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The History of Israel from the Perspective of the Qumran Community's Texts

Historia Izraela w perspektywie tekstów wspólnoty z Qumran

Abstract. The article surveys the historiographical elements found in the manuscripts of the Qumran community in order to grasp the community's perspective on the history of Israel. Since history is subordinated to paraenesis in the community's texts, the article adopts a chronological approach, discussing Israel's history from the creation of the world to the emergence of the community. In the preserved writings, the history of Israel appears as a history of continual failure in both the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods. The portrayal of Israel's past in such dark tones served to justify the need to establish the community of the new Israel, founded upon new revelation and a new covenant. In raising up the community, God remained true to the promise made to Israel's ancestors, and the future, in the community's view, belongs to the new Israel alone. Thus, reflection on the past is important only insofar as it serves to illuminate the history of the community and to deepen its sense of identity.

Streszczenie. Artykuł zawiera przegląd elementów historiograficznych w manuskryptach wspólnoty z Qumran w celu uchwycenia perspektywy wspólnoty na historię Izraela. Ponieważ w tekstach wspólnoty historia jest podporządkowana parenezie, w artykule przyjęto klucz chronologiczny, omawiając historię Izraela od stworzenia świata do czasu powstania wspólnoty. Z zachowanych tekstów wspólnoty historia Izraela jawi się jako historia nieustannej kompromitacji, zarówno w okresie przedwygnaniowym, jak i powygnaniowym. Zarysowanie historii Izraela w ciemnych barwach miało na celu uzasadnić konieczność powołania wspólnoty nowego Izraela opartego na nowym objawieniu i nowym przymierzu. Bóg powołał wspólnotę przez wzgląd na wierność obietnicy danej przodkom i w przekonaniu wspólnoty przyszłość należy już tylko do nowego Izraela. Tak więc refleksja nad przeszłością jest o tyle ważna, o ile służy zrozumieniu historii wspólnoty i pogłębieniu jej własnej tożsamości.

Keywords: history of Israel, new Israel, new covenant, Qumran community.

Słowa kluczowe: historia Izraela; nowy Izrael; nowe przymierze; wspólnota z Qumran.

1. Introduction

In an attempt to grasp the Qumran community's perspective on the history of Israel, this article looks at the issue from the community's own perspective—according to which the God of Israel is the Creator of the world, and therefore everything that takes place in the history of Israel is connected to the history of the entire world. In the community's view, Israel's history thus extends back to the foundation of the world, and even beyond it. From the community's perspective, God had chosen it even before the creation of the world and the divinely ordained direction of the world's history had, from the very beginning, been leading toward the formation of a community whose history would culminate in the eschaton and the beginning of a new messianic era. Consequently, Israel's history is not understood here in the historical-critical sense characteristic of scholarly reflection on ancient Israel, but rather in the theological perspective that emerges from the texts of a particular community that lived in Judea from the second century BC to the first century AD.¹

The title of the article deliberately emphasizes the perspective of the Qumran community's *texts* rather than that of the community itself in order to indicate that our ability to reconstruct the community's worldview on the basis of its library holdings² is rather limited. First, the texts discovered in the eleven caves do not represent the entire collection, but only a portion of it—be it greater or smaller. Second, the majority of the more than nine hundred texts found in the

¹ The Essene hypothesis remains the predominant and best-supported hypothesis on the basis of the contents of the Qumran community's texts, archaeological evidence from the Qumran settlement, and sources external to Qumran (Collins 2010). Nonetheless, the term "Qumran community" (or, for the sake of brevity, simply "community") is used throughout the article.

² Even if Cave 4, where approximately 60 percent of all Qumran texts were discovered, was not the community's library, it at the very least served to store the collection during the final stage of its existence (Werrett 2015, 78–105).

caves are fragmentary, and in many cases, it is impossible to determine their meaning, literary genre, or function. Third, not all the texts are products of the community itself—some of the preserved literature was brought in from outside, and while the very presence of these texts points to the community's interest in the theology reflected in them, they do not provide direct insight into the community's worldview. Fourth, while some texts were copied for communal use, many manuscripts were clearly copied for private purposes, leaving open the question of the extent to which the texts brought in from outside, copied, and read as part of individual reading practices shaped the worldview of the community as a whole.

