APPROACHES TO BIBLICAL EXEGESIS IN QUMRAN LITERATURE*

Bilhah Nitzan

Pericopes containing biblical exegesis have been discerned in the Qumran texts since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. These have been observed in the versions of the biblical text, in the *pesharim* of biblical texts, and in most of the variegated texts and genres from Qumran, both sectarian and non-sectarian. Systematic study of the characteristic methods of biblical interpretation found in the Qumran scrolls has been accomplished in part, particularly in the *Pesharim* scrolls,1 in pericopes of homilies using proof texts,2 in the *Temple Scroll*,3 and in reworked Pentateuchal texts.4 However, this

---

* I am grateful to Dr. Meira Polliack for her valuable suggestions regarding the content and style of this article.


research has concentrated on certain specific texts. A comprehensive, systematic study of approaches and methods of biblical exegesis in Qumran remains to be done.

Due to the accelerated publication over the past decade of the scrolls from Cave 4, thanks to Emanuel Tov’s direction and management, the entire Qumran corpus is now available in authoritative scientific editions. Additional genres of Qumran literature incorporating biblical exegesis are also known today. In addition to the Pesharim of biblical texts and the exegetical use of biblical proof texts for sectarian ideas, we are acquainted with parabiblical texts, including scrolls of the reworked Pentateuch, with apocryphal and pseudepigraphic compositions, with halakhic compositions, and with other genres. Thus, study of the interpretive approaches to the Bible in Qumran may be further elaborated and even reach a comprehensive classification.

Methods of biblical interpretation may be investigated with regard to contents, textual criticism, and form criticism through use of conventional categories of biblical exegesis, but while maintaining openness towards new categories used in Qumran literature. Synchronously, one may engage in a comparative investigation as against the exegetical methods used in the ancient translations of the Bible, with those used in the apocryphal and Jewish-Hellenistic literature from the Second Temple period, and with the ancient tannaitic homilies. Diachronically, Qumran exegetical types may be studied in relation to other Jewish sectarian exegetical types, such as those of the Middle Ages and especially the ancient Karaite exegesis.

The importance and purpose of a systematic study of biblical interpretation in Second Temple texts is to promote our knowledge of the history of biblical exegesis. A comprehensive study of the categories and methods of biblical exegesis in the entire corpus of the Qumran scrolls would be very extensive, far too wide for one study. However, an attempt to build the foundations for such a systematic research project should be undertaken, at least of some of the interpretive approaches and methods used in the Qumran scrolls.

My first attempt to build a classification of biblical exegesis, in terms of both formal and stylistic-critical aspects and those of content, was undertaken in my book Pešer Habakkuk, published in Hebrew in 1986. During the last decade I have continued, throughout my

5 Nitzan, Pešer Habakkuk, 27–103.