

HOW MUCH DID THE PROPHETS KNOW?

1 Peter 1:10-12

Early Jewish Exegesis and The Hermeneutical Crisis in Evangelicalism

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Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. 1 Peter 1:10-12

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Introduction

A number of reputable Evangelical scholars speak of the Old Testament prophets as writing "better than they knew." For example, Gleason Archer in his chapter, "The Inspiration of the Old Testament," writes,

The implication [of 1 Pet. 1:10-11] is that the Holy Spirit was in these Old Testament authors, and that he guided them into composing words of infallible truth sure of fulfillment, even though the human authors themselves did not fully know all that these divinely guided words actually signified. Because of verses like these, in interpreting Scripture we must seek to establish not merely the intention of the human author who wrote the words, but also (and more important) the intention of the divine Author who guided in the composition of those words.¹

Hobart Freeman makes the same point:

¹ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed., (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 26.

The true prophet insists that his messages do not originate in his own heart nor result from his own personal reflections, but they are divinely revealed counsels through the Spirit of God....The prophet, under a divine anointing by God's Spirit, declares the word of the Lord received from the Spirit by inspiration or revelation. Sometimes it may run counter to his own preference (Jonah 1-4). Often it is not fully comprehended by the speaker himself (Dan. 7:15; 12:8; cf. I Peter 1:10-11).²

Is it valid to distinguish between the meaning intended by the OT author and the meaning intended by God? Does Peter imply such a distinction in I Peter 1:10-12? This paper argues for a negative answer to both questions.

Jewish Scribal Periods and Literature

The above questions can be formulated in more technical terms based on Jewish methods of interpretation current during the Apostolic era. However, before discussing those methods, it is necessary to review the various biblical, theological, and exegetical writings of Jewish scholars from the time of Ezra to the time of the Masoretes.

The Scribal Periods

- The Sopherim.³ The term Sopherim (meaning *scribes*) is applied to the earliest group of Jewish scribes from the fifth to the third century B.C. (from Ezra to Antigonus of Socho). However, they formed the origin of a guild of custodians of the text of the Old Testament whose activity extended from about 400 B.C. to A.D. 200. The Gospels refer to them often.⁴
- The Zugoth. The Zugoth (meaning *pairs*) were five great pairs of legal scholars and teachers from about 200 B.C. to about 10 B.C. The last and probably greatest pair of teachers were Hillel⁵ (c. 60 B.C.-A.D. 20) and Shammai (c. 50 B.C.-A.D. 30).
- The Tannaim. The Tannaim (from the Aramaic verb *to repeat* and thus meaning *repeaters* or *teachers*) were the rabbinic scholars during the period from about the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 to the death of Rabbi Judah "the Prince" (*ha Nasi*) about A.D. 200.

2 Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 73.

3 The *im* suffix on a Hebrew noun is the masculine plural ending.

4 Matt. 2:4; 5:20; 7:29; 9:3; et al.

5 It is still debated whether Hillel was the grandfather of Gamaliel I, the teacher of Paul (Acts 5:34; 22:3); Robert J. Wyatt, "Hillel," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), II:716.

- The Amoraim. The Amoraim (meaning *speakers* or *explainers*) were the rabbinic scholars that followed the Tannaim during the period from about A.D. 200 to 500.
- The Masoretes. The Masoretes (from *masorah*, meaning *tradition*) were the scholars from about A.D. 500 to A.D. 950. They produced the final form of the text of the Old Testament, inserting the vowel and accent points to preserve the traditional pronunciation of Hebrew, giving each word its exact pronunciation and grammatical form.

During the period after the Maccabean revolt and the cleansing of the Temple in 164 B.C., a number of sects arose within Israel, among them the Pharisees and Sadducees.⁶ The Sadducees were limited to the hereditary high priesthood established by Judas Maccabeus,⁷ and their function was closely tied to the Temple. Many of them were priests, and all the high priests were Sadducees. Until the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, they remained the majority party in the Sanhedrin. When the Temple was destroyed, "the Sadducees lost their function and disappeared from history."⁸

After the destruction of the Temple, only the Pharisees survived from the various sects of the Temple era. This put an end to pre-70 sectarianism, and since the name "Pharisee" reflected that sectarianism, the rabbis began to avoid the term. It is also possible that pre-70 pharisaic beliefs were also modified somewhat.

The Pharisees as a definite group probably came to an end along with the Sadducees and Essenes. What some assume to be a post-70 pharisaism may be an altered form of it, a new rabbinical scribal movement that inherited the best that the *perusim* [Pharisees] had to offer and attempted to preserve it...but which avoided any direct association with Pharisees because of pharisaic involvement in the disastrous revolt and other excesses that had stigmatized them as hypocrites (Mt. 23:23f; T.B. Sotah 22b).⁹

To summarize, the sects of Judaism, specifically the Pharisees and Sadducees, go back to Maccabean times and remain until the destruction of the Second Temple. During that same period, the scribal guild went through the periods of the Sopherim and the Zugoth. Hillel and Shammai, the last

6 The name *Pharisee* comes from the Hebrew פָּרִישׁ, meaning *to make distinct* (BDB, p. 831; its use in Neh. 8:8 is discussed later in this paper under "Midrashic Interpretation") and by extension *to separate*. Thus the name of the sect would mean *separatists*. The etymology of the name *Sadducee* is debated and probably lost (W. J. Moulder, "Sadducees," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988) IV:278).

7 Robert. J. Wyatt, "Pharisees," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), III:826).

8 Moulder, "Sadducees," *ISBE*, IV:279.

9 Wyatt, "Pharisees," *ISBE*, p. 827.

and greatest Zugoth, were both Pharisees. With the post-70 end to sectarianism within Judaism, pharisaism transitioned into the next group of scribal scholars, the Tannaim. However, even though the name was dropped, pharisaism was the foundation of modern rabbinic Judaism.

From Ezra to the Masoretes, Jewish religious literature can be broadly divided into two groups: the earlier (pre-Christian) writings and the rabbinic literature (discussed in the next section). Due to apparent long gaps between origination and codification of some of this material, such a division is fuzzy but still helpful.

Early Jewish Religious Literature

The earlier Jewish literature falls into four categories:

- The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha
- The Qumran material (Dead Sea Scrolls)
- Philo's writings
- The Targumim

Between the Old and New Testaments, a large volume of Jewish religious literature was produced called the *Apocrypha* and *Pseudepigrapha* of the Old Testament.¹⁰ However, this literature, although religious, contains no examples of formal biblical exegesis. Nevertheless, with regard to the apocryphal writings, "in their interpretive retelling of the biblical stories and their extensions of the biblical teachings they reflect some of the nonconformist exegetical principles of the day."¹¹

Between the years 1947 and 1956, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in eleven caves along the Wady Qumran near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. They consist of about 600 identifiable manuscripts, whose dates range from the first century B.C. to the early first century A.D.¹² About one-fourth of the manuscripts are biblical texts, with every canonical book represented except Esther.¹³ However, more important for the study of early

¹⁰ See the classic work, R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 volumes (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913). The Apocrypha (meaning *hidden*) are non-canonical religious writings. 1 Esdras and 1 Maccabees are well-known examples. In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church canonized some of the apocryphal books at the Council of Trent in 1546. The Pseudepigrapha (meaning *false inscription*) are writings whose authorship is falsely ascribed to figures from the past. The book of 1 Enoch is a well-known example and is even cited in Jude 14-15.

¹¹ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 26.

