of its narrative detail on direct scriptural interpretation.

By further contrast, the midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy (§55), which directly explicates Deut 11:29, is even more intertextual and dialogical, as befits the nature of its scriptural commentary.30

“You shall pronounce the blessing on Mount Gerizim [and the curse on Mt. Ebal]”. Was it necessary for Scripture to come to teach us that the blessing is on Mt. Gerizim and the curse on Mt. Ebal? Is it not said elsewhere, “These shall stand on Mt. Gerizim for the blessing of the people… and these shall stand on Mt. Ebal for the curse” (Deut 27:12–13)? Why then does Scripture say, “You shall pronounce the blessing on Mt. Gerizim”? Since it was [otherwise] possible to think that all of these blessings [as a group] precede the curses. Hence Scripture says “You shall pronounce the blessing on Mt. Gerizim”. A [single] blessing precedes a [single] curse, and the [group of] blessings do not preceed [the group of] curses. Also to draw an analogy between curses and blessings: Just as the curses are recited by the Levites, so too the blessings are recited by the Levites. Just as the curses are recited aloud, so too the blessings are recited aloud. Just as the curses are recited in the holy tongue, so too the blessings are recited in the holy tongue. Just as the blessings are general and particular, so too


A retold biblical narrative is here constructed, in its specifics much like that of the more coherent narrative of the Mishnah and Tosefta; but this retelling emerges now more gradually through the shuttle between Scripture and commentary, that is, in expressly expositional form, employing intertextual hermeneutics and dialogical rhetoric. Although, in contrast to Qumran usage, the reconstructed biblical narrative in both Mishnah and midrash tells clearly of a one-time past event in scriptural time, with no contemporary practical consequence, its participial verbal forms denote the perpetual present of the commentary itself. If the performative aspects of the Qumran accounts of an annual, eschatological ceremony of blessings and curses have the effect of extending scriptural texts and events into the communal present and eschatological future, the performative aspects of the midrashic commentary have the effect of diagrammatically drawing its rabbinic auditors into scriptural text and time. Even if the net effect of temporal connectivity is comparable, the very different performative strategies employed by each form of interpretive textuality can be illuminatorily contrasted, revealing thereby different attitudes toward and approaches to scriptural text and time.

5. Example 2: Revelation Retold31

Both the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic literature place great emphasis on the claims that their respective traditions are the successors to what was revealed to Israel via the Torah of Moses.32 At Qumran, many works of “rewritten Bible,” some previously known, such as


32 For the “Torah of Moses,” see 1QS 5:8; 8:22; 1QS 15:9, 12; 16:2, 5; 4Q266 (4QD) 9:16. For “commanded by the hand of Moses,” see 1QS 8:15; 1QM 16:1; 1QH 17:12; 4Q504 (4QDibHam) 1–2 v 14. For “by the hand of Moses and the prophets,” see 1QS 1:13; CD 5:21. For the “Book of Moses,” see 4Q174 4QFlor 11:2–3 (restored); 4QMMT C 10, 17, 21; 4Q247 1 verso. For “Moses said,” see CD 5:8; 8:14 (= 19:26).
Jubilees, and some previously unknown, such as the Temple Scroll and others, more fragmentary works of “Mosaic pseudoepigraphy,” echo Josephus’s attribution of the Essenes of great reverence for Moses the lawgiver. These texts of esoteric knowledge either explicitly or implicitly claim to have been revealed at Mt. Sinai, presumably alongside the Torah, to the spiritual elite. Curiously, however, the Dead Sea Scrolls contain hardly any direct exegetical engagement with biblical passages narrating the revelation at Mt. Sinai as a way of exegetically linking their revelatory self-understanding to that central scriptural event. Perhaps the Dead Sea Scrolls’ emphasis on continuous revelation, especially in the recent history and present time of the community via its prophetic teachers, produces little interest in elucidating the revelatory narrative of Mt. Sinai.

