

PROPHECY AND FULFILLMENT IN THE QUMRAN SCROLLS

John J. Collins*

It is a commonplace that the interpretation of older Scriptures is a major factor in the composition of Jewish writings of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The forms of interpretation are diverse. Geza Vermes makes a broad distinction between "pure" exegesis, intended to clarify the Biblical text, and "applied" exegesis, which establishes a connection between the Scripture and the new circumstances of the author.¹ Both phenomena can be observed already in the Hebrew Bible, from the brief explanatory glosses in the text to the major rewriting of earlier material that we find in Chronicles.² The distinction between the two kinds of exegesis is difficult to maintain in practice, since the need to clarify the text often arises precisely from the sensibilities of a new era. Nonetheless it has some heuristic value in indicating the poles of spectrum in early Jewish Biblical interpretation.

The literature of the Hellenistic period attests the continuation and development of the full range of inner-Biblical interpretation, but it also attests a significant new development. Now, for the first time, we find formal and systematic Biblical commentaries. These commentaries are of two kinds. On the one hand there are the commentaries of Philo, which explain the Biblical text in the categories of Hellenistic philosophy. On the other there are the *pēšārīm* from Qumran, which are in fact the oldest extant Biblical commentaries. Philo's commentaries are devoted to the books of the Torah. They are allegorical in method and are heavily indebted to Greek philosophy. The *pēšārīm* expound the books of the prophets and the Psalms, which were also understood to be prophetic. They too make use of allegorical interpretation—e.g., "Lebanon is the council of the community" (1QpHab xii 3-4)—but more often they simply specify the references of the text (e.g. when the "wicked" is specified as the Wicked Priest).³ Since our concern here is with the interpretation of prophecy we will confine our attention to the Qumran commentaries.

*John Collins is professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

¹G. Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible. From the Beginnings to Jerome* (eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970) 199-231.

²See M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

³J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament," in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Missoula: Scholars, 1974) 53: "We may characterize both the Qumran and the New Testament use of the Old Testament in general as a literal exegesis" (italics his).

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PEŠĀRĪM

The texts hitherto published from Qumran include fifteen that have been identified with certainty as *pešārīm*.⁴ These are based on the books of Habakkuk, Micah, Zephaniah, Isaiah, Nahum and Psalms. There are no duplicate copies, but there are fragments of multiple manuscripts on Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah and Psalms. There are also some indications of copying errors, and so it is unsafe to conclude that the extant copies are autographs.⁵ The manuscripts are usually dated from the mid-first century B.C. onward, on the basis of paleography and of the historical allusions, especially in the *pešer* on Nahum.⁶ It should be noted that there are differences between the individual *pešārīm*. The proportion of commentary to text is much smaller in 4QpIsa^a than in 1QpHab. There is, however, a consistent format that is used throughout.⁷ The text is cited section by section, each lemma followed by an interpretation, which is introduced by a formula, usually including the word *pešer* (e.g. *pešer haddābār, pišrō 'al*). The length of the section cited may vary, and occasionally part of the citation may be repeated in the course of the interpretation (e.g. 1QpHab iii 14; v 6).

The method of citing the text by sections lends itself to atomistic interpretation with scant regard for the original literary context, much less the original historical context.⁸ So, in 1QpHab iv–vi most of the passages cited are referred to the Kittim, but one sentence (“Why do you heed traitors . . . ?”) is said to refer to the “house of Absalom,” a group that is not otherwise mentioned. Disregard for the historical context is integral to the method. According to the explicit statement of 1QpHab vii 1–2, “God told Habakkuk to write down the things that are going to come upon the last generation, but the fulfillment of the end time he did not make known to him.” Rather, it was to the Teacher of Righteousness that “God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets.” Interpretation, then, is itself an inspired activity. It proceeds on the assumption that the words of the prophets are mysteries that refer to eschatological time.⁹

The method of interpretation that we find in the *pešārīm* has its roots in

⁴M. P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books* (CBQMS 8; Washington: Catholic Bible Association, 1979) 1.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶D. Dimant, “Qumran Sectarian Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (ed. M. E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 489.