¹² Ibid. According to W. S. Lasor, "Dead Sea Scrolls," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), I:895, the range is from roughly 140 B.C. to A.D. 68.

¹³ The famous Isaiah Scroll (1QIs^a) contains all sixty-six chapters of Isaiah. All the others are partial manuscripts. These texts represent copies of the Hebrew Bible about 1000 years older than the oldest copy previously known (A.D. 980).

Jewish hermeneutics is the discovering of a number of biblical commentaries. The most important is the commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHb), but commentaries were also found on Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Psalm 37.

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.-A.D. 50), as a representative of hellenistic Judaism, is also an important source for the study of early Jewish biblical exegesis. There are thirty-eight extant works of Philo, and thirty-one of those are commentaries on the five books of the Torah or discussions of topics in the Torah.

The Targumim¹⁴ are Aramaic paraphrases (interpretive translations) of all the Old Testament books except Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Jewish tradition has it that the Targumim were transmitted orally since the time of Ezra, but there is no evidence that any were actually committed to writing before around A.D. 200.¹⁵ However, Longenecker expresses a caution regarding the origin and date of the Targumim, while he also stresses their importance for biblical studies:

A great deal of work remains to be done in dating, collating and interpreting targumic materials...Nonetheless, informed opinion believes that the targumic traditions that have been codified into our existing written Targums represent Palestinian and Babylonian Jewish hermeneutics of a very early time, possibly coming from various pre-Christian synagogues. As such, they are of great significance to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis.¹⁶

The Targumim are important to the discussion of early Jewish exegesis

Therefore, the discovery at Qumran is extremely important for textual criticism.
14 The meaning of *targum* is basically *translation* or *interpretation* (B. H. Young, "Targum," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Grand Rapids: William B.

Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988], IV:727). The Hebrew noun תרגום (*targum*) is not used in the OT, but a verbal form occurs in Ezra 4:7, where the exact meaning is debated but might mean "Aramaic annotations for the letter Tabeel and his associates sent to King Artaxerxes" (Young).

15 Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 49. This statement by Archer is limited to the extant paraphrastic Palestinian Targumim originating in the synagogues and preserved through rabbinic effort, for on p. 38 he earlier had referred to a Targum of Job found in cave 11 at Qumran (11QtgJob), which obviously predates A.D. 200 by at least two centuries. Consistent with this distinction, Young argues that "one must take care *not* to identify the Targums surviving today with those of antiquity [from Qumran]" ("Targum," *ISBE*, IV:729; emphasis original). He further argues that the Qumran Targums probably originated in Babylon in the 2nd or 3rd centuries B.C.

16 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 22. According to Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.; original publication date, 1890), p. 614, the Targumim represent "the best ancient Jewish exegesis." Young comments similarly: "The study of the Targums is of paramount importance, for they reflect early Jewish ideas, customs, and Halakah as well as Jewish interpretation of Scripture" ("Targum," *ISBE*, IV:729). More information on Jewish Halakah is given later in this paper under "Rabbinic Literature."

precisely because they are not mere translations but paraphrases that involve interpretation to bring out the meaning of the text for those who listened to them in the synagogues.

The best known Targumim are the Targum *Onkelos* on the Torah, codified by Jewish scholars in Babylon in the third century A.D., and the Targum of Jonathon ben Uzziel on the prophets (the former prophets Joshua to Kings and the latter prophets Isaiah to Malachi), codified in the fourth century A.D., again in Babylon.

Rabbinic Literature

The rabbinical writings represent a vast body of material. It is classified primarily on the basis of codification (that is, material grouped into written units) and includes the Midrashim, the Mishnah, and the Gemara.¹⁷ By subject matter, the content of these writings, and thus Jewish theology as a whole, can also be classified as either halakah¹⁸ or haggadah.¹⁹ Halakah deals with behavior and the regulation of conduct, while haggadah is concerned with the illustration of biblical texts and with edification.²⁰

The *Midrashim*²¹ are the most ancient Jewish exegetical commentaries on Scripture. The practice of explaining the meaning of Scripture began with Ezra.²² These commentaries, however, were oral and probably extemporaneous. They were not put into definite form until much later, likely between about 100 B.C. to A.D. 300.²³ Perhaps the best known is *Midrash Rabbah*, a series of commentaries on the Torah and the Five Scrolls (or *megilloth*, Heb., *scrolls*), Canticles, Ruth, Esther, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. Several other Midrashim are extant.

17 *Talmud* is from the Hebrew verb לָמַד, which in the Piel stem means *to teach* (BDB, p. 540), thus meaning *instruction*. Today the name "Talmud" is used in several different ways. In its narrowest sense it is used of the Palestinian and Babylonian Gemara. More frequently it is used of the Mishnah together with its respective Gemara; that is the way it is used in this paper. Although in its usual sense, "Talmud" implies a body of literature exclusive of the Midrashim, in its broadest sense, it is sometimes used as the name of "rabbinic literature" generally.

18 The Hebrew noun הַלְכָה comes from the verb הָלַךְ, *to walk* (BDB, p. 229), thus meaning *the path* or *the way of walking*. By extension, the idea becomes *walking according to the law* or simply *law*.

19 The Hebrew noun הַגְדָה comes from the verb נָגַד, *to tell* or *to declare* (BDB, p. 616), thus meaning *telling*, *declaration*, or *explanation*. By extension, the idea becomes *lure*, *narrative*, or *story*.

20 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 23.

21 The meaning of "midrash" is discussed later in this paper under "Midrashic Interpretation."

22 See Neh. 8:1-8. This material is also discussed in more detail later in this paper under "Midrashic Interpretation."

23 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 62.

The *Mishnah*²⁴ is Judaism's basic halakic document. According to Jewish tradition, Moses at Mt. Sinai received not only the Written Torah (the five books of Moses) but also the Oral Torah, which interpreted and explained the Written Torah. The two Torahs were of equal status and authority. Moses delivered the Oral Torah to Joshua, who in turn delivered it to the seventy elders. They passed it on to the prophets through whom it eventually came down to the postexilic sages and the schools of Hillel and Shammai. After the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, the Oral Torah was preserved by the Tannaim. Toward the end of the tannaitic era, these oral traditions were codified by Rabbi Judah the Prince to form the Mishnah,²⁵ the first major work of Rabbinic Judaism. Thus in Judaism, the Mishnah is the authoritative, written form of the Oral Law. It is organized into six divisions (*sedarim*), which are subdivided into a total of sixty-three tractates. One of the tractates, called *Aboth*²⁶ (*fathers*), contains the "Sayings of the Tannaim." This Jewish tradition of the origin of the laws in the Mishnah is recorded in that tractate.²⁷

The *Gemara*.²⁸ Differences of opinion regarding interpretations of the Mishnah arose among the Amoraim, the sages that followed the Tannaim. Two large commentaries record their legal discussions and debates. The earlier commentary (c. A.D. 200) was codified by the Amoraim²⁹ at the rabbinic academy at Tiberius in Palestine, while the later commentary (c. A.D. 500) was codified by the Amoraim at the academy at Sora in Babylonia. Thus the Mishnah together with the Gemara from Palestine comprise the *Palestinian Talmud*, and the Mishnah together with the Gemara from Babylonia comprise the *Babylonian Talmud*.

Jewish Hermeneutics in the First Century

24 See the next footnote for the meaning of *mishnah*.

25 *Tanna* is from the Aramaic verb *to repeat* and thus the plural noun *tannaim* means *repeaters* or *teachers*. The cognate Hebrew verb is *שנה*, also meaning *to repeat*, from which *משנה* (*mishnah*) comes, meaning, *second*, and in this context, "second law."