By contrast, our earliest “tannaitic” midrashim, especially the Mekhilta to Exodus and the Sifre to Deuteronomy, embrace a rich assortment of exegetical retellings, some substantially expansive, and often in multiple versions, of the giving of the Torah to Israel at Mt. Sinai, and of Moses’s intermediary role therein. For example, we may recall the well-known rabbinic accounts according to which God first offered the Torah unsuccessfully to the other nations, exegetically linked to biblical passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy. To give a very crude representation of this disproportionate attention, in all of the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls, the proper name “Sinai” appears in only five places, in two of which the text is too damaged to know the context, and in none of which is the text clearly of sectarian provenance. Even if we add to that count one other place of unlikely sectarian provenance (4QRevised Pentateuch, where the word is restored); three instances of the word restored in Hebrew fragments of the Book of Jubilees; and one instance restored in an Aramaic fragment of 1 Enoch, the evidence is still paltry, especially considering the centrality in other respects of Moses and Mosaic revelation to the Qumran community’s prophetic self-understanding. By contrast, whereas the word “Sinai” occurs 35 times in all of the Hebrew Bible, 8 times in the Mishnah, and eleven times in the Tosefta, it appears 228 times in the “tannaitic” midrashim. Clearly, the tannaitic midrashim evidence much more exegetical engagement with the biblical narrative of the Sinaitic revelation than do the Dead Sea Scrolls (or the Mishnah/Tosefta).

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38 Josephus, J.W. 2.145. For overviews of attitudes to Moses and of writings associated with him, see D. K. Falk, “Moses,” EDS 1.576–77; idem, “Moses, Texts of,” EDS 1:577–81. The surviving texts of “rewritten Bible” dealing with Moses appear more interested in Moses’s farewell orations warning to Israel at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, understood to be prophetic, than in his role in narratives of the exodus from Egypt or the revelation at Mt. Sinai. For examples of both, see 1Q22 (Words of Moses); 4Q3868 (Apocryphal Pentateuch A); 4Q377 (Apocryphal Pentateuch B). For fragmentary texts reciting the exodus from Egypt, see 4Q574; 4Q422 col. 3. On the broader phenomenon of “Mosaic discourse” in Second Temple Jewish literature, see H. Najman, Seconding Sinai.

39 See The Texts From the Judaean Desert: Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series (ed. E. Tov et al.; DJD 39; Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 115–64, A. Lange, “Announced List of the Texts from the Judaean Desert,” where many “parabiblical texts” are listed for the Book of Genesis, and many texts apocryphally attributed to Moses, but nothing devoted to the narratives of Exodus–Deuteronomy. The closest would seem to be 4Q577 2 ii. Similarly, under “Exegetical Texts,” there are several “commentaries” to Genesis (4Q255–254, on which see above, n. 14), and mss. kacher to the prophetic books, but nothing on Exodus–Deuteronomy or the early prophets. For the centrality of Sinai in the self-understanding of the Qumran community, see J. C. VanderKam, “Sinai Revisited,” in Biblical Interpretation at Qumran (ed. M. Henze; Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44–60, who states that “Israel at Sinai was the template for the Qumran fellowship” (48). However, as VanderKam notes elsewhere “The Interpretation of Genesis in 1 Enoch,” in The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation (ed. F. W. Filtn; Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 142, the revelation at Mt. Sinai is absent from 1 Enoch (see 55–90), and is not narrated in the Book of Jubilees, both of which were probably considered authoritative at Qumran. Note also the argument of M. Segal (“Between Bible and Rewritten Bible,” in Henze, Biblical Interpretation at Qumran, 22) that the missing first column of the Temple Scroll would have contained a retelling of the first part of Exodus 34, with its renewal of the covenant after the golden calf incident.
We shall examine one limited example. Exodus 19, in describing preparations for the revelation at Mt. Sinai, contains several narrative gaps, repetitions, and inconsistencies that midrashic interpreters must address in filling out that narrative. One such apparent inconsistency noted by the two Midrashim to Exodus occurs in Exod 19:10–12, where God instructs Moses: “Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai.” Yet several verses later (19:14–15), the narrative states: “Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman.’” Rabbinic exegetes confronted two inconsistencies here: first, are the people to remain pure for two or three days prior to revelation; and second, why does Moses add to God’s instructions to be pure (which might denote only ablutions) the separation of (the men) from the women, understood to denote sexual abstinence?