Another issue is the absence of historiographical literature in the community's collection.³ Although several fragments found in the Qumran caves refer to historical events and figures and can, to some extent, be compared to Greek historiography (Lange and Mittmann-Richert 2002, 120), they are too fragmentary to allow for the identification of their proper literary genre.⁴ Their classification as "historical" arose from the need to create a taxonomy of the Qumran texts that would facilitate scholars' access to texts that could be useful for reconstructing the history of the community (Brooke 2007a, 217, 219

³ There is a general consensus among scholars in that regard. See Vermes 2005, 29; Brooke 2007a, 221 (= Brooke 2010, 208); Collins 2014a, 119; Davies 2019, 228. Likewise, Russell E. Gmirkin and Harold W. Attridge omit the Qumran texts from their discussions of Jewish historiography from the Second Temple period (Gmirkin 2019, 342–343; Attridge 1984, 157–183). It is worth noting that the absence of historiography at Qumran coincides with the community's limited interest in the biblical historical books (Brooke 2007a, 218 [= Brooke 2010, 205]), as suggested by the relatively small number of copies of these books in comparison with other books of the Hebrew Bible. A possible reason for the community's lack of interest in these books may have been the fact that the monarchical model presented in them was invoked by their enemies, the Hasmoneans, who may have used these books to legitimize their political actions (Brooke 2007b, 212–216 [= Brooke 2013, 176–180]).

⁴ The texts in question are the following: 4Q Historical Text A (4Q248) (Broshi and Eshel 2000, 192–200); 4Q Historical Text B (4Q578) (Puech 1998, 205–208); 4Q pap Historical Text C (4Q331) (Fitzmyer 2000a, 275–280); 4Q Historical Text D (4Q332) (Fitzmyer 2000b, 281–286); 4Q Historical Text E (4Q333) (Fitzmyer 2000c, 287–289); 4Q Historical Text F (4Q468e) (Broshi 2000, 406–411); and 4Q Historical Text G (4Q486f) (Lange 2000, 412–413). The use of capital letters in the designations indicates that these are independent compositions. A discussion of the above texts and the validity of their designations can be found in Brooke 2007a, 207–225 (= Brooke 2010, 193–210) and Atkinson 2007, 125–151.

[= Brooke 2010, 204, 206]). Nevertheless, even if the nature of these texts remains uncertain, the mere fact that they mention historical figures reveals some interest on the part of the community in world history. These texts refer primarily to events of the Hellenistic period.

In light of the above, any analysis of historical themes must necessarily rely on texts which are not historiographical in nature but contain some historiographical elements.⁵ Such elements are present in legal texts,⁶ parabiblical texts,⁷ liturgical and prayer texts,⁸ commentaries on prophetic books (known as *pesharim*),⁹

⁵ A fairly comprehensive discussion of these texts can be found in Brooke 2007b, 211–230 (= Brooke 2013, 175–192) and Collins 2011, 295–315 (= Collins 2014a, 119–132).

⁶ In the paraenetic sections of these texts (CD I–VIII; 4QMMT C 1–32), events and figures are invoked paradigmatically in order to motivate the addressee—by presenting negative and positive historical examples—to put into practice the commandments of the Law as interpreted by the community.

⁷ In this category, one might distinguish the Genesis Commentaries (4Q252–254; 4Q254a), the Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q383–385a; 4Q387–388a; 4Q389–390), the Book of Jubilees (1Q18, 2Q19, 2Q20, 3Q5, 4Q216–224, 11Q12), and the Commentary on the Apocalypse of Weeks (4Q247). For an overview and brief discussion of these texts, see Fröhlich 2011, 821–855.