26 Also known as *Pirke Aboth*.

27 The notion that the laws in the Mishnah originated at Sinai probably arose at some point between the late first century B.C. and the first century A.D. "Pharisaism traced its nonbiblical legal and exegetical traditions to the 'tradition of the fathers' or 'unwritten laws.' Yet nowhere do we find the Pharisees asserting that these traditions came from Sinai. The tannaim...asserted that their extrabiblical traditions, many of them inherited from the Pharisees, were part of the oral law, a second Torah given by God to Moses at Sinai along with the written law" (Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple Rabbinic Judaism* [Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1991], p. 178).

28 *Gemara* is from the Aramaic verb *גמר*, *to end* or *to complete* and thus *gemara* means *that which has been learned*.

29 *Amora* is from the Aramaic verb *אמר*, *to speak* and thus *amoraim* means *speakers* or *explainers* of the Mishnah.

Before discussing Jewish hermeneutics in detail, it is helpful to point out that all first century Jewish interpreters, regardless of how their methods or conclusions differed, agreed on four basic points:³⁰

- All believed in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. For them, this meant that the words of the Bible were the very words of God and had meaning for the people in their present circumstances.
- All were convinced that the Torah contained the entire truth of God needed for the guidance of man. The transmitted texts, therefore, were rich in content and contained many meanings.
- Because of the many possible meanings of a given text, all viewed their task to be one of dealing with the plain and obvious meaning of the text as well as the various implied or deduced meanings.
- All considered the purpose of biblical interpretation to be translating into life the instructions of God, making God's word meaningful and relevant to the people in their present situations.

It will be noted that these characteristics are present in each of the methods of interpretation employed by first-century Judaism.

There were four types of Jewish exegesis in the first century: literal, midrashic, pesher, and allegorical.

Literal Interpretation

Literal interpretation is relatively simple to define:

LITERAL INTERPRETATION: interpreting a text in a straightforward way so that the plain, simple, and natural meaning of the text is stated and applied to the lives of the people.

This most basic method of interpretation is found throughout the three major types of first-century Jewish exegetical literature. While rabbinic literature generally contains a midrashic type of exegesis and the sectarians at Qumran primarily practiced what is now called pesher exegesis and Philo is known for his allegorical method of interpretation, yet there are examples of literal interpretation within all three groups of writings.

After about the fourth century A.D., the Aramaic verb *peshat* came to be associated with literal interpretation. In the OT, the corresponding Hebrew verb *פשט* means *to strip off, to make a dash, or to raid*.³¹ However, in the Tannaitic period, the Aramaic verb came to mean *to stretch out, to extend,*

³⁰This summary is taken from Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 19-20.

³¹BDB, pp. 832-833.

to make plain,³² and therefore was used in reference to literal interpretation. Prior to the fourth century, the terms *peshaṭ* and *midrash* seemed to be considered roughly equivalent.

Midrashic Interpretation

The interpretive concept most common in Rabbinic literature, and presumably the one practiced by first-century Pharisees as well, is *midrash*. The Hebrew noun מדרש is derived from the verb דרש meaning *to resort to* or *to seek*.³³ In the MT, מדרש occurs only in 2 Chronicles 13:22 and 24:27. In these two texts, the word is probably used in the sense of *annals* or *treatise* and not as it is used later in reference to rabbinic commentaries on biblical passages.³⁴

The origin of this rabbinic approach to interpreting Scripture is traceable to Ezra in postexilic times: "For Ezra had set his heart to study [Heb., דרש] the law of Yahweh, and to practice it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel."³⁵ Ezra then not only read the law of God to the people, but he explained it:

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the

32 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 31.

33 BDB, p. 205.

34 Roland K. Harrison, "Midrash," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), III:351.

35 Ezra 7:10.

reading.³⁶

Under Ezra's leadership, the Levites "explained"³⁷ the law to the people, "translating" it to give them the "sense" so they could understand it. Therefore, the formal exposition of Scripture historically began with Ezra.³⁸ However, there is considerable disagreement over the meaning of the verb "translating" in the above text. מִפְרָשׁ comes from the verb פָּרַשׁ, whose basic meaning is *to make distinct, to declare*. BDB suggests that "interpreting" is the essential idea in this word as used here,³⁹ but other scholars argue for "translating," that is, translating the Scriptures from Hebrew into the Aramaic understood by the people.⁴⁰

However, for the purpose of this discussion, "sense" is the key word. The noun, שֵׂכֶל, means *prudence or insight*; BDB suggest the Hebrew phrase translated "give the sense" in the above text means "set forth (the) understanding (i.e. the meaning)."⁴¹ Therefore, there is little doubt that *interpretation* did take place at the event recorded in Nehemiah 8, and this laid the foundation for the development of the twofold type of midrashic interpretation, halakah and haggadah.

Ezra seems to have practiced the use of *midrash*, having as his objective in life to study and apply the Torah, as well as to instruct the nation in the ordinances and statutes of the Law (Ezr. 7:10). The necessity for interpreting these precepts for the life of the postexilic theocracy prompted the rise of two varieties of midrash, the *haggadah* or "narration," which interpreted nonlegal materials in an ethical and expository manner, and the *halakah*, which applied the general principles of the OT laws to more specific situations.⁴²

In the broadest sense of the term, *midrash* is roughly equivalent to the English word "exegesis."

36 Neh. 8:1-8.

37 A Hiphil (causative active) form of the verb בִּיַן, *to discern, thus, to cause to understand, to give understanding, to teach*; BDB, p. 107. The word is used again in v. 9.

38 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 604.

39 BDB, p. 831.

40 F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, NICOT* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 217-218. The main arguments are that the people needed translation and that the idea of "interpreting" is already present in the other verb בִּיַן. It is true, of course, that Aramaic, the language of Assyria, Babylon, and Syria, had become the *lingua franca* of the western provinces of the Persian Empire. The question is whether the Jews who returned from Babylon to Palestine under Ezra and Nehemiah still understood Hebrew. Those scholars who would follow BDB argue that Jews even in postexilic Judah understood enough Hebrew and did not need translation.

41 BDB, p. 968.

42 Harrison, "Midrash," *ISBE*, III:351.

But the word *midrash* [also] bears a more limited meaning, namely, interpretation for the purpose of discovering a pertinent rule (in the Mishnah) or theological truth (in Scripture).

Midrash halakah refers to deriving a rule or a law from a verse of Scripture...

Midrash haggadah refers to the "interpretation of a biblical story"...⁴³

The question to answer, however, is how this "derivation" and "interpretation" were performed. What was the method used?

As already pointed out, prior to the fourth century A.D. the terms *midrash* and *peshat* were roughly synonymous. However, "it remains possible to postulate a basic continuity of practice between the earlier Tannaim and the Amoraim."⁴⁴ Thus, although the terms themselves did not take on their final, technical, and distinct meaning until somewhat later, the practice of what came to be described as *midrashic* interpretation did in fact develop at least as early as the Tannaic period. This type of interpretation can be defined as follows:

MIDRASHIC INTERPRETATION: "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."⁴⁵

It is also important to note that the *midrashic* methodology developed over time, as evidenced by three sets of increasingly numerous hermeneutical rules or principles, called *middoth*:⁴⁶

- The seven *middoth* attributed to Hillel (c. 60 B.C.-A.D. 10), under which Pharisaic Judaism operated
- The thirteen *middoth* of Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha (A.D. 110-130)
- The thirty-two *middoth* associated with Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Galili (somewhere between A.D. 130 and 160)

Exegesis thus became more and more fanciful. Through this process, Rabbinic

⁴³ Jacob Neusner, "Talmud," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), IV:720.