At Qumran, we find no exegetical engagement with these seeming narrative inconsistencies, or for that matter with any of the others in the Sinitic narrative. However, it is generally understood that this narrative is the basis of the Temple Scroll’s requirement of three days of sexual purity as a precondition to entering any part of the Temple after a nocturnal seminal emission or any part of the Temple city after sexual intercourse, in contrast to Lev 15:16–18 and Deut 23:11–12, which would seem to require bathing and at most a one-day wait (11QTP 45:7–12).49

Since the Temple city was considered analogous not only to the wilderness camp, but especially to Mt. Sinai, people entering it needed to be in the same state of ritual purity as those approaching Mt. Sinai in order to receive divine revelation; hence, the three-day (נוכות הבשלה) stringency of the Temple Scroll is understood to derive from Exod 19:15. That the Qumran community applied the same understanding to themselves, ideally at least, can be seen from 1QSa (1Q28a) 1:25–27:

אַל גַנְבֵּל חֵלֶק מְדֻבָּשׁ וְלֹא יְנַעֲרָה וְלֹא יֵצְרֵד מְלָחָה

And when the whole assembly is summoned for judgment, or for a Council of the Community, or for war, they shall sanctify them for three days that every one of its members may be prepared.46

Since the Qumran community understood itself to be in a state of ongoing revelatory reception, and since (according to 4QMMT) they understood the “sanctuary” to be the functional equivalent of the “tent of meeting” (a revelatory locus), and the “city of Jerusalem” to be the functional equivalent of the “camp,” they would have assumed that an idealized Jerusalem, like an idealized covenantal community, would be, in a sense, a perpetual Mt. Sinai, to which entry would have required three prior days of sexual separation. While we can readily reconstruct

46 The Hebrew text is according to Qumran Cave I (ed. D. Barthélémy and J. T. Milik; DJD 1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 110. Others restore the final word as נוכת (“for the council”).
44 The Hebrew text is from Pseudo-Philo, L.J.U. 11:2–3, in which sexual abstinence is part of God’s instruction to Moses, but not Moses’s to the people.

50 This work on the narrative midrash at Qumran is from Steven D. Fraade, The Temple Scroll: Its Context and Message, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2001).
the interpretive connection between Exod 19:14–15 and these practical and ideological purity applications, nowhere is such a link made explicit in the Scrolls themselves. Whatever the exegetical process by which the Exodus passage was linked to entry into the community as the site of continuous revelation, the Dead Sea Scrolls show no interest in engaging their readers in the process.

By contrast, let us look briefly at the Meḥila of R. Ishmael’s commentary to the same verses (Bahdesh 3): ⁴⁷

And he said to the people, to separate three days; do not go near a woman].” But we did not hear God say to separate from women! But “be ready” (19:15) “and let them be ready” (19:11) form an analogy: Just as the expression “be ready” used here (19:15) means to separate from women, so too “and let them be ready” used there (19:11) means to separate from women. Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch) says: It can be proved from its own context. “Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow” (19:10): If this only referred to immersion, one could immerse on the third day of the week and be pure around sunset. Why then does it say “Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow”? Since God told Moses that they should separate from women.

The midrash is explicitly attentive to the subtle but significant differences between God’s instructions to Moses to prepare the people for revelation and Moses’ instructions to the people. As expressly stated in the Meḥila of R. Simeon bar Yoḥai, and elaborated in later midrashim, “Is it possible for Moses to have said this on his own,” that is, to have revised God’s instructions to the people, adding a requirement of sexual abstinence not specified by God?⁴⁸ While several later midrashic traditions celebrate

Moses’ initiative here, and have God concur with him after the fact, our midrash avers that Moses simply made explicit what had been implicit in God’s words to him. Two different hermeneutical arguments are given to prove that in fact God’s words and Moses’ words are congruent: 1) the use of analogous language; and 2) a contextual inference, presumably drawn by Moses, from God’s instructions (the three-day wait could only be required in the case of sexual abstinence, and not with regard to general purification through immersion).⁴⁹ Note again the dialogical rhetoric, the multiplicity of interpretive strategies, and the prominence of participial verbal forms.

