The Problem of Exegesis: A Reflection from an Historical Perspective

Fr Michael Hough

Newton Theological College, Post Office Box 162
Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea

Introduction

Having to prepare a course on exegesis for final-year students here at Newton College has proved to be a more difficult task than I would have anticipated. One of the real stumbling blocks has proved to be the attitude the students have to scripture: how they understand the nature of the material they have before them. The first, and necessary, starting point in exegesis, then, has to be the understanding of scripture as scripture, and not as literature, or theology, or as a kind of source book for doctrine. Yet, coming to an understanding of scripture is not easy process, and involves the integration of a number of differing visions. In this, and in subsequent papers, I shall reflect on a number of these approaches, in an attempt to isolate a starting point for exegesis.

Jewish Exegetical Methods

The very first interpreter of scripture was scripture itself. This is not all that surprising, when we remember that the canon is the result of some thousand years of evolution and growth. Traditions have been modified, corrected, and, at times, contradicted[1]. This, too, is a reasonable process, if we also consider the many, great, social changes that the nation of Israel went through, from the time of the Exodus until the final formalising of the canon. They changed from a semi-nomadic people, to an agricultural society; then moved into cities, had their own king, army, and newly-won territories. They, then, ended up occupied, and governed by foreign powers. Each of these factors had profound effects on the way the nation thought, worshipped, and used its sacred stories. What was written down, as the way of sacrificing for the desert people, did not always make sense to post-exilic Jews of the second temple period. Changes, then, had to be made to what was the accepted interpretation of their traditions. It is the ease with which

[1] A. T. Hanson, *The Living Utterances of God*, London UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983, p. 7.

these changes were made that is important to our search for hermeneutical guidelines.

The book of Chronicles is a good example of this process, as it sets out to represent the past glories and sins of the people. Compare, for example, 2 Sam 24:1:

> Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying "Go, number Israel and Judah".

with 1 Chr 21:1:

> Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.

Some 500 years lie between these two works, and, in that time, there had been a great deal of growth and development in theology, and the understanding of God. By the time of the Chronicler, people would have found it very difficult to accept that God could "incite" the king to sin. Yet, that is precisely what the text from 2 Samuel is saying. Thus, the text had to be modified, introducing Satan, a figure who was just beginning to emerge as a force in theology. As someone who was opposed to God, he could well "incite" someone to break the Law. It does not matter what the mind of the original author was. Nor does it matter what the original *Sitz in Leben* was. The important key to interpretation was the audience of the Chronicler, and their needs and expectations (as perceived by the author). The second text actually meant what they had it mean, independent of what the original source was saying.[2] It is even more interesting to read the *Targum*, an Aramaic translation and commentary on the text.[3] It takes the process a step further, and has the text reading:

> Yahweh incited Satan against Israel.

Another good example for this process is found in a reinterpretation of Hos 1:4. That text reads:

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[2] Ibid., p. 8.

[3] The Targums are an important part of the reflection, and will be studied at some length later on. But, for now, it is important to remember that they were much more than just a translation. They contained an interpretation, and an application of the text, all incorporated into the biblical passage being used.

> For it will not be long before I make the house of Jehu pay for the bloodshed at Jezreel.

This is clearly at odds with the man who wrote the commentary in 2 Kings 9. He wrote his account in such a way as to put Jehu's actions in a good and acceptable light, even to the point of having the prophet Elisha initiate the whole incident, at the behest of Yahweh. Hosea had a different message in mind – same Bible; same event, but varying understandings. A quick read through Ps 78 will show a similar kind of hermeneutical process, where the history of the nation undergoes a theological revision.[4]

We could go on and multiply these examples, as the Bible has many such forms (Hanson, in his *The Living Utterances of God*, has a good collection of them) and, at end, we would be forced into an obvious conclusion. The Bible has always been reinterpreted, with the new interpretation often moving far beyond what was intended in the original text. Hermeneutics, thus, requires something more than faithfulness to original meanings. What we have in front of us, in the form of these texts, represents a dynamic statement of faith, whose precise meaning transcends the recorded events, and calls on the new audience to accept the reinterpretation of what happened. Both the original account and the reinterpretation then become scripture despite, the irreconcilable differences.