⁴⁴ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ S. Horowitz, "Midrash," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, (1904), VIII:548, cited by Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 32-33; emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ *Middoth*, מִדּוֹת, is the plural of the feminine noun מִדָּה. The noun is derived from the verbal root מָדַד, meaning *to measure*. Thus *middoth* means *measures* or *acts of measurement* (BDB, p. 551).

Judaism developed

an atomistic exegesis, which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words, independently of the context or the historical occasion, as divine oracles; combines them with other similarly detached utterances; and makes large use of analogy of expressions, often by purely verbal association.⁴⁷

In halakic matters, the hermeneutical rules were applied more moderately, while in haggadic exegesis the results of using these rules were more extreme.⁴⁸

Despite the common phrase, "Midrashic interpretation," this type of exegesis was not limited to the Midrashim but includes the style of exposition in both the Midrashim and the Gemara.⁴⁹

Longenecker summarizes midrashic interpretation in a simple, concise formula:

That has relevance to This

Here is his explanation:

Midrashic exegesis, in effect, ostensibly takes its point of departure from the biblical text itself (though psychologically it might have been motivated by other factors) and seeks to explicate the *hidden meanings* contained therein by means of agreed upon hermeneutical rules in order to contemporize the revelation of God for the people of God. It may be briefly characterized by the maxim: "That has relevance to This"; i.e., What is written in Scripture has relevance to our present situation.⁵⁰

Peshet Interpretation

The sectarian Qumran community was active from about 140 B.C. to A.D. 68.⁵¹ They considered themselves a divinely elected group living in the final generation before the Messianic age and considered various prophecies of

47 G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, I:248, cited by Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 35.

48 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 35.

49 Ibid., p. 32.

50 Ibid., p. 37; emphasis mine.

51 The buildings of the community were destroyed by the Romans toward the end of June in A.D. 68. The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the nearby caves are the remains of the library of the community. Prior to the attack, the members hid the documents in the caves, probably hoping to return for them. They never came back.

the OT to speak directly of them.

The biblical commentaries among the Dead Sea Scrolls are usually introduced with the Aramaic word פֶּשֶׁר (*peshar*), meaning *interpretation*.⁵² Thus, this term is used today to characterize the type of exegesis applied at Qumran.

One of the characteristics of *peshar* hermeneutics is that everything the OT prophets wrote had a veiled eschatological meaning. How was this hidden meaning to be discovered? Their answer is found in the Habakkuk commentary, 1QpHab.⁵³

God told Habakkuk to write the things that were to come upon the last generation, but he did not inform him when that period would come to consummation. And as for the phrase, "that he may run who reads" [Hab. 2:2], the interpretation [*peshar*] concerns the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God made known all the mysteries [*rāzīm*] of the words of his servants the prophets.⁵⁴

Little is known about this "Teacher of Righteousness." According to references in the Dead Sea Scrolls, he was not the founder of the Qumran movement but was raised up twenty years after its beginning. He was a priest who was given understanding by God to interpret the prophets.

Therefore the Teacher must be recognized as one of the significant leaders in the community, probably the most significant of its spiritual leaders in its earlier days, and possibly the only spiritual leader of any stature in the entire history of the sect.⁵⁵

Therefore, based on the excerpt quoted from the Habakkuk commentary, the central idea of Qumran hermeneutics was the *rāz* (mystery)-*peshar* (interpretation) revelational motif.⁵⁶

PESHER INTERPRETATION: the divine intent of the prophets, the *rāz* (mystery) that God revealed to them, cannot be understood until its *peshar* (interpretation) has been revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness.

52 Curiously, this word פֶּשֶׁר is used in the sense of *interpretation* once (only) in the OT at Eccl. 8:1. Both BPB, p. 833, and *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II:742, call this use a "loan word from the Aramaic." It is curious because, if many conservative scholars are correct, Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, putting its composition about 800 years before Qumran and over three hundred years before the Babylonian captivity.

53 The technical designation of a Dead Sea Scroll begins with the number of the cave in which it was found and includes the abbreviation of the name of the scroll itself. Thus: 1QpHab means the commentary (indicated by "p" for *peshar*) Habakkuk found in Qumran cave 1.

54 1QpHab 7.1-5.

55 LaSor, "Dead Sea Scrolls," *ISBE*, I:893.

56 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 41.

F. F. Bruce explains this concept in more detail as follows.⁵⁷

The interpretation of Old Testament scripture exhibited by the Qumran commentaries and related documents is based upon the following principles:

(a) God revealed his purpose to His servants the prophets, but this revelation (especially with regard to the time of the fulfilment of His purpose) could not be properly understood until its meaning was made known by God to the Teacher of Righteousness, and through him to his followers.

(b) All that the prophets spoke refers to the time of the end.

(c) The time of the end is at hand.

These principles are put into operation by the use of the following devices:

(a) Biblical prophecies of varying date and reference are so interpreted as to apply uniformly to the commentator's own day and to the days immediately preceding and following--that is, to the period introduced by the ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness and the emergence of the eschatological community of the elect.

(b) The biblical text is atomized so as to bring out its relevance to the situation of the commentator's day; it is in this situation, and not in the natural sequence of the text, that logical coherence is to be looked for.

(c) Variant readings are selected in such a way as to best serve the commentator's purpose.

(d) Where a relation cannot otherwise be established between the text and the situation to which it is believed to refer, allegorization is pressed into service.

One final point in this survey of Peshet interpretation must be added. According to Longenecker, "the crucial question in defining peshet interpretation has to do with the point of departure."⁵⁸ It is precisely in its point of departure that peshet exegesis differs from rabbinic or midrashic exegesis. Both deal with the relationship between biblical prophecies and (then) current events. However, midrashic interpretation begins with the biblical text and relates it to the current event:

⁵⁷F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 77.

⁵⁸Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 43.

That has relevance to *This*

Pesher interpretation begins with the current event and relates it to the biblical text:

This is *That*

However, for the purpose of this paper, it is most important to understand the implication of pesher interpretation: this type of interpretation is impossible without a new revelation beyond and subsequent to the revelation given to the prophets.

Biblical interpretation at Qumran, then, was considered to be first of all revelatory and/or charismatic in nature. Certain of the prophecies had been given in cryptic and enigmatic terms, and no one could understand their true meaning until the Teacher of Righteousness was given the interpretive key. In a real sense, they understood the passage in question as possessing a *sensus plenior* which could be ascertained only from a revelational standpoint...⁵⁹

The concept of a *sensus plenior*, meaning *fuller sense* or *deeper sense*, is a key issue in determining the type of exegesis performed by the NT writers and the correct interpretation of 1 Peter 1:10-12. It is discussed later in this paper under "The Interpretation of the Old Testament."

Allegorical Interpretation

Philo is the name most often associated with Jewish allegorical interpretation of the OT.⁶⁰ However, he did not originate this method of interpretation, nor was he the last to practice it.⁶¹ What is the motivation for an allegorical interpretation of Scripture?