The midrash here hermeneutically and dialogically engages both the words of the Torah and its own textual auditors, so as to resolve a seeming difficulty in scriptural narrative coherence. In arguing that Moses was correct in deducing from God’s words the requirement of sexual abstinence as a prerequisite for the purification necessary to be recipients of revelation, the midrash projects rabbinic methods and contestations of hermeneutical argumentation onto the scriptural narrative itself. As I have shown elsewhere, this is not unusual for the tannaitic midrashim: in interpreting the scriptural narrative of Sinaitic revelation, these texts project the very activity of human (rabbinic) interpretation of divine speech back onto the originary moment of revelation itself. They thereby implicitly claim and performatively enact the very converse: i.e., that rabbinic interpretive practice is itself an extension of Sinai into the perpetual present of its studying community.⁵⁰ Much the same can be said for the Qumran projection of Exodus 19 onto the construction of an idealized Temple city and eschatological community, as perhaps enacted in the communal study of the textual embodiments of those constructions, with the critical difference that at Qumran, hermeneutical

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⁴⁸ Note as well Sper. Num. 105 (Spera ad Numeros agitato Spera zutta [ed. H. S. Horovitz; Leipzig: Gustav Frock, 1917]; repr. Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1966), 101], where Moses’ own separation from his wife, from the time of Sinai on is said to have been at God’s command, whereas in later sources, this is said to have been Moses’ own (commendable) initiative. Cf. Tg. Ps.-J. to Num 12:8; Rashi on Num 12:8. Other

⁴⁹ See the continuation of the Meḥila of R. Ishmael. Semen remains virile within a woman for three days. Thus, to insure that she not discharge virile semen from previous intercourse just prior to revelation, and thereby be rendered impure and contagious to others, she must abstain from sexual intercourse for three days prior to revelation. Cf. m. Avot 2:5; m. Shab. 9:3. On the addition of R. Judah the Patriarch’s argument here, see M. Kahana, “Marginal Annotations of the School of Rabbi in the Halakhat Midrashim,” in Studies in Bible and Talmud: Papers Delivered at the Departmental Symposium in Honour of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Institute of Jewish Studies (ed. S. Japhet; Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987), 69–85 (Hebrew).

⁵⁰ See above, n. 51.
and dialogical engagement with the scriptural text of Exodus 19 does not appear to have occupied the same performative place as it did among the early rabbinic sages.

6. Conclusions

While the variety of forms of scriptural interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls is enormous, and provides an indispensable window into the richness of that variety which must have existed more broadly in Second Temple Jewish culture, we find relatively little by way of direct and explicit exposition of narrative Scriptures. Most interpretation of scriptural narrative that we find in the Dead Sea Scrolls, whatever its sectarian provenance, is what has been called, for want of a better term, “rewritten Bible,” which interpretively glosses and expands those narratives without explicitly engaging their language exegetically. The Scriptures that are the focus of such interpretive “rewriting” are especially those of Genesis (as Urzeit) and the end of Deuteronomy (as pointing to Endzeit). This is by no means to diminish the interpretive and compositional creativity of such scrolls, nor of their ideational significance. To the extent that we encounter explicit expositions of scriptural narrative verses in Qumran sectarian texts, they are for purposes of scripturally grounding either the community’s rules or its eschatological expectations and self-understandings. This is somewhat surprising given the admonitions of some sectarian writings to “study (carefully)” not just “the book of Moses and the books of the Prophets,” but “the (writings of) David [and the] [events of] ages past.” With very few exceptions, the interpretive modes of scriptural exposition and para-scriptural composition are kept textually separate in the Dead Sea Scrolls, both sectarian and non-sectarian.

By contrast, our earliest rabbinic midrashic collections contain extensive sections of commentary that combine direct scriptural exposition with expansively retold scriptural narratives, although not in the form of “rewritten Bible.” Although they share interpretive traditions, hermeneutical presuppositions, terminology, and exegetical methods with the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Jewish writings more generally, their formal and rhetorical modes of communication, in particular their explicit employment of dialogical and intertextual commentary, differentiate them from their sectarian antecedents.

Describing these differences is one thing, accounting for them is quite another. Since space does not allow me to do justice to such an accounting, I shall sketch several possible explanatory trajectories, by no means mutually exclusive, that would need to be considered. My point, in part, is that complex cultural-historical phenomena, especially when comparatively viewed, do not submit to singular explanations, as convenient and satisfying as they may be.