The Septuagint

In a simple understanding, the Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. But, for our reflection on hermeneutics, it represents much more than that. It was seen as an inspired book, with its translators being referred to as "inspired prophets".[5] But, as we shall see, being inspired did not mean that interpreters and translators were limited by the clear meaning of the original Hebrew text.

Take, for example, Gen 2:2, which, in the LXX, is an example of *Halakah*. *Halakah* is the Jewish technique of taking a text, and applying it to everyday life. Given the rapidly-changing society, such applications were necessary, as the believer was facing situations never envisaged at the time of the first revelation. The Hebrew of Gen 2:2 reads:

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[4] B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, London UK: SCM Press, 1961, p. 273.

[5] Philo, *De Abrahamo*, [Publishing details not available]; cf. Hanson, *Living Utterances*, p. 10.

> And, on the seventh day, God finished His work, which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work, which He had done.

The problem with this passage is that it has God working on the seventh day, the Sabbath. This is clearly against the law, and unacceptable, even for God! The LXX translators worked on it, and rendered the same text:

> And God finished the works, which He had done on the sixth day, and rested on the seventh day.

And so the problem is solved. This change (and many others like it) in no way affected the authority of the LXX in the community. It was as much "scripture" as its Hebrew counterparts. This is a good example of how, in the process of translation, perceived difficulties in a text could be smoothed out for the sake of the needs of later communities. Similar texts can also be found that show how later generations changed texts to meet variations that had come about in cult with the passing of time (see, for example, Lev 24:7).

In another example, we find that the LXX adds a rather long sentence about the grave of Joshua at the end of Jos 24:30 that is not in the Hebrew. It is not a great theological addition, but, rather, a note that helps the community understand what was probably a much later ritual and pilgrimage associated with this sacred shrine. Similarly, it adds extra verses to the end of the Hebrew text of Job. This is done to show that Job can be traced back five generations to Abraham. What is important is that these Haggadic additions were accepted as "scripture", in the very same way as were the originals. They were seen as clarifications, and probably improvements, necessary for proper comprehension by the believing community. It also provides us with clear insights into how they handled a text.

The LXX also has a clear tendency to remove anthropomorphic language from descriptions of the actions of God. From its Greek background, giving God human qualities would have been unworthy of His greatness. Some of these are:

HEBREW	**GREEK**
Ex 15:3 Yahweh is a man of war.	The Lord crushes war.
Ex 18:8 With the blast of Your nostrils.	With the Spirit of Your angel.
Exodus 24:10 They saw the God of Israel.	They saw the place where the God of Israel stood.
Ex 24:11 Upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay a hand.	Of the elect of Israel not one was missing.

Again we are struck with the apparent audacity of the exegete/translator, who can change words and meanings, on the basis of the language and images used being potentially offensive. Again, we have a process that would be frowned upon today, but one that helps us understand how they approached the texts, and how they were in no way limited to what they said.

A perhaps more important reworking is found in Ex 4:24-25. The Hebrew text has the Lord going out to kill Moses, but he is saved when Zipporah, his wife, takes a knife and cuts off her son's foreskin and places it at the feet of Moses. God sees this, and decides that He would change His mind, and not kill Moses after all. This is probably a quite ancient tradition that the LXX had presumably decided is too difficult to manage, and so reinterprets it. The two texts are reproduced below, side by side, to better see the changes that take place. The Hebrew is on the left.

On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the Lord met him, and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint, and cut of her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly, you are a bridegroom of blood to me." So God let him live. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by the circumcision."	And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord met him by the way in the inn, and sought to put him to death. And Zipporah, having taking stone, cut off the foreskin of her son, and fell at his feet, and said, "The blood of the circumcision of my son is now staunched."

The first obvious change is that the LXX has an angel of the Lord coming to kill Moses, and not God doing the deed. Then, Zipporah falls at Moses feet rather than having her place the foreskin on his feet. Finally, her

cry is quite at variance with the Hebrew. Examples like these show just how interpretations of a text depend on many things beyond what was in the mind of the original authors.