⁷Horgan, *Pesharim* 237–244.

⁸The atomization of the *pešārīm* has often been noted; cf. e.g. K. Elliger, *Studien zum Habakkuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953) 139–142; F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 11.

⁹Elliger, *Studien* 150–156; O. Betz, *Offenbarung und Schriftforschung in der Qumransekte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960) 36–59.

the interpretation of dreams in the ancient Near East.¹⁰ This is indicated already by the name *pēšer* itself.¹¹ The word is found, both as a noun and as a verb, in the Aramaic of Daniel, where it refers to the interpretation of dreams (chaps. 2 and 4) and of the writing on the wall (chap. 5). The Akkadian cognate *pašāru* is also used for dream interpretation but implies not only the explanation of the dream but also the dispelling of its evil consequences.¹² The latter connotation was evidently lost in the book of Daniel, in view of the misadventures of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Nonetheless some scholars have held that the word is not adequately translated as "interpretation." Isaac Rabinowitz has argued forcefully that "the Peshers are not the commentaries, expositions, or otherwise exegetical works that they are commonly held to be" and suggests that the terms "presage, prognostic, while unsatisfactory in some respects, are not too wide of the mark."¹³ I believe that Rabinowitz is mistaken in his sharp antithesis of exegesis and prognostic, but his article has the merit of underlining the fact that the *pēšārim* are a very specific kind of commentary, based on the assumption that the text consists of predictions of future events.

This atomistic method of interpreting ancient texts was not unique to ancient Judaism. The technique is found in Egyptian sources as early as the *Book of the Dead*.¹⁴ A very interesting example is found in the so-called *Demotic Chronicle*, a document from the early Hellenistic period that cites a series of supposedly ancient prophecies and then comments on them.¹⁵ The prophecies appear to be composed *ex eventu* or after the fact, except where they predict that a native Egyptian dynasty will arise from Heracleopolis after the demise of the Ionians or Greeks.¹⁶ The interest of this text as a parallel to ancient Judaism is further enhanced by the fact that certain pharaohs are condemned for their failure to act in accordance with "the Law," whereas the ruler who is

¹⁰L. Silberman, "Unriddling the Riddle," *RQ* 3 (1961) 330–331; A. Finkel, "The Peshes of Dreams and Scriptures," *RQ* 4 (1963) 357–370; M. Fishbane, "The Qumran Peshes and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1979) 97–114.

¹¹Horgan, *Pesharim* 230–237.

¹²A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46/3; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956) 217–225.

¹³I. Rabinowitz, "Peshes/Pittaron. Its Biblical Meaning and Its Significance in the Qumran Literature," *RQ* 8 (1973) 230.

¹⁴Fishbane, *Biblical* 452–453; F. Daumas, "Littérature Prophetique et Exegetique Egyptienne et Commentaires Esseniens," in *A la Rencontre de Dieu. Memorial A. Gelin* (ed. A. Barucq et al.; Paris: Mappus, 1961) 203–221.

¹⁵W. Spiegelberg, *Die sogennante Demotische Chronik* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1914); E. Bresciani, "La cronaca demotica," in *Letteratura e Poesia dell' antico Egipto* (Torino: Erasmo, 1969) 551–562.

¹⁶"Be joyful, thou prophet of Harsaphes. (This means:) The prophet of Harsaphes will proceed in joy after the Ionians, for a ruler shall have arisen in Heracleopolis." See J. G. Griffiths, "Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Era," in *Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic World and the Near East* (ed. D. Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983) 280.

to come "will not abandon the Law." ("The Law" here has been taken to mean more than traditional laws, embracing the concept of right or justice.¹⁷) While the formal parallel between this text and the *pēšārīm* is intriguing, there is no evidence of literary influence in either direction. At most the analogy is indicative of the similarity of circumstances that prevailed throughout the Near East in the Hellenistic period. The model that influenced the *pēšārīm* lies closer to hand in the Jewish, Biblical book of Daniel.

II. THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY IN DANIEL

The interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years in Daniel 9 marks a hermeneutical shift in the history of ancient Jewish exegesis. It is the first case where a prophetic oracle is explicitly interpreted allegorically, or understood to mean something other than what it literally says. There are, of course, many earlier instances where prophecies are reinterpreted in the light of a new situation, or even reinterpreted in an eschatological sense.¹⁸ Ezek 38:17, where Gog is identified as "he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel," is widely recognized as a reinterpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy of "evil from the north" (Jer 4:6). In that case, however, the reinterpretation is simply a specification and does not involve an alteration of the original prophecy. The situation is different in Daniel 9, where seventy years are reinterpreted to mean seventy "weeks" of years.

The novel interpretation of prophecy of the book of Daniel must be seen in the context of the understanding of revelation throughout that book.¹⁹ In the tales that make up Daniel 1–6, Daniel is represented as a wise man at the Babylonian court who is able to interpret dreams (chaps. 2 and 4) and other mysteries (chap. 5) when the Babylonian wise men fall. Daniel's success is attributed to the power of his God, who "gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and mysterious things" (Dan 2:21–22). Nonetheless, the form of the interpretations is similar to the decipherment of symbolic dreams elsewhere in the ancient Near East.²⁰ The full dream is recounted and then broken down and interpreted piecemeal. The interpretation is symbolic or allegorical (e.g. "The tree you saw . . . it is you, O king," 4:20–22). The dream vision undergoes some development in chaps. 7 and 8. While it is possible to trace a history of the symbolic vision form in Biblical prophecy, beginning with Amos,²¹ there is obviously also continuity between the dreams that Daniel interprets in chaps. 2 and 4 and the visions that he

¹⁷C. F. Nims, "The Term *Hp*, 'Law, Right,' in Demotic," *JNES* 7 (1948) 243–260.

¹⁸Fishbane, *Biblical* 465–474.

¹⁹On the forms of revelation in Daniel see J. J. Collins, *Daniel, with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 6–11.

²⁰Fishbane, *Biblical* 447–450; Oppenheim, *Interpretation* 206–225.

²¹K. Koch, "Vom profetischen zum apokalyptischen Visionsbericht," in *Apocalyptic* (ed. Hellholm) 413–446; S. Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico: Scholars, 1983).

sees in chaps. 7 and 8. (The continuity is most obvious between chaps. 2 and 7.) The main difference is that now the interpreter is an angel, as in Zechariah 1–6, a fact that emphasizes the mysterious, supernatural character of the revelation. The manner of interpretation is similar to that of the dreams in chaps. 2 and 4: The visions are described and then interpreted piecemeal in an allegorical sense (e.g. 8:21: “The he-goat is the king of Greece”).

The interpretation of the seventy years in Daniel 9 follows the same pattern of allegorical interpretation that we find in the dreams and visions.²² The angel’s discourse is not formally introduced as the interpretation of the prophecy, but the association seems obvious in view of Daniel’s preoccupation at the beginning of the chapter. Unlike the dreams and visions, the mystery to be interpreted in this case consists of a single datum, the seventy years of desolation. (In Jer 25:11 the land is to lie desolate; Daniel speaks of the desolations of Jerusalem.) What is significant, however, is that the prophecy is regarded as a mystery that must be decoded, like the writing on the wall in Daniel 5, and that a new revelation is necessary for its interpretation.