The allegorical explanation could come into existence only among a people possessed of sacred books, and only at a time when the spokesmen and leaders of that nation had already chosen for their possession another philosophy than that presented by the literal meaning of the written revelation.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁶⁰ Among the Church Fathers, the name most often associated with allegorical interpretation is Origen (c. 185-254), who was also from Alexandria. However, this method of exegesis dominated in the Christian church until the Reformation, with only a few exceptions such as the Syrian school at Antioch.

⁶¹ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 614; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 47.

⁶² Gföerer, *Philo und die alexandrinische Theosophie*, I:69, cited by Terry, *Biblical*

For Philo, as an Alexandrian Jew, this philosophy was hellenism. He was greatly influenced by both Stoic and Platonic ideas, and his goal was to vindicate the Jewish Scriptures and theology before the court of Greek philosophy. In pursuit of this goal, he did occasionally use literal interpretation, but his primary method was allegorical.

Philo usually treated the Old Testament as a body of symbols given by God for man's spiritual and moral benefit, which must be understood other than in a literal and historical fashion. The *prima facie* meaning must normally be pushed aside--or even counted as offensive--to make room for the intended spiritual meaning underlying the obvious; though...at times he seems willing to consider literal and allegorical exegesis as having "parallel legitimacy." In the main, however, exegesis of Holy Writ was for him an esoteric enterprise which, while not without its governing principles, was to be dissociated from literal interpretation.⁶³

To understand this method, it is important to distinguish between a literary allegory and allegorical interpretation. A literary allegory is an extended metaphor, as a parable is an extended simile. It is intentionally constructed by its author to communicate a message under concrete or material forms. Allegorical interpretation, by contrast, can be defined as follows:

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION: the reworking of a passage, which has a *prima facie* meaning intended by the author, in such a way as to bring out another hidden, symbolic meaning.⁶⁴

Here are two examples of allegorical interpretation from Philo:

- On planting the garden paradise in Eden (Gen. 2:8), Philo commented as follows: "Virtue is called a Paradise metaphorically, and the appropriate place for the Paradise is Eden; and this means luxury; and the most appropriate field for virtue is peace and ease and joy, in which real luxury especially consists."⁶⁵
- The Mosaic dietary laws allowed Israel to eat animals that "divide the hoof" (e.g., Lev. 11:3). About this, Philo said, "For the division of the hoof and the separation of the claws are intended to teach us that we must discriminate between our individual actions with a view to the practice of virtue."⁶⁶

Hermeneutics, p. 611.

⁶³ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 46.

⁶⁴ Adapted from Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 49, n. 111.

⁶⁵ Cited by Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 613.

⁶⁶ Cited by Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 47.

The Interpretation of the Old Testament

The question posed in the introduction to this paper can now be raised again: Based on the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, is it valid to distinguish between the meaning intended by the OT author and the meaning intended by God? Does Peter imply such a distinction in 1 Peter 1:10-12?

However, this question can now be stated in more technical terms.

- What method or methods of interpretation of the Old Testament did the writers of the New Testament employ?
- Can we reproduce the exegesis of the New Testament writers today?⁶⁷

All agree that there are examples of literal interpretation of the Old Testament practiced by the writers of the New Testament. If the answer to the first question is that this was the *exclusive* method employed, then the answer to the second question is quite simply yes.⁶⁸

However, in view of the various methods of exegesis practiced within the broader Jewish community at the time the New Testament was written, a series of questions critical to hermeneutics today follow immediately:

- Did any of the New Testament writers engage in midrashic, pesher, or allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament?
- Did the prophets themselves know the correct interpretation of their own writings?
- Is specific (new) revelation required in order to apply midrashic, pesher, and allegorical exegesis to the Old Testament?

Literal Interpretation

The word "literal" in the phrase "literal interpretation" is, of course, ambiguous. Used in its strictest sense, it would preclude the recognition of figures of speech and symbolism in writing. However, in the case of hermeneutics, it is used in a broader sense and should be construed to mean simply *the intent of the author*.

⁶⁷ Longenecker formulated this question in his paper, "Can We Reproduce the Exegesis of the New Testament?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970):3-38; he later expanded his treatment of this question into the full-length book, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*.

⁶⁸ Of course, there is a proviso here. Conservative Christians believe that under the leading and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the NT writers were preserved from error in the application of the principles of literal interpretation. Today we can use these very same principles, but we can make mistakes in their application to any given OT passage.

The thesis of this paper can be stated in the following propositions:

- Any given Old Testament biblical text has and can have but one single meaning.⁶⁹
- That single meaning of the text is the meaning intended by the human author, and it alone has divine authority.⁷⁰
- The meaning of an Old Testament text can be derived by a careful application of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, that is, by using the "the laws of grammar and the facts of history."⁷¹

69 Milton Terry writes: "The hermeneutical principles which we have now set forth necessarily exclude the doctrine that the prophecies of Scripture contain an occult [secret or hidden] or double sense....We may readily admit that the Scriptures are capable of manifold practical *applications*....But the moment we admit the principle that portions of Scripture contain an occult or double sense we introduce an element of uncertainty in the sacred volume, and unsettle all scientific interpretation" (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 493 [emphasis his]). Terry goes on to cite Dr. Owen: "If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all." J. C. Ryle emphasizes the same point: "I hold undoubtedly that there is a mighty depth in all Scripture, and that in this respect it stands alone. But I also hold that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and that our first object should be to discover that sense, and adhere rigidly to it. I believe that, as a general rule, the words of Scripture are intended to have, like all other language, one plain, definite meaning" (*Expository Thoughts on St. Luke* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007; original publication date, 1858], I:383).

70 Apart from a mechanical dictation theory of inspiration, this proposition follows logically from the first. If there is only one meaning to an OT text, it must be meaning intended by the prophet who wrote it. "Notice what is clearly at stake here. Do the principal author (God) and the instrumental author (the Scripture writer) supply us with one truth-intention, whose meaning is to be found in the intention of the human writer and the sense conveyed by his words or with two or more independent or related meanings, of which one or more of the meanings are totally unknown to the human writer?....Therefore, we look for the divine intention in these and other predictive words [of the prophets], but the divine truth-intention *as found in that single truth-intention of the human author* through whom God was pleased to reveal these words" (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Evangelicalism': Promise Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13[1970], pp. 94-95, emphasis mine).

71 "The grammatico-historical sense of a writer is such an interpretation of his language as is required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history" (Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 203). Terry describes the grammatical-historical method of interpretation in more detail as follows: it has as its "fundamental principle...to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning which the writers intended to convey. It applies to the sacred books the same principles, the same grammatical process and exercise of common sense and reason, which we apply to other books. The grammatico-historical exegete...will investigate the language and import of each book....He will master the language of the writer, the particular dialect that he used, and his particular style and manner of expression. He will inquire into the circumstances under which he

- While most biblical subjects are larger than any single Old Testament author's contributions to that subject, the biblical authors were the recipients of divine revelation and therefore wrote what they indeed had heard, seen, and now both knew and understood.⁷²
- These were the assumptions made by the New Testament writers when they cited Old Testament texts, and their interpretations of those texts was based on a grammatical and historical analysis of them.

The grand conclusion from these propositions: We can certainly reproduce this method of exegesis used in the New Testament today!

For contrast, here are some alleged examples of the New testament writers employing then-current Jewish methods of interpretation.

Allegorical Interpretation

Paul allegedly engaged in allegorical interpretation in Galatians 4:21-31. Note verse 24:

This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.