In most of these changes, theology was clearly important. But good theology was not the only consideration. By the time of the LXX translation, the people of Israel had suffered greatly at the hands of the Gentile nations around them, and had developed an enormous depth of hatred for them. This strong anti-Gentile feeling also found its way into the handling of the Hebrew. In 1 Sam 17:43, for example, there is David's glorious fight with Goliath, and, in this verse, we see the Philistine warrior baiting the shepherd soldier with these words: "Am I a dog that you would come against me with sticks?" The LXX translators, reflecting the mood of the times, uses this to make a further point about Gentiles by adding a reply from David that the Hebrew misses out: "No, but worse than a dog!"

Mind you, not all the changes worked out too well. Compare, for example the Hebrew of Is 51:20, which reads:

> Yours sons have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net

with the unusual LXX translation:

> Yours sons are the perplexed ones, sleeping at the top of every street like a half-boiled beet.

Anyone who attempts translation work on the Bible will quickly discover that there are many passages in the Hebrew that almost defy reasonable and accurate translation, and the LXX does as good a job as any other in attempting this work. However, it is also very clear, just from the few examples given here, that, when it came to using the scriptures, the translators understood that what they had was much more than just a text. They had a revelation from God that needed to speak to their communities, and they were the ones, called and inspired, to make this message come alive and be relevant. If this meant adding theologies, clarifying words, changing old rites and customs to reflect current liturgical and social conduct, and

taking out all those things they thought were inappropriate, then they did so without qualms or hesitation.[6]

Exegesis in the Qumran Community

The community that set itself up at Qumran, in the wilderness on the shores of the Dead Sea, was composed of Essenes. They were a strict observance group, who emerged from the struggles for independence, engaged in by Israel during the Maccabean period. They had two main principles that guided their exegesis:[7] (a) prophetic scripture must always refer to the end of time (and, by prophetic scripture, they meant virtually all of the Bible, as they saw Moses and David as prophets); (b) the present WAS the end time. Their main exegetical device was the *pesher* technique. This sought to identify persons and events recorded in scripture with specific people and events from the Qumran community itself. This is not the same as going back to the Bible and finding in it characters who are models of present figures, or who are like people from Qumran. The community believed that scripture was written specifically with their group in mind, and that, when it was being revealed, God did not even make this future relevance known to the prophet doing the writing. They were the end-time community, and scripture was fulfilled in them. The word *pesher* can be translated as "the means". The interpreters would quote the text they were looking at and then add ". . . *pishro* (this means) . . ." and go on with their interpretation. In its commentary on Hab 1:4, we can see this *pesher* method in operation:

> And so the Law loses its hold. (*pishro*) This refers to the fact that the people have rejected the Torah, that is, the Law of God.
>
> Yes, the wicked men get the better of the upright. The wicked (*pesher*) refers to the wicked Priest, and the upright is the Teacher of Righteousness.

This shows their understanding of the reasons for the existence of the community, as well as the problem of struggles within its own ranks. In the same prophecy, this time in 1:6, we can see how history is reinterpreted to become a commentary on current events. The text reads: "For now I am

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[6] It should be noted that, at this stage, we are not talking about a fixed Hebrew canon. Though many of the texts, in what we now call the Old Testament, would have been considered as "scripture".

[7] Hanson, *Living Utterances*, p. 15.

stirring up the Chaldeans, that fierce and fiery people." To this is added, "Interpreted (*pesher*) this is about the Kittim, who are, indeed, swift and mighty in war, bent on destroying peoples far and wide. . . ." For the Qumran community, the Kittim are the Romans, not the Chaldeans, of whom Habakkuk writes. They would hold that the prophet, while he thought he was reflecting on his own situation, was, in fact, anticipating the situation that would be current to the Qumran community. This is apparent in their understanding of Hab 2:2, which reads:

> Then Yahweh answered, and said, "Write the vision down, inscribe it on tablets to be easily read, since this vision is fulfilled, it does not deceive."

> The *pesher* reads:

> God told Habakkuk to write down the things that were to come upon the latter age, but he did not inform him when that moment would come to fulfilment. As to the phrase . . . to be easily read . . . (*pesher*), this refers to the Teacher of Righteousness, who expounds the Law aright, for God has made known to him all the deeper implications of the words of His servants the prophets. This vision is for its own time only . . . (*pesher*), and refers to the fact that the final moment may be protracted beyond anything, which the prophets had foretold, for "God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform".