It has been suggested that the construal of prophecy as dreams or visions had its Biblical warrant in Num 12:6: “If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream.”²³ This suggestion is attractive, although the warrant is never cited in pre-Christian Jewish literature. It concerns, however, only the justification of the hermeneutical shift, not its cause. In the case of Daniel 9 the interpretation applies the prophecy of Jeremiah to a new situation, several hundred years later than its literal terms would allow. The use of Jeremiah’s prophecy in this way is especially remarkable since both the Chronicler and the prophet Zechariah had regarded the prophecy as fulfilled in the sixth century. The author of Daniel 9 could, in a sense, claim to be interpreting Scripture by Scripture, insofar as the move from seventy years to seventy weeks of years is suggested by the discussion of weeks of years in Leviticus 25. Yet Leviticus does not suggest the specific content of the interpretation. Sixty-nine-and-a-half of the seventy weeks are filled out by a sketch of postexilic Jewish history. The historical sketch is schematic and not exact, and sixty-two weeks are passed over virtually without comment. The focus of the interpretation is on the last week, from the time when “an anointed one” is cut off (most probably a reference to the murder of the high priest Onias III in 170 B.C.). If, as I believe, the author lived in this last week, in the period of crisis under Antiochus Epiphanes, the interpretation of Jeremiah’s prophecy then fits the pattern that we find in many apocalypses of the historical type.²⁴ An overview of history is provided in the guise of prophecy, but written after the fact, concluding with a real prediction of an eschatological nature (in this case the decreed end of the desolator). This same pattern is found in the dream interpretation in Daniel 2 in the visions in chaps.

²²Fishbane, *Biblical* 482–489.

²³L. H. Silberman, “Unriddling” 331. See also D. Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine* (SBLDS 22; Missoula: Scholars, 1975) 301.

²⁴Collins, *Daniel* 11–12; *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 5–6.

7 and 8 and again in chaps. 10—12 but also in the Enochic apocalypses of the Maccabean era (the *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Animal Apocalypse*). In each of these cases a mysterious revelation is interpreted in such a way as to correlate it with history (with varying degrees of accuracy from a modern viewpoint) but also so as to predict an eschatological finale of history. The prophecy of Jeremiah in Daniel 9 is treated no differently than the dreams and visions of Daniel and Enoch.

It is generally recognized that apocalyptic revelations are substantially *ex eventu*, or after the fact. The claim that the whole course of history was revealed to Enoch before the flood is a literary device, which serves various purposes. It conveys a sense of determinism, since the course of history was foreknown even then. Most importantly, it inspires confidence in the eschatological predictions with which these revelations typically end. The classic illustration is Daniel 11, where, as Porphyry already claimed in antiquity, the revelation gives an accurate account of events down to the career of Antiochus Epiphanes but erroneously predicts that he would die in the land of Israel ("between the sea and the glorious holy mountain," 11:45). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the revelation was composed during the time of Epiphanes and before his death and was intended to inspire confidence that his death, and the vindication of his victims, was imminent. The use of Jeremiah's prophecy in Daniel 9 functions in a manner similar to the use of a pseudonym such as Enoch. It invokes the authority of antiquity, and it permits an *ex eventu* prophecy of the intervening history. Here again there is a real prediction, that the decreed end will be poured out on the desolator (9:27). The prediction is warranted by the fact that Jeremiah had prophesied a specific duration for the desolation. The fact that that duration is interpreted allegorically, however, and, at least by modern reckoning, corresponds only loosely and schematically to the period identified in the interpretation, suggests that the prediction is not really derived from the prophecy but that the prophecy is invoked to lend authority to a prediction that is made for other reasons.

III. INTERPRETATION IN THE PĒŠĀRĪM

The manner in which the interpretation is derived from (or at least related to) the text in the *pēšārīm* is the subject of a long-standing debate. Already in 1951 William H. Brownlee proposed thirteen hermeneutical principles that he found to be operative in the Habakkuk commentary.²⁵ These included not only general principles such as the assumption that prophecy has an eschatological meaning but also methodological clues, such as the rearrangement of letters in a word or the division of a word into two or more parts. Brownlee argued for a very close relationship between text and commentary and found the *pēšer* "essentially midrashic in character." This view was flatly contradicted by Karl Elliger in 1953, who found many of Brownlee's explanations farfetched.²⁶ El-

²⁵W. H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BA* 14 (1951) 54–76.