Longenecker draws the following conclusion:

We must reject the view that Hagar and Sarah are here treated merely typologically. Allegorical interpretation has entered in. In fact, Gal. 4:21-31 is a highly allegorical representation of Old Testament history. While it is true that the apostle begins with the historical situation, he definitely goes beyond the literal and primary sense of the narrative to insist upon hidden and symbolic meanings in the words.⁷³

If this is what Paul is doing, then this type of exegesis clearly requires revelation (divine inspiration), and we cannot reproduce it today.

Midrashic Intepretation

wrote, the manner and customs of his age, and the purpose or object which he had in view" (p., 173).

72 If grammatical-historical exegesis can unlock the writer's meaning, then he must have constructed his sentences in order to convey that meaning in the first place and therefore understood it himself. However, the crucial text on this question is 1 Peter 1:10-12. This text is used by some to argue that the OT writers often did *not* understand the true meaning of their message. This paper argues that what Peter said proves just the opposite.

73 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 127.

Numerous scholars argue that midrashic exegesis occurs throughout the New Testament. Most of the examples cited involve alleged applications of Hillel's seven *middoth*.⁷⁴ However, several of these hermeneutical principles are simply common sense. Therefore, examples of those common-sense principles prove little with regard to a specific use of midrashic techniques.

Rabbinical midrash, however, includes more than just Hillel's seven principles of hermeneutics. It also includes the idea that there are "deeper meanings" than the literal sense in texts of the Old Testament. For example, Paul in Galatians 3:16 allegedly finds a deeper meaning in the word "seed" used in Genesis 13:15.

All agree that Paul is not presenting anything new here when he draws attention to the fact that the grammatically *singular* σπέρμα, as well as its Hebrew counterpart זרע in Genesis 13:15, can be used in either a singular or plural *sense*. Everyone knew this. Although the word was normally used in the sense of a *generic singular*, indicating the numerically plural nation to come from Abraham (e.g., Gen. 13:16; 15:5), it could be just as legitimately applied to Isaac personally in the sense of a *specific singular*. However, what is not explicitly in the Genesis texts, and what represents Paul's alleged midrash, is his conclusion that זרע means the coming Messiah, for which reason the word *had* to be singular.

Paul "deliberately furnishes them [the Galatians] with a deeper application" of the promises of God made to Abraham and his "seed."⁷⁵

Again, if Paul has "found" something "deeper" than the literal meaning of the Genesis text, this type of exegesis also requires revelation (divine inspiration), and we cannot reproduce it today.⁷⁶

Pesher Interpretation

The argument as to whether we can reproduce the exegesis of the New Testament today centers mostly on the alleged presence of a *rāz-pesher* approach on the part of its writers. Why does this battle center mostly on pesher exegesis? First, the examples generally cited of allegorical and

⁷⁴As the original seven principles behind midrashic exegesis were later expanded into thirteen and then thirty-two, the method became more and more fanciful. However, the original seven formed the basis of rabbinic exegesis during the first century when the NT was written.

⁷⁵Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 124, citing D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1965), p. 441.

⁷⁶Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 218, suggests that even in those cases where midrashic exegesis does not include "hidden meanings" but simply reflects various rabbinical patterns of thought and argumentation, we should not attempt to reproduce those methods of handling a text. They are too closely tied to the cultural context in which Paul wrote.

midrashic methods of interpretation are rather easy to explain without recourse to those forms of Jewish exegesis. Second, promoters of the argument that the writers used Jewish methods claim that peshet interpretation was the predominant method used.

Literal and midrashic modes of exegesis were indeed features of early Christian preaching. But what appears to be most characteristic in their treatment of Scripture is peshet interpretation.⁷⁷

Third, the *rāz-peshet* pattern explicitly requires that the peshet (interpretation) be given by divine revelation, and the New Testament writers were, according to (conservative) Christian theologians, in a position to receive it.

One of the characteristics of the peshet exegesis practiced at Qumran was the "this is that" motif: the exegete begins with a current event and relates it to a biblical text, God having revealed the true peshet of that text to him. Therefore, Peter, using this very phrase, supposedly engages in this approach to Old Testament Scripture when he applies Joel 2:28-32 (MT 3:1-5) to the event that occurred at Pentecost.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

But **THIS IS THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN** [ΤΟΥΤΟ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΤΟ ΕΙΡΗΜΕΝΟΝ] by the prophet Joel;

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke:

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

⁷⁸ Acts 2:14-21. Of course, it hardly seems necessary to point out that the phrase "this is that" is not limited in its meaning to the context of peshet exegesis.

In the same sermon, Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11, giving another alleged example of peshar exegesis:

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.
DAVID SAID ABOUT HIM [Δαυιδ λεγει εις αυτον]:

"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will live in hope,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence."

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, **HE SPOKE OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE CHRIST**, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.⁷⁹

Note carefully what Peter said here: David, he claims, spoke of the Messiah when he (David) wrote, "You will not abandon *me* to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Peter concludes that in this Psalm David "spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah." If this is an example of peshar exegesis, then God gave David a *rāz* (a mystery): David wrote that sentence, but about whom was he speaking? Himself? Or someone else? The mystery could not be deciphered. Then God gave Peter the *peshar* (the interpretation): David was talking about the Messiah.

If this was what actually took place in Peter's sermon, then, clearly we cannot reproduce this exegesis today.

1 Peter 1:10-12 is often cited to confirm that peshar exegesis was the primary method used in the New Testament in its interpretation of Old Testament Scripture.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to

Peter might easily have said "this is that" because he believed Joel's prophecy, interpreted literally, had direct fulfillment on the day of Pentecost. The phrase does seem to fit!

⁷⁹Acts 2:24-31.

themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

F. F. Bruce claims that in this passage Peter expresses a view of the Old Testament "strikingly similar" to the view of the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran. He adds that

Peter's claim [in 1 Peter 1:10-12] is, in effect, that things had been concealed from the prophets--things vitally affecting the interpretation of the words which the prophets spoke--[but which things] had been revealed to himself and to his fellow apostles.⁸⁰

Longenecker expresses the same view:

[1 Peter 1:10-12] is a clear-cut *peshar* attitude expressed toward the nature of Old Testament prophecy, which attitude very likely reflects the conviction of the earliest believers as well....While the terms "mystery" and "interpretation" are not employed, the thought is strikingly parallel to that of the *rāz-peshar* motif in the Dead Sea Scroll.⁸¹

The logic of this position is simple: if the prophets wrote a "mystery" (*rāz*) given to them by God that they did not themselves understand, then the correct interpretation of what they wrote cannot be derived by the application of grammatical-historical hermeneutics to the prophetic text. Therefore, God must reveal the correct interpretation (*peshar*) to the writers of the New Testament, and we cannot reproduce their exegesis today.

Longenecker draws this conclusion in point-blank fashion:

As students of history we can appreciate something of what was involved in their [the writers of the NT] exegetical procedures, and as Christians we commit ourselves to their conclusions. But apart from a revelatory stance on our part, I suggest that we cannot reproduce their *peshar* exegesis.⁸²

Of course, the logic of this position is based on a highly dubious premise. Again, the thesis of this paper is that an Old Testament text has but one meaning and that is the meaning intended by the human author, which alone has divine authority.

Sensus Plenior

⁸⁰F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (London: Tyndale, 1960), p. 76, cited by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses in the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 18-19.

⁸¹Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 99.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 218.