So the prophet was passing on a message that he did not understand, a message that would only be revealed by the Teacher of Righteousnes, for whom it was originally written[8]. Any thought of a hermeneutic, based on the message, as perceived by the original author, would be absurd to them. Exegesis was not meant to rediscover the original meaning, but the intended meaning for the receiving group.

The Targums and Exegesis

The Targums are very important in any study of early exegetical methods, because they are not only translators of the Hebrew scriptures from Hebrew into Aramaic, but are also theologies of the text under consideration. They:

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[8] T. H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, New York NY: Anchor Books, 1976, p. 318.

> give the sense, and make the people understand the meaning (Neh 8:8).

So while they would be "faithful" to the text, when they considered it necessary, they would add clarifications, so that the proper meaning, as they perceived it, would be understood by the audience. The Targums, therefore:

> lie half-way between straightforward translation and free retelling of the biblical narrative: they were clearly attached to the Hebrew text and, at times, translated it in a reasonably straightforward way, but they were also prepared to introduce into the translation as much interpretation as seemed necessary to clarify the sense.[9]

Important, in the growth of the Targums, is an appreciation of the fact that post-exilic Israel was a nation in which Hebrew was a dying language. It had been replaced, over a number of years, by Aramaic, the court language of the Assyrian empire. Much of the Bible was, therefore, beyond the linguistic reaches of the ordinary man and woman. In the synagogue service, the text would be read in Hebrew, and then a translation and interpretation would be given (though it is probably more accurate to call it a paraphrase rather than a translation). In the *Mishnah*, Meg 4:4, we find these instructions:

> He who reads in the Torah should read no fewer than three verses. He may not read to the translator more than a single verse (of the Law) at a time, so that the translator will not err; and, in the case of the prophetic reading, three. If the reading constitutes three distinct paragraphs, they read them one by one. They skip from place to place in the prophetic readings, but not in the readings from the Torah. And how far may they skip? Only so much that the translator will not have stopped (during the rolling of the scroll).[10]

These Targums are important in the study of exegesis, in that, like the works of Rabbinic literature, they throw light on the understanding of the text and its meaning. How did people of the time see the Bible, its purpose, and how did they go about extracting the meaning from the text.

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[9] J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 13, quoted in R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975, p. 21-22.

[10] J. Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, London UK: Yale University Press, 1988.

Rabbinic Literature

The rabbinic literature is an enormous body of writing that reflects a range of traditions, and which was put together in the period 2-6 AD. It is generally divided into two parts:

(a) *Halakah* – which is about human behaviour. This is how the daily life of the Jew is modified by the Torah, and what these sacred writings mean in everyday life.

(b) *Haggadah* – this is the illustration of the biblical texts, where original stories are expanded, heroes praised, and the full meaning of the text is coloured, for the edification of the reader.

Though these two are clearly distinct, very often the *Haggadah* would also include some halakic details, and the *Halakah* use haggidic pronouncements.[11] The *Mishnah* is the basic document for *Halakah*. It is made up of 63 tractates, called *Massektoth*, which are arranged under six main divisions. These are not generally attached to a specific text of scripture. It was collected, and put together, by Rabbi Judah (called *ha nasi* – the Prince – in Jewish tradition), who was born around 135 AD. The *Tosephta* is basically an expansion of the *Mishnah*, and another body of literature, the *Gemaras* (meaning teachings), takes the *Mishnah* and tries to relate it directly back to the scriptures. It is valuable, because it is a

> homiletical exegesis of scripture; moral maxims, popular proverbs, prayers, parables, fables, tales; accounts of manners and customs, Jewish and non-Jewish; facts and fancies of science by the learned; Jewish and heathen folklore, and all the wisdom and unwisdom of the unlearned.[12]

While never thought of as scripture, these works are important for us, because they highlight the way scripture was understood and used. When one reads through this impressive body of literature, one is faced with the overpowering certainty of the scribes that there is no such thing as a single meaning to a biblical text. Quite the opposite; what comes out clearly is that scripture is a very living, dynamic, and adaptable gift of revelation from

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[11] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 23.

[12] J. H., Hertz, *The Babylonian Talmud: Nezikin I* (1935), p. xviii, cited in Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 24.

God, which speaks to one person, and one situation, in one way, and in a very different way to someone else. Having two messages in the one passage would not necessarily be a difficulty, or a proof of how scripture can err. Rather, it would show that the word of God was indeed “alive and active, cutting like a two-edged sword”.