²⁶K. Elliger, *Studien* 157–164. Elliger questions cases where Brownlee divides words and treats the letters of a word as abbreviations for other words.

liger insisted that Daniel was a much closer parallel than the rabbinic midrashim and that the commentary was generated by the attempt to address the concerns of the community rather than by exegetical techniques. Lou Silberman, writing a decade after Brownlee, affirmed the continuity of the *pěšārīm* with Daniel and traditional dream interpretation but pointed out that even in those cases interpretations are derived from, or related to, the text.²⁷ He proceeded to argue for an analogy between the *pěšārīm* and the late *Petirah Midrashim*²⁸ and to argue for a close derivation of the commentary from the text, often relying on little-known secondary meanings of roots to make his point.²⁹ More recently Rabinowitz has disputed the relationship between *pěšer* and midrash,³⁰ while that relationship has been affirmed by Brooke.³¹

Even if one does not accept all the exegetical suggestions of Brownlee and Silberman, there can be no doubt that the *pěšārīm* make use of midrashic techniques such as plays on the double meaning of words. There is equally no doubt that the commentaries cannot be adequately explained by these techniques alone. Maurya Horgan gives a balanced summary of four modes of interpretation in the *pěšārīm*:³² (1) The *pěšer* may follow the action ideas and words of the lemma closely; (2) it may grow out of one or more key words, roots or ideas; (3) it may consist of metaphorical identifications of figures or entities named in the lemma; (4) it may be only loosely related to the lemma. The third point is especially significant as it points to the fact that the *pěšārīm* presuppose a body of information about the figures mentioned that is correlated with the prophetic text but not derived from it.

The interrelation between exegetical technique and independent tradition can be illustrated by a few passages from 1QpHab. At the end of the first column Hab 1:5 is cited. Most of the citation is lost because of the fragmentary nature of the text, but the interpretation presupposes the reading *bwgdym*, "traitors," rather than *bgwym*, "among the nations," as in MT. Most probably the commentator found the variant reading in his text. There is no reason to suspect him of altering it.³³ The citation may be reconstructed as: "Look, O traitors, and see, wonder and be amazed, for I am doing a deed in your days that you would not believe if it were told." The interpretation that follows (1QpHab ii 1–10) is concerned exclusively with the identification of the traitors. Not one but three identifications are affirmed: The traitors together with the Man of

²⁷Silberman, "Unriddling" 326–327.

²⁸His primary illustration of *Petirah Midrash* is taken from *Qoh. Rab.* 12:1.

²⁹E.g. he realtes the verb *pwg* in 1QpHab i 10 to the Hebrew *pwq*, Aramiac *npq*, "go forth," rather than the more usual understanding, "grow numb."

³⁰Rabinowitz, *Pesher/Pittaron*.

³¹G. J. Brooke, "Qumran Peshet: Toward the Redefinition of a Genre," *RQ* 10 (1979/81) 483–503.

³²Horgan, *Pesharim* 244–245.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 23, points out that *bwgdym* is suggested as an emendation in *BHS* on the basis of the Greek *hoi kataphronetoi*.

the Lie, the traitors to the new covenant, and the traitors at the end of days who are the ruthless ones of the covenant. Each of the three groups is accused of not "believing" or "being faithful" (*h'myn*) in accordance with the citation, and the reference to "your days" may have suggested the interpretation in terms of the end of days. Nonetheless it is clear that all the interpretation cannot be derived from the text. The interpretation presupposes that the Man of the Lie and the Teacher are known figures and that the designation "traitors" can be plausibly referred to the Man of the Lie and his followers. The *pēšer* correlates the prophetic text with the otherwise known history of the community, using the words "traitors" and "believe" as catchwords.