Closely related to the mechanism of *rāz-pesher* exegesis is the notion developed within Roman Catholic circles that Old Testament Scripture often has a *sensus plenior* (*deeper sense* or *fuller sense*). As an advocate of this view, Catholic scholar Raymond E. Brown defines *sensus plenior* as follows:

The deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, that is seen to exist in the words of Scripture when they are studied in the light of further revelation or of development in the understanding of revelation.⁸³

By contrast, Brown defines *literal sense* as "the sense which the human author directly intended and which his words convey."⁸⁴

However, Brown's definition of *sensus plenior* does not tell the whole story. As this concept has been developed in Roman Catholic hermeneutics, its use does indeed involve revelation in a way that precludes individual scholars today from discovering the *sensus plenior* of an Old Testament text. Longenecker explains:

A number of Roman Catholic scholars have recognized that the New Testament frequently employs the Old Testament in a way that gives to the biblical texts a fuller meaning, and have credited the origin of this *sensus plenior* in one way or another to the historic Jesus. Explicating a doctrine of the dual basis of revelational authority, they then go on to argue that in like manner theology today can carry on the New Testament exegetical procedures--but only as interpreters are guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the visible expression of the "Mystical Body of Christ."⁸⁵

The problem with this concept of *sensus plenior* is not so much that it requires the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic church to apply it. The real problem is that the existence of a "deeper meaning" not clearly intended by the human author is postulated in the first place. The error that both *sensus plenior* and the *rāz-pesher* motif have in common is the assumption that an Old Testament text has a meaning beyond its literal meaning that was unknown to the human author who wrote it.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to demonstrate *in extenso* how the New Testament writers do in fact apply the principles of grammatical-historical hermeneutics in all the examples cited that supposedly represent midrashic, pesher, allegorical, and *sensus plenior* methods. Walter Kaiser has written an entire book to do just that.⁸⁶ However, determining the exact meaning of Peter's statement about the prophets is the main purpose of this paper.

83 Raymond E. Brown, "Hermeneutics," *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), II:615, cited by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Epangelicalism': Promise Theology," p. 92, f. 6.

84 Ibid.

85 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 215-216.

86 Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*.

The Interpretation of 1 Peter 1:10-12

Does 1 Peter 1:10-12 shed any light on the issue of the method or methods of exegesis used by the New Testament writers? Did the prophets understand their own writings? As already noted, a number of scholars argue that Peter in this passage teaches that the prophets did not (always) understand their own writings. This in turn implies a method of exegesis in the New Testament that goes beyond literal interpretation. The current reigning champion among many scholars is pesher exegesis. But does Peter really teach what is claimed?

The context of 1 Peter 1:10-12 speaks of salvation (v.9): "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (κομιζόμενοι τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν). It is specifically this subject--the salvation possessed by his readers--that Peter in 1:10-12 relates to the prophets: "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully (περὶ ἧς σωτηρίας ἐξεζήτησαν καὶ ἐξηραύνησαν προφῆται). What does Peter say was the nature of this search?

Peter specifically relates the salvation of his readers to the work of the Messiah: "the sufferings of Christ [Messiah] and the glories that would follow." Since Peter claims that the prophets were searching, there was something about this Messianic salvation that the prophets did not know. The critical phrase in determining what that was is in verse 11: ἐραυνῶντες εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν. Here is a sampling of the various ways it has been translated by the major versions:

KJV: "...searching what, or what manner of time..."
ASV: "...searching what time or what manner of time..."
RSV: "...inquired what person or time..."
NASB: "...seeking to know what person or time..."
NEB: "...tried to find out what was the time, and what the circumstances..."
NIV: "...trying to find out the time and circumstances..."

These translations divide into two groups: according to the RSV and NASB, the prophets were ignorant of both the Person of whom they prophesied and the time of fulfillment; the KJV, ASV, NEB, and NIV, on the other hand, have the prophets ignorant only of the time of fulfillment and possibly the general character of that time.

The issue here is primarily one of Greek grammar. Both τίνα and ποῖον are interrogative pronouns; καιρὸν is a masculine accusative singular noun meaning *time*. The pronoun ποῖον is also a masculine accusative singular form and clearly modifies καιρὸν. The construction ποῖον καιρὸν therefore means "what kind of time" or possibly just "what time."

The crucial question is to decide which of the following options is correct:

- Is τίνα to be dissociated from καιρὸν, leaving only ποῖον to modify καιρὸν?
- Are both τίνα and ποῖον intended to modify καιρὸν?

If the former, the object that τίνα modifies is absent and has to be filled in. Since τίνα is accusative singular, either masculine or feminine (but not neuter), its meaning would then have to be "whom" or "what person." The overall result would be "to whom or what time" or as the NASB has it, "what person or time." If the latter, the overall result would be "what [time] or what kind of time."

The standard grammars favor the second interpretation. For example, A. T. Robertson writes:

Sometimes τίς and ποῖον are used together. It might seem at first as if the distinction were here insisted on, as in εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν (1 Peter 1:11) and ποῖον οἶκον -- ἢ τίς τόπος (Ac. 7:49). But tautology seems plain in the last example and may be true of 1 Peter 1:11, but not certainly so.⁸⁷

Blass, DeBrunner, and Funk suggest that

Both [τίς and ποῖος] may be combined (tautology for emphasis?): εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν (1 P 1:11).⁸⁸

Similarly, Moulton/Turner similarly take τίς and ποῖον in 1 Peter 1:11 to be "tautologous for emphasis."⁸⁹

If τίνα and ποῖον represent a tautology (that is, if τίνα = ποῖον), then they both modify καιρὸν. This leads to the meaning "what time," or if a nuance is intended, "what [time] or what kind of time." In their lexicon, that is the way Arndt and Gingrich translate the phrase: "εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν to what time or what kind of time."⁹⁰

Therefore, according to this analysis, Peter tells us that when the

87A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th edition (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 735-36.

88F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, revised and translated by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 155, par. 298 (2).

89 James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. III, *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 48.

90 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 691.

prophets were writing about the Messiah and his work, they wondered only about the *time*, and possibly *the kind of time or general character of the time* in which their predictions would be fulfilled. They were not wondering who it was they were speaking about or what he would do. They were not wondering about what their message meant that they had just finished writing! In his commentary, A. T. Robertson states,

The prophets knew what they prophesied, but not at what time the Messianic prophesies would be fulfilled.⁹¹

In fact, the complete text of 1 Peter 1:10-12 states no less than five things the prophets did know and understand:

- They knew when they were speaking of the Messiah who was to come.
- They knew when they were predicting his sufferings.
- They knew when they were predicting his glories.
- They knew the correct order: the sufferings first and then the glory.
- They knew that their message and ministry extended to future believers who would see the advent of the Messiah.

This last point is directly related to the time issue into which the prophets inquired. Peter states that their searching and inquiries did not go unanswered. God "revealed to them" that their ministry would most directly profit those believers living during the time of the Messiah.

91A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), VI:85. Commentary testimony for this view could be multiplied and would include the following: Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958; original publication date, 1849), IV:337: "what or what sort of [time]." J. H. A. Hart, *The First Epistle General of Peter in The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols, gen. ed., W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970; original publication date, 1901), V:47, first mentions the alternate view: "It is possible also to dissociate τίνᾱ from καιρὸν and to render *in reference to whom and what time the Spirit signified...*" However, his second (preferred?) view is the view taken in this paper and interprets the statement to mean the following: "Failing to discover *at what time*, the prophets asked *at what kind of time...*" Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), *First Peter in the Greek New Testament*, p. 30, interprets the verse as follows: "What they [the prophets] looked for was as to *what time* or if they could not find that, *what kind of time* would usher in this particular unique salvation." Again, Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 80, writes, "They [the prophets] tried by search and investigation to discover more concerning the date and the character of the times thus indicated. It was revealed to them that their ministry would most directly profit not their own age but those for whom the foretold grace was intended."