The main exegetical method, found in the rabbinic writings, was that of *Midrash*. The word comes from the Hebrew verb דָרַשׁ (*dārash*), which means “to seek”, “to resort to”,[13] and covers all forms of interpretation. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol 8) describes *Midrash* as

> An exegesis, which, going more deeply than the mere literal sense, attempts to penetrate into the spirit of the scriptures, to examine the text from all sides, and thereby to derive interpretations, which are not immediately obvious.

It, in fact, covered many different types of commentaries on scripture, as well as exegesis, and virtually any form of writing that, in some way, referred back to scripture. What is important is the use of the word in the Bible. There are many examples in scripture of people “searching” for God, or “inquiring” of God, “looking” for God, and so on (cf. Gen 25:22; Ex 18:15; 1 Sam 9:9, etc.). The verb that is used here is דָרַשׁ (*dārash*). However, in some later references, we find that what is being searched for is no longer God, but the Torah of God. For example, in Ez 7:10, we read: “For Ezra had set his heart to study (לִדְרוֹשׁ (*lid^{e}rōsh*), from the verb דָרַשׁ (*dārash*)) the instruction (the Torah) of the Lord.” Again, in Ps 119:155, we find: “Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not see (דָרַשׁ (*dārash*)) your statutes.” This represents quite a profound change, and an important understanding of the nature of the revealed word of God. Whereas, in the past, the wicked would have been accused of not keeping God firmly in their sights (as we find in Is 9:12 and Jer 10:21), here their condemnation rests on their failure to study the Torah. It is possible, therefore, to see how, once the Bible was canonised, *midrash* became an important tool in the exegete’s arsenal in his search for God. For this is what the study of the scripture had become – not just an analysis to find God’s teaching, but to come into contact with God Himself.

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[13] In the Genesius lexicon, we find that this can then be taken in a figurative way to mean “to read repeatedly”, “to discuss”, and “to search out”.

Midrash, then, is a method that moves well beyond the literal interpretation of scripture, seeing, in the text, a multiple layer of meanings. It sought to capture the spirit of the text, looking at everything that was written down, examining it for its divine significance.[14] It is immediately clear that such methodologies are easily open to a number of quite subjective interpretations, well beyond the meaning of the original text. It was to avoid this danger that strict guidelines were laid down to control the use of *midrash*. It was not just left to the individual to find whatever message he liked from the passage he was studying.[15] Hillel proposed seven laws of exegesis, while Rabbi Ishmael came up with 13. As Hillel represents a pre-Christian exegesis, a list of his rules will be instructive:[16]

1. *Qal wahomer*
   What applies in a less important case will apply in a more important case.
2. *Gezerah shawah*
   Verbal analogy from one verse to another: where the same words are applied to two separate cases it follows that the same considerations apply to both.
3. *Binyan ab mikatub 'ehad*
   Building up a family from a single text: when the same phrase is found in a number of passages, then a consideration found in one of them applies to all of them.
4. *Binyan ab mishene ketubim*
   Building up a family from two texts together: the principle can then be applied to other passages.
5. *Kelal upherat*
   The general and the particular: a general principle may be restricted by a particularisation of it in another verse; or, conversely, a particular rule may be extended into a general principle.

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[14] S. Horovite, "Midrash", in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol 8, [Publishing details not available], p. 548.

[15] Whilst it is true that the formalising of these rules was late, they are pulling into proper methodologies processes that were a part of the exegetical scene for a period well before this time.

[16] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 34f.

6. *Kayoze bo bemaqom 'aher*
   As is found in another place: a difficulty in one text may be solved by comparing it with another which has points of general (though not necessarily verbal) similarity.

7. *Dabar halamed me'inyano*
   A meaning established by context.

