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Metzenthin, Christian

Jesaja-Auslegung in Qumran

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How were the Holy Scriptures interpreted in the community of Qumran? Thanks to the publication of virtually all ancient manuscripts that were found in the area, it is possible to answer this question with more certainty than some decades ago. It is clear that Isaiah played an important role in the Qumran community. In his new book, based on his dissertation, Christian Metzenthin describes the characteristics of the interpretation of Isaiah in the extrabiblical texts from Qumran. Unfortunately, the so-called Isaiah peshers are quite fragmentary, and in other nonbiblical compositions from Qumran we find only short passages with exegesis of Isaiah. Therefore, Metzenthin first gives an extensive description of the interpretation of Isaiah in other texts from the same period, before directing his attention to the less easily reconstructable interpretations of Isaiah in Qumran.

After the introduction in part 1 (1–14), Metzenthin clarifies the fundamentals of his research in part 2 (“Grundlagen,” 15–111). He shares the traditional view that the scrolls found in the caves came from the neighboring settlement at Khirbet Qumran. The community there seems to have evolved out of a wider religious movement—possibly the Essenes—that was dominated by priests and was critical of the corruption in the temple and the calendar that was used there. It was characterized by a very strict observance of the Torah.

Contrary to most older studies, Metzenthin does not deal with the biblical interpretation in Qumran from a New Testament perspective but rather from the perspective of the Old Testament. He draws attention to the latest developments in Old Testament scholarship: the classical historical-critical approach aiming at reconstructing the original words of the prophets has become obsolete and has given way to a redaction-critical approach that calls attention to inner-biblical exegesis and intends to reveal the motivation of the redactors. Metzenthin stresses that the interpretation of older authoritative texts can be found not only in extrabiblical texts such as the peshers from Qumran but also within the Old Testament itself, for instance, in Isa 65:16b–25, which offers a new interpretation of 43:16–21 and limits the older promises of salvation to the pious. The exegetical texts from Qumran, which probably date from approximately the same period as Isa 65:16b–25, display a similar limitation of the salvation to the own faithful community. Metzenthin shows that the redactors of the prophetic texts claim the same authority for their redactional interpretations as for the prophetic sources themselves: their interpretative additions are not less prophetic than the prophecies that they incorporated. According to Metzenthin, Isa 59:21 implies a legitimation of the redactors' interpretation of the older prophecies of Isaiah. He also describes the interpretation in Dan 9 of the “seventy years of desolation” mentioned in Jeremiah (25:11; 29:10; cf. 2 Chr 36:21; Zech 1:12). He notes that the book of Daniel dates roughly from the same period as many extrabiblical texts from Qumran. The same principles surface there as in the Qumran texts: in order to gain prophetic insight, it is necessary to study the holy books, but they can only be interpreted adequately thanks to new revelations. Several Qumran texts see the Teacher of Righteousness as the endowed mediator of the correct interpretation of Scripture.

The faithful of Qumran were convinced that the prophecies in Scripture related directly to the religious and political developments in their own time, which they saw as the final days. Therefore, their texts contain many quotations not only from the Torah but also from the prophetic books. All the “continuous” peshers that have been found are commentaries on prophetic books. Daniel and Psalms were also seen as prophetic books, just as in the New Testament. The book of Isaiah, however, is the prophetic book from which the nonbiblical books quote most often.

Despite the correspondences between the interpretation of the Scriptures in Qumran and their interpretation in the New Testament, Metzenthin does not assume a direct relationship but suggests that both are examples of a broad Jewish exegetical tradition. In addition, the deuterocanonical and pseudepigraphical books that were known in Qumran (1 Enoch, Letter of Jeremiah, Sirach, Tobit, Jubilees) regard Isaiah and the other prophets first of all as inspired men who announced what would happen in the future. The fictional dating of 1 Enoch and Jubilees long before the prophets prevented the inclusion of quotations from the prophetic books. In both books, however, the explanations of

religious rules contain unmarked references to the prophetic books, but these books do not share the high status of the Torah.

Metzenthin distinguishes different ways in which the biblical literature left its traces in the extra-biblical texts from Qumran (21–23): (1)

Marked quotations: biblical quotations introduced by a formula that does not say explicitly that a biblical passage is quoted. Moses is not mentioned as the speaker of quotations from the Torah. In the case of a quotation from a prophetic book, the prophet remains unmentioned.

Explicit quotations: quotations introduced by a formula revealing that the Bible is the source by indicating that God, Moses, or a biblical prophet is the speaker.

Implicit quotations: series of words that correspond to a passage from the Scriptures but without an introductory formula.

References: series of words with a biblical passage as its source but with only partial correspondence.

Allusions: phrases that remind readers who are familiar with the Bible of the biblical passage by which the author was influenced.

It is difficult to establish with certainty where extrabiblical texts from Qumran allude to biblical passages. Metzenthin decided to limit his research to the marked and explicit quotations. However, he points out that even in these clear cases there may be deviations between the quotations and the source texts, which suggests that the sources were quoted by heart or were adapted deliberately to better suit the proposed interpretation. Many introductions to quotations from the prophetic books do not indicate which prophetic book is being quoted. This fact, as well as the custom to explain Scripture with Scripture, indicates that the prophetic books and Scripture as a whole were seen as a unity.