Based on Peter's discussion in 2:21-25, there is little doubt that he was thinking primarily of Isaiah 53 when he speaks of the prophets ministering the gospel to his readers.⁹² Therefore, again according to Peter, Isaiah knew he was speaking about the Messiah, about his sufferings, about his substitutionary atonement as the final and efficacious sacrifice for sin to secure the salvation of his people, and about his glory to follow.

To broaden the prophetic scope a bit, the prophets, lacking only the time element related to their message, knew and fully understood everything else. There is no denial in 1 Peter 1:10-12 that the prophets knew *that* they spoke of Messiah or *when* they spoke of Messiah. This hardly fits the notion that a *peshet* or *sensus plenior* had to be divinely distinctly revealed to the New Testament writers in order to achieve a correct interpretation of the prophets. Instead, the correct interpretation of the Old Testament prophets is derivable today, as it was in apostolic times, by a careful application of the principles of grammatical-historical hermeneutics.

The Apologetic Value of the Old Testament

The hermeneutical issues discussed in this paper are neither trivial nor inconsequential. They go to the heart of the apologetic use of the Old Testament Scriptures. Can fulfilled prophecy be used to establish the fact that the prophetic message was given by God to his prophets? That Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah? That Christian claims in general are true? If the divine meaning of Old Testament texts cannot be determined by a grammatical and historical analysis but rather requires subsequent divine revelation to unlock it, then the Old Testament in general, and fulfilled prophecy in particular, is useless for apologetic purposes.

In 1852 Alexander McCaul wrote a book entitled *The Messiahship of Jesus*, one of the best books on Messianism I have found. McCaul lived and wrote long before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, but the main threat to valid hermeneutics was still present in his day: allegations of allegorical and midrashic methods of interpretation employed by the writers of the New Testament. Here is what McCaul had to say about the relationship of this hermeneutical debate and the apologetic value of the Old Testament.

Yes, if we would not be accounted as deceivers--if we have any regard for consistency--if we would place our own faith above suspicion, or

⁹² Peter quotes directly from Isaiah 53. "Christ also suffered for us" (1 Pet. 2:21) and "...wounded for our transgressions...bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5); "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth" (2:22) and "He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (53:9); "When he was reviled, did not revile in return" (2:23) and "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (53:7); "Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (2:24) and "And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6) and "He bore the sin of many" (53:12); "By whose stripes you were healed" (2:24) and "By his stripes we are healed" (53:5); and "You were like sheep going astray" (2:25) and "All we like sheep have gone astray" (53:6).

preserve a single hope of ever communicating it to the Jewish people--if we would follow the footsteps of our Lord, we must adhere to the old Biblical method of interpretation. [Do] we endeavour by an appeal to the prophecies to prove that the Scriptures are the word of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world? Upon what is this appeal founded? What is presupposed as a first principle in the whole investigation? What is the cornerstone of the whole fabric of our argument? Beyond all doubt, the turning-point--the root and foundation of our proof--is, first, the supposition that the prophecies are simple in their enunciation--unambiguous in their language, and of easy understanding, and secondly, that the fulfilment has taken place according to their unsophisticated grammatical meaning. Without these indispensable conditions, a proof of the Christian religion from prophecy is impossible. Introduce allegory and mystery--change the meaning of words--tell the unbeliever, that to prove Christianity it is necessary to affix an unusual meaning to the names of men, and to the geographical designation of cities and countries, he will laugh you and your argument to scorn; he will regard you, and that with good reason, as one of those two characters with which mankind is least in love. The whole force of our argument, when we refer to prophecies fulfilled before our eyes, or to those whose accomplishment is recorded in the New Testament, depends upon the unambiguity of the prediction, and the exactness of its accomplishment.⁹³

McCaul's point is especially important when it comes to Jewish evangelism. For example, Longenecker commits a grave error with serious consequences when he writes,

Philip appears in Acts 8:32-35 preaching Jesus to the Ethiopian Eunuch on the basis of Isaiah 53:7f, and 1 Pet.2:22-25 employs a number of verses from Isa. 53 to explicate Christ's example of suffering. But such a use of Isaiah's "Servant Song," while never accepted by Judaism to be applicable to the Messiah, could very well have been fixed quite early in Christian thought, stemming from Jesus' own reinterpretation of the passage.⁹⁴

First, it is an inexcusable historical error to claim that Isaiah 53 was "never accepted by Judaism to be applicable to the Messiah." Until Rashi (A.D. 1040-1105), Isaiah 52:13-53:12 was in fact almost universally interpreted by Jewish writers as referring to the Messiah.⁹⁵

93 Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus: The Concluding Series of the Twelve Lectures on the Prophecies* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1952), pp. 92-93.

94 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 101-102.

95 For extensive citations from Jewish literature, see the following references: David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), pp. 225-31, 269-74; also his book, *The Servant of Jehovah* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1922), pp. 10-15, 143-58; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1886), II:727; E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1856), II:310-19.

Second, to claim that Jesus had to "reinterpret" Isaiah to make it refer to himself removes all possible use of Isaiah 53 to establish the Messiahship of Jesus. Here is the reason: Christians claim that Isaiah 53 predicts the atoning death of the Messiah and that it was fulfilled by Jesus. What thoughtful Jewish person would be persuaded of this view if the argument for it were based on some Christian "reinterpretation" of Isaiah 53? As McCaul said, he would "laugh us to scorn" and rightly so! Christians can claim Isaiah 53 in defense of the Messiahship of Jesus only if the argument is based on a clearly discernible literal meaning of this passage that anyone can see for himself.

So, contrary to Longenecker, the real situation regarding Isaiah 53 is as follows. According to Walter Kaiser,

Undoubtedly, this is the summit of OT prophetic literature. Few passages can rival it for clarity on the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah.⁹⁶

Over a hundred years earlier, Franz Delitzsch was even more expressive on the role of this magnificent prophecy and its use in Jewish evangelism:

How many are there whose eyes have been opened when reading this "golden *passional* of the Old Testament evangelist," as Polycarp the Lysian calls it! In how many an Israelite has it melted the crust of his heart! It looks as if it had been written beneath the cross upon Golgotha, and was illuminated by the heavenly brightness of the full שב לימיני ["sit at my right hand," from Ps. 110:1, MT, v. 2]. It is the unravelling of Ps. xxii and Ps. cx. It forms the outer centre of this wonderful book of consolation (ch. xl.-lxvi.), and is the most central, the deepest, and the loftiest thing that the Old Testament prophecy, outstripping itself, has ever achieved.⁹⁷

It is difficult to see how Isaiah 53 could have such a profound effect on Jewish readers if it required "reinterpretation" by Jesus.

At the heart of the debate over the Messiahship of Jesus is a large number of Old Testament Messianic passages that either prove or disprove this claim. For those passages to be used in this role, both sides must agree on the method of determining the meaning of those passages. That method must be grammatical-historical exegesis, or the passages become useless to both sides.

This is how the New Testament writers engaged in the Messianic debate. Their arguments were not based on "hidden meanings" in the prophetic texts.

⁹⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 178.

⁹⁷Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols., (1861, reprint ed., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), II:303.