These rules represent an important development in hermeneutics, because they rest on an underlying theology of the nature and role of a text of scripture. Clauses, sentences, words, and even single letters, can be taken, independently of setting and context, and examined for meaning. They can be linked with similarly-disjointed words and phrases, and be used to explain any piece of divine revelation. In fact, sometimes passages were joined on the basis of nothing other than an apparent verbal link.[17] This means that any text or word can end up with two or more different meanings, by simply changing the vowels that go with the consonants,[18] leaving out the weak consonants,[19] changing the gutturals,[20] and, sometimes, allowing the Greek reading to be the text that determines the Hebrew meaning or reading.[21] To a modern biblical critic, this seems like an abuse of the given text, but, for the Rabbis, it was a legitimate way of making revelation alive, and relevant to the people for whom it was given. It is about discovering what God is saying now in that text to a people chosen to be His own, and who are in need of direction, help, encouragement, or consolation. Provided one stayed within the agreed rules, there was little danger of being guilty of changing scripture to suit personal whims. Renee Block summarises it (*midrash*) in this way.[22]

1. Its point of departure is scripture; it is a reflection or meditation on the Bible.

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[17] Here we are taking about the Hebrew verb stems and forms, which very often show no such similarity, and change in the English.

[18] b. *Ber* 64a on Is 54:13, reading בֹּנַיִךְ (*bonayikh* = your builders) for בָּנַיִךְ (*banayikh* = your sons).

[19] b. *Meg* 13a on Est 2:7, reading לְבַיִת (*lebayith* = as housewife) for לְבַת (*lebath* = as daughter).

[20] b. *Ber* 32a on Num 11:2, reading עַל (*'al*) for אֶל (*'el*).

[21] b. *Yoma* 75a on Num 11:32, reading וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ (*vayyish^{e}chetūu* = and they slaughtered) for וַיִּשְׁטְחוּ (*vayyish^{e}t^{e}chū* = and they spread).

[22] Vermes, G., *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, Leiden: Brill, 1965, pp. 22f.

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

With *midrash*, it is important to realise that what is being presented is the meaning of scripture. It is not a theology that uses scripture as a starting point, but pure exegesis. Birger Gerhardsson puts this very clearly in what is almost a definition of the science of *midrash*:[23]

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

Modern scholars would not accept the methodology of *midrash*, but it is clear that it is biblical reflection, dependent on the text, which sets out to make the true meaning come alive to its audience. That the original author might not have seen the new message there is not really relevant, as scripture is a gift for a living, believing community. After all, scripture is a gift that is meant to be directing the life of the faithful Jew, and this was difficult, if there were passages that were confusing or unclear. The Rabbis would then move in, not so much to clarify some obscure text, but to highlight its true significance. They would not have seen themselves as changing the

[23] B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son*, Lund: Gleerup, 1966, p. 14.

revealed Word of God, but as men charged with the task of exposing its inner meaning and value.

And so, the Jews studied the scriptures, each one looking for something to guide him, or his community, along the way of God. The Pharisees (from whom the Rabbinic schools developed) were interested in finding out what the Law was saying, and how it was to be applied to the daily lives of the faithful. While doing this, though, they also discovered much about God; who He was, and how He was acting. The Qumran community members went off to the desert to study the scriptures, and to find out what the writings of the past had been saying about themselves and the movements of history. They also developed a complete *halakah* for the governing of their lives. Philo the philosopher searched the texts to find the principles of life that would spell out, for him, the meaning of man's life before God, and in community. He also found, in the great men of the past, stories and values that were examples for the people of his own time to follow and emulate. They were motivated by their belief in these written (and spoken) revelations as being the Word of God. As such, it was not limited by time, place, culture, or language. It was intended to be used, and not kept as a museum piece (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). This was easy to do, because they saw scripture as having a broad significance that went far beyond the literal (though the literal could never be just abandoned). Once they accepted that the writings were inspired by the Spirit, they were unable to then turn around and say that its message was finite. That it was limited to the thoughts of the author, the events it was describing, or the characters involved.

Conclusion

What we have seen so far is merely an indication that, within the Bible itself, and in biblical times, there can be found a number of differing understandings of just what scripture was. These understandings influenced the process of exegesis. But it would be wrong to make any final conclusions of the basis of the above material. In future reflections, we shall need to go further, and look at scripture in the synagogues, typology, the importance of the finalising of the canon, and the early Christian use of scripture. Then we should be in a position to make some conclusions regarding the necessary starting point of exegesis. What we can see emerging is that exegesis meant something very different, from a biblical perspective, to our Western understanding today. While we cannot simply adopt these methodologies, they are important in orienting our minds to what it is we are working on.

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