Part 3 (113–342) discusses the explicit and marked quotations in the extrabiblical Qumran texts and their accompanying clarifications. Metzenthin does not start with the peshers, because they are fragmentary. He describes first the interpretation of Isaiah in the religious law texts. The Damascus Document, which probably did not originate in the Qumran community but in the wider “community of the covenant” from which it evolved, consists of two parts, the admonitions and the laws. Contrary to other scholars, Metzenthin discusses not only the quotations in the admonitions but also those in the second part of the text. On the basis of their introductions and functions, he distinguishes two kinds of explicit and marked quotations: (1) In the case of *Schriftbezug* (scriptural

reference), the quotation is used to interpret a recent or a forthcoming event. Especially in the first part of the Damascus Document, single elements in these quotations may be interpreted allegorically. Most introductions to these quotations contain the verbs דבר “to speak” or אמר “to say” and mention the biblical speaker. (2) In the case of *Schriftbeleg* (scriptural proof), the quotation proves the correctness of a stipulation. Such quotations are commonly introduced by a formula containing the word כתוב “written.” Most of them come from the Torah, but some were taken from the prophetic books or even from the book of Proverbs. In the Damascus Document, the quotations from Isaiah (parts of 24:17; 54:16; twice 7:17) must all be classified as cases of *Schriftbezug*. In the undamaged introductions, Isaiah is always mentioned explicitly. However, God is seen as the actual speaker, as in the case of the Torah.

The different versions of the Community Rules (1QS, etc.) contain only three marked quotations from Scripture. It is unclear why Metzenthin sees the quotation from Exod 23:7 as a case of *Schriftbezug* (180, possibly erroneous) and as a case of *Schriftbeleg* (181, 187). The other quotations come from the book of Isaiah: 2:22 (*Schriftbeleg*) and 40:3. The clause “In the desert prepare the way of the Lord” (40:3) is interpreted as an exhortation to study the Torah and the “desert” as a quiet place for studying the Torah. After comparing 1QS with 4QS^d, where Isa 40:3 is not quoted, Metzenthin concludes that the quotation is a secondary insertion and that the decision of the community to settle in Qumran was not due to a literal interpretation of “desert” in Isa 40:3.

The War Scroll (1QM) quotes two passages from the book of Numbers as well as Isa 31:8a in a prayer to convince the faithful that God will help them during the eschatological war.

After his discussion of the quotations in these better-preserved texts, Metzenthin draws attention to the fragmentary Isaiah peshers. He doubts whether 3Q4 (previously labeled 3QpIsa) is an Isaiah pesh. The five fragmentary manuscripts of Isaiah peshers from Cave 4, however, demonstrate that at least two different Isaiah commentaries existed. The fragments show that the peshers did not comment on every verse but that passages were sometimes skipped. Metzenthin argues that the interpretation of Isa 11 in 4Q161 (4QpIsa^a) is in line with the theology of the Qumran community but that the expected destruction of the enemies does not do justice to the more peaceful source text. What the Isaiah peshers have in common is that they expect salvation only for the faithful and that they relate the prophecies of doom to the Greeks and Romans (the Kittim), and also to the Pharisees and other Jewish apostates. This is in line with Isa 65, where the unfaithful of Israel are excluded from the expected salvation.

The Midrash on Eschatology (4Q174, 4Q177) contains several quotations from Isaiah and from Ezekiel and Daniel, who are all mentioned by name and labeled “prophet” in the

introductions to the quotations. The quotations from the Twelve Prophets, however, are marked but not explicit. Metzenthin shows that the common designation of the text as a “thematic pesher” is appropriate. In his discussion of another thematic pesher, the Melchizedek Midrash (11Q13), Metzenthin argues convincingly that the text may have contained a quotation of Isa 61:1–2 before the extant part of column II.

At the end of part 3 Metzenthin compares the method of pesher exegesis with the interpretation of dreams and visions as described in the Old Testament. He points to the use of the verb פתח and the noun פרוץ (Hebrew) in Gen 40–41 and the verb פשר and the noun פשרא (Aramaic) in Dan 2 and 4–5. These verbs and nouns are used for the divinely inspired interpretation of dreams and visions. Joseph and Daniel were specially endowed individuals capable of revealing the message of the dreams and visions by unraveling the meaning of single elements. There are structural correspondences with the allegorical exegeses in the texts from Qumran, which reveal the profound meaning of single elements in prophetic texts. Metzenthin concludes that the biblical method of dream and vision interpretation exercised a heavy influence on pesher exegesis. He argues that in the Old Testament dreams and visions are the original medium by which the prophets received revelations. The role of the divinely endowed Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran texts is reminiscent of Joseph and Daniel as well as the *angelus interpres* in the book of Zechariah.

In part 4 (343–57) Metzenthin summarizes the results of his analyses and draws conclusions. He points out that, although allegorical exegesis was influenced by the biblical descriptions of dream interpretation, allegorical exegesis is not found in the Old Testament and the deuterocanonical books but arose only after the canonization of biblical books. After the biblical books had reached their canonical shape, the method of inserting redactional clarifications in the texts themselves was given up and replaced by the formation of separate, nonbiblical texts offering the correct interpretation of the canonical texts.

The book concludes with a bibliography and an index of biblical and extrabiblical texts. An index of subjects is, unfortunately, missing.

Since there were already other scholarly studies about the interpretation of the Bible in Qumran, it is quite an achievement that *Jesaja-Auslegung in Qumran* offers several new insights. It appears to be fruitful to compare the peshers with other interpretative literature that was known in Qumran as well as the redactional interventions within the Bible itself.

I add only some minor critical remarks. Metzenthin shows repeatedly that it is not possible to describe Isaiah's interpretation in Qumran without an extensive analysis of the interpretation of the other biblical books. When writing a monograph it is necessary to limit one's goals, but the author himself suggests that it is not so appropriate to devote a study to the interpretation of one particular biblical book. Another point is that it might have been useful to compare the interpretative interventions in the Hebrew text of Isaiah itself, especially in 1QIsa^a. Also, a comparison with the Isaiah Targums might have been fruitful, because they contain early exegesis despite their relatively late fixation in writing. It is clear that further research is necessary, but this research will definitely benefit from Metzenthin's meticulous work.