A second illustration may be taken from 1QpHab viii. Here there is a relatively lengthy citation of Hab 2:5-6, which concerns a haughty man who multiplies what is not his own. The interpretation identifies the figure as the Wicked Priest, although the citation gave no hint of his priestly status. The points of contact with the text are that he became arrogant and took the wealth of the men of violence and of the nations. Here again the *pēšer* presupposes certain information about this priest and adds information that has no point of connection in the text: that he abandoned God, that the men of violence had rebelled against God, and that he was guilty of impurity. Moreover it distinguishes two stages in his career: when he first arose and was called by the name of truth, and when he ruled in Israel. This distinction has no basis in the text.

A third illustration is taken from 1QpHab xi. The text of Hab 2:15 is cited as follows: "Woe to him who gives his neighbors to drink, mixing in his wrath—indeed, making (them) drunk in order that he might look upon their feasts." "Their feasts" (*mw'dyhm*) differs from the reading of the MT (*m'wryhm*, "their nakedness"). Silberman regards the change as the deliberate alteration of a commentator who lacked the ingenuity to do anything with the MT reading but wanted a peg on which to hang his story.³⁴ The possibility that the text had already been corrupted can not be discounted. In any case, the "feasts" become the main focus of the interpretation here. There is no reference to drunkenness in the interpretation. Instead the commentator appears to construe the text to mean that the villain drinks or swallows his neighbor.³⁵ The neglect of the motif of drunkenness here contrasts with the following passage (1QpHab xi 8b-15), where it is emphasized. In 1QpHab xi 4-8a the commentator again introduces information that has no apparent basis in the text: the statement that the priest pursued the Teacher to his place of exile.

From these illustrations it is clear that the commentator is not simply exegeting the prophetic text but is correlating it with an independent body of information about the history of the community. There are always points of connection with the text, but the constraints placed on the interpreter are minimal. A text may be interpreted in more than one way, and words and phrases do not necessarily carry the same meaning whenever they occur.

³⁴Silberman, "Unriddling" 358.

³⁵So Brownlee, "Biblical" 68. Silberman, "Unriddling" 355, attempts to derive *mašqeh*, "gives to drink," from *nšq*, "armament," in the sense of "hostile encounter."

(*Haṣṣaddiq*, "the righteous," is interpreted as the Teacher of Righteousness in Hab 1:13, but the *ṣaddiq* of 2:4b ["the righteous man will live by his faithfulness"] is interpreted as everyone who observes the Law and is faithful to the Teacher.) The interpretations are highly selective, and many features of the text are ignored. (This is more obvious in the *pēšer* on Isaiah.) Consequently what is found in the interpretations is never simply required by the text, although it is limited by the points of connection that can be found in a given lemma.

Not all the interpretations in the *pēšārīm* refer to the history of the community. As in the apocalypses, there are also genuine predictions. Some of these are of a general nature (e.g. iv 3: "God will not destroy his people by the hand of the nations," or xiii 3: "God will wipe out completely all those who serve the idols"). Others are more specific. The wealth of the last priests of Jerusalem will be given over to the army of the Kittim (ix 4–6). God will sentence the Wicked Priest to complete destruction (xii 5). These predictions are virtually all concerned with retribution, mostly against the priests and in a few cases against the Gentiles. All pertain to the definitive events expected in the end of days.

IV. THE FUNCTION OF THE PĒŠĀRĪM

The most obvious clue to the function of the *pēšārīm* is the prominence of the motif of retribution. The commentaries provide assurance that the Wicked Priest, the last priests of Jerusalem, and the idols of the nations will be destroyed, by showing that the destruction has long been foretold in prophecy. This exposition provides consolation for the "poor ones" who are oppressed in the present. In this regard the *pēšārīm* resemble the *ex eventu* prophecies of the apocalypses. In both cases visionaries are thought to have predicted events long after their time. The fact that some of these events can already be verified insures the reliability of those that are still to come. Unlike the apocalypses the *pēšārīm* explicitly identify some predictions as already fulfilled and do not employ the device of pseudonymity. Nonetheless the effect is similar. The expectation of retribution and vindication is supported by the authority of ancient prophecy. Both sets of documents presuppose and encourage the belief that the "end of days" was imminent in the time of the actual author.