1. One approach would be to argue that these differences are the product of time; that is, since rabbinic midrashim are significantly later, in their redacted forms, they represent an evolutionary progression from their Qumran antecedents. Such a progression might be occasioned internally by the unfolding of earlier exegetical potentialities, externally by changed historical circumstances, or by a combination of the two. For example, to what extent would the progressive closing and fixing of the Hebrew biblical canon have required a more “postbiblical” attitude to the biblical text and its authority, thereby necessitating that narrative retellings be explicitly anchored in the actual words of that text, from which they would derive their authority, rather than from pseudopigraphic attributions or charismatic claims to prophetic knowledge? While this progression in canonical scriptural status is


a necessary precondition for rabbinic midrash aggadah, it is not alone a sufficient explanation. Otherwise, we would have to presume that had the Qumran community survived past 68 CE, its texts of scriptural exegesis would have evolved to approximate rabbinic midrash, and that the Pharisaic antecedents to rabbinic midrash would have resembled the forms of scriptural interpretation found at Qumran.

2. Another approach would be to link these dissimilarities to different understandings of the character of continuous revelation among the Qumran and rabbinic communities, especially with regard to the relationship between ongoing revelation and revelation at Mt. Sinai. In simple terms, the rabbis considered the Oral Torah to have originated in the revelation at Sinai to all of Israel, and to have exegetically accompanied the Written Torah from then and ever since. By contrast, the Qumran community considered their esoteric teachings to be the most recent installment of revelations begun with Moses, continued with the prophets, and renewed, after a hiatus, among the sectarian covenantal “remnant” through the Teacher of Righteousness and his successors. Thus, differing approaches to the interpretation of biblical narratives (and laws) reflect not simply progressive stages in the developing status and authority of those scriptural texts (previous point), but fundamentally different ideologies of the chronology and anthropology of continuing revelation across time.

3. Any comparison of Qumran and rabbinic forms of interpretation must take into account differences between their intended audiences. How did their differing textual practices, as “speech acts,” seek rhetorically and performatively not just to inform, but to privilege and to transform their very different kinds of readers or auditors in very different social settings. How was the very process of study not just understood, but experienced as a form of divine service or worship? In other words, do the dialogical differences between these corpora reflect differences in their pedagogical methods and purposes, especially considering the rabbinic emphasis on the master-disciple relationship and circle, and the related differentiation between written and oral modes of revelatory transmission, nowhere evidenced at Qumran. The following, from the preface to a recent comparative effort to get at the “differen ia specifca of commentaries cross-culturally, would apply well to the formal differences between scriptural interpretation within the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic midrash:

For commentary is not a natural type but is always constructed variously in various social formations, and may therefore be expected to respond differently to different kinds of identifiable exigencies. This constructedness of the form of commentary may well be disguised to a certain extent from its producers and consumers by its very ubiquity, both within their own work and across the spectrum of cultures available for historical and geographical comparison; ... But there is nothing natural about the general form of commentary itself, and no matter how natural a particular form of commentary may seem to its own practitioners in any one place and time, it need not seem at all natural to other practitioners.

4. Finally, as we have done with respect to the above examples, we might ask to what extent do differences between Qumran and early rabbinic narrative interpretation reflect different attitudes not just to the biblical text, but also to the biblical past, in relation both to the present lives of the respective textual communities and to their anticipation of the future (imminent or deferred) fulfillment ofbiblically generated eschatological expectations? The rabbis employed midrash aggadah, in part at least, as a means of shuttling back and forth between biblical, present, and eschatological times so as to defer while still foretasting the last, and to enter while refashioning the first; whereas Qumran narrative and prophetic interpretation was more intent on defining and justifying the present conduct of the elect in urgent preparation for an imminently anticipated consummation of history. How do these very different temporal perspectives of the two corpora shape their very different manners of reworking biblical narrative?

162–63. Note the remark of G. Brooke at the conclusion to his discussion of “Rewritten Bible” (see above, n. 12): “Once both the form and content of the biblical books were fixed in Hebrew, Rewritten Bible continued only in the Targums.” Whether or not this is true for the Targums, the presumption here is that the shift from rewritten Bible to more explicit forms of exegesis is the product of the fixing and closing of the biblical canon.


There are, no doubt, other aspects of this set of comparative questions that would need to be considered in any attempt at a fuller explanatory program, and many more specific comparative case-studies to be conducted along the way. But there can be no doubt that the Qumranic and rabbinic corpora, in their respective recastings of shared biblical narratives, have much more light to shed on one another and their respective textual, studying communities.  

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