A second function of the *pēšārīm* is also paralleled in the apocalypses. They provide confirmation and legitimation for the identity of certain groups in the present.³⁶ When Enoch predicts the emergence of the chosen righteous, or Daniel predicts the rise of the *maškilīm*, they are understood to provide a prophetic sanction and mandate for these groups. This function is more prominent in the *pēšārīm* insofar as Biblical words and phrases are used to label individuals and groups. So the general epithets "righteous" and "wicked" are given very specific reference in 1QpHab. The righteousness of the Qumran community, and the wickedness of the High Priest, is confirmed by the correspondence with the

³⁶W. H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Peshet of Habbakuk* (Missoula: Scholars, 1979) 35–36, speaks of "vindication." This is not, however, to say that "the basis for their sectarianism was their interpretation of scripture" (so Patte, *Early* 214).

prophetic text. This use of prophecy for legitimation is often in evidence in the use of Scripture in other Qumran documents. So, in CD iv 2–3, the “priests, the Levites and the sons of Zadok” of Ezek 44:15 are identified as “the converts of Israel who departed from the land of Judah,” “those who joined them,” and “the elect of Israel . . . who shall stand at the end of days.” The sectarian group derives not only an honorific title from the Biblical text but also confirmation of its place in the divine plan. Again, in 1QS viii the settlement in the wilderness is said to be the fulfillment of Isa 40:3. Whether we suppose that the settlement was a deliberate attempt to fulfill the command of the prophet, or that the prophecy was invoked after the fact, the correspondence with a prophetic text confirmed the rightness of the settlement.

From a modern critical viewpoint, the exegetical method of QL involves the manipulation of the prophetic text to meet the needs of the community. As Silberman has put it, the text provides pegs on which the commentator hangs his message, although he uses much ingenuity to justify the connections. In Vermes' terms, this is “applied” rather than “pure” exegesis. Needless to say, the members of the Qumran community would not have formulated the matter in this way. What is manipulation to us was to them the revelation of the mysteries hidden in the text. They were, of course, not the only group in history that considered itself the primary beneficiary of God's providence. Nonetheless the belief that the true meaning of the words of the prophets concerned the Qumran community can hardly fail to strike us as naive. The claim of revelation appears here to be a rhetorical device, however sincerely employed, that masks the actual process of Biblical interpretation.

V. THE PĒŠĀRĪM AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Much of the modern study of the *pēšārīm* has been devoted to attempts to reconstruct the history of the Qumran community from the allusions in the commentaries.³⁷ This enterprise has been problematic, most obviously because of the fondness of the *pēšārīm* for exclusive titles such as “the Wicked Priest” and the lack of explicit names. (The mention of Demetrius king of Greece in 4QpNah is the notable exception, and even there the information is deficient.) The *pēšārīm* do not provide continuous narrative, such as we find in historiographic texts like 1 Maccabees, or even in the *ex eventu* prophecies in the apocalypses. Nonetheless the expectation that the *pēšārīm* provide evidence for historical reconstruction is well grounded. Not only do we find explicit reference to Demetrius king of Greece and some rather transparent references to other figures (most notably the “Lion of Wrath,” who is generally recognized as Alexander Jannaeus), but the genre of the *pēšārīm* itself supports the expectation. We have seen that a major factor in the exegetical method of the *pēšārīm* involves the correlation of the Biblical text with data known from other sources concerning persons, groups and events. The very fact that the *pēšārīm* do not provide a continuous narrative about, or clear description of, such figures as the Wicked Priest and Man of the Lie requires that we assume that the readers

³⁷E.g. F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) 111–160; H. Stegemann, *Die Entstehung der Qumrangemeinde* (Bonn: published privately, 1971).

were familiar with these figures from some other source. *Pēšer* exegesis, like dream interpretation, is largely an exercise in correlation. Unlike some forms of haggadic midrash it allows little scope for creative fiction, since it has little scope for narrative. There is obviously a creative element in the *pēšārīm* where they predict future, eschatological events. The credibility of these predictions, however, depends on the recognition that much of the ancient prophecy has already been fulfilled. Consequently when the incidents cited as the *pēšer* of specific texts are alleged to have already taken place they must be already familiar to the readers and cannot be new creations of the interpreter. We can infer from this that stories about the Wicked Priest (e.g. that he was given into the hand of his enemies and that he disrupted the Teacher on the Day of Atonement) were already in circulation before the *pēšer* on Habakkuk was written. Whether these stories were historically accurate is of course a further question, but the enigmatic allusions of the *pēšārīm* must be seriously examined in any attempt to reconstruct the history of the Qumran community.

VI. THE PĔŠĀRĪM AND THE NT

The style of commentary developed in the Qumran *pēšārīm* was not continued in either Judaism or Christianity. The closest Jewish parallels are found in the *Petirah Midrashim* to which Silberman has drawn attention. There we find the same point-by-point identification of symbols in the manner of dream interpretation (e.g. *Qoh. Rab.* 12:1: "The light—this is the Torah, and the moon—this is the Sanhedrin"). In the midrash, however, the interpretations are not claimed to be inspired, and they do not focus on historical and eschatological events as the *pēšārīm* do. On the Christian side there have been many proposals concerning "*pēšer*-like exegesis" in the NT.³⁸ The *pēšārīm* do indeed throw valuable light on the early Christian understanding of Scripture, but there is no actual example of *pēšer* in the NT.³⁹

The relationship between the *pēšārīm* and the NT may be considered briefly with reference to two blocks of material that are often adduced in this regard: the formula quotations in Matthew,⁴⁰ and the quotations in the speeches in Acts.⁴¹ The Matthean passages affirm that events in the life of Jesus happened "to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet" (e.g. Matt 1:22). They differ from the *pēšārīm* by their focus on the Messiah: They are messianic rather than eschatological. Formally, the procedure is the reverse of what we find in the *pēšārīm*. They do not move from text to interpretation but start from a narrative about Jesus and add the Biblical quotations. In principle this procedure provides greater scope for the creation of new material than was the case in the *pēšārīm*, since it provides a full narrative and does not merely allude

³⁸D. Hay, "NT Interpretation of the OT," *IDBSup* 444; see Brooke, "Qumran" 484.

³⁹See Fitzmyer, "Use" 6.

⁴⁰The analogy between these passages and the *pēšārīm* was argued by K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Lund: Gleerup, 1954) 183–202.

⁴¹E.g. D. Goldsmith, "Acts 13:33–37: A *Peshier* on II Samuel 7," *JBL* 87 (1968) 321–324.

to one. The quotations in Acts are, likewise, Christological in focus and are cited as proof-texts in a narrative. They are not interpreted atomistically in the manner of the *pěšārîm*. Here again the narrative gives greater freedom for creativity than was the case in the *pěšārîm*, although there can be little doubt that the story of Jesus was traditional by the time the speeches in Acts were written.

In view of these significant differences it is best to avoid loose references to "pěšer-like" exegesis. Yet the *pěšārîm* have shed some important light on the NT. Both sets of documents share some basic presuppositions—e.g., that the primary reference of prophecy is not to the time of the prophets themselves but to the time of the interpreters and to the eschatological future. In both cases we are dealing with applied exegesis that makes creative use of the Biblical text to confirm and legitimate the novel beliefs of a community. While the early Christians made their own adaptation of Jewish methods of interpretation they continued to share some of their most basic assumptions, and their use of the Scriptures is scarcely intelligible apart from the Jewish context in which they lived.