⁸ The so-called historical psalms (Psalm 105 and Psalm 136) preserved in the Qumran Psalter (11Q5), as well as the liturgical composition known as the Words of the Luminaries (4Q504–506), served the community as a means of reflecting on God's works in the history of Israel; their recitation during recurring rites and rituals reinforced the memory of these events. The recitation of the psalms was not limited to recalling past events; through reinterpretation, they were given a meaning that enabled the community to better understand its own identity and its place within the history of the world. A detailed analysis of the liturgical and prayer texts in the context of reflection on the history of Israel can be found in Buster 2022a, 199–249; Brooke 2017, 305–319.

⁹ Continuous *pesharim* have been preserved at Qumran on the books of Isaiah (4Q161–165), Hosea (4Q166–167), Micah (1Q14; 4Q168), Nahum (4Q169), Habakkuk (1QpHab), Zephaniah (1Q15; 4Q170), and Malachi (5Q10), as well as on the Book of Psalms (1Q16; 4Q171; 4Q173), which was treated as a prophetic book. In interpreting the prophetic writings, past events were reexamined in order to discern, through a renewed reading, the hidden message that had been intended for the community from the beginning. This hidden message was unveiled through the divine revelation granted to the Teacher of Righteousness. The purpose of the *pesharim* was to strengthen the community's conviction that its salvation had been foretold by the ancient prophets and that the prophecies had already begun to be fulfilled in the present time, as evidenced by contemporary events. If some of the prophecies had begun to be fulfilled, it was to be believed that the remaining prophecies would likewise be fulfilled. In that sense, the logic of the *pesharim* resembles that of the *ex eventu* prophecies

calendrical texts,¹⁰ and writings in which the authors offer a periodization of history.¹¹ While some of these texts refer to public history,¹² others address what may be called “private” history—that is, the history of the community itself (Davies 2019, 228–229). The community divides history into the past (the time of its emergence), the present (the current time of crisis), and the future (the approaching end of time) (Wacholder 1995, 345). In the community’s apocalyptic worldview, everything merges: public history blends with private history, and the past and the future converge with the present. What is more, public history is subordinated to that of the community, and past events only matter insofar as they elucidate the community’s present existential situation.

The historiographical elements found in the community’s texts do not differ substantially in their approach to history from ancient historiographical literature known to us, which focused not so much on recounting events factually as it did on retelling them as they ought to have occurred and as they ought to be remembered from the perspective of those who constructed the account (Davies 2019, 228). At the same time, due to the fact that the Qumran community was separated from the rest of society (4QMMT C 7), another important factor

typical of apocalyptic literature (Collins 2014a, 124). It is precisely the references to past and contemporary events in the *pesharim* that allow them to be regarded, at least to some degree, as historical texts. Nonetheless, their purpose was not to convey historical information, and the choice of events was rather selective, limited to those that could be anchored in the prophetic writings themselves. It should also be noted that the historical allusions in the interpretations of the prophetic books refer to events from the second and first centuries BC—that is, respectively, to the period of the community’s emergence and activity.

¹⁰ The calendrical texts (4Q320–330) are noteworthy in that their authors link events and figures from Judea with events and figures from outside it, integrating them into the Qumran community’s distinctive 364-day calendar (Wacholder 1995, 368–369). Unfortunately, these texts have only survived in fragmentary form.

¹¹ The main texts in this category are 11Q Melchizedek (11Q13) and the Peshier on the Periods (4Q180–181). While 11Q Melchizedek divides the history of the world into ten jubilees of forty-nine years each, the Peshier on the Periods divides successive stages of history into ten generations. The latter text is fragmentary, with only content pertaining to the ten generations before the Flood and the ten generations from the Flood to Abraham being preserved. However, it is assumed that the author of this composition also applied the same division to the subsequent history of Israel.

¹² References to public history are mainly found in the so-called Historical Texts, commentaries (*pesharim*) on the prophetic books, and calendrical texts (see footnotes 4, 9, and 10, respectively).

comes into play: the community's memory, which differed from that of those outside it, was as important a component of its identity as its social attitudes. Therefore, the community was interested in the history of Israel insofar as it helped its members understand their own place within that history. It is also clear that there is no straightforward correspondence between the community's collective memory and history in the modern sense—that is, history as it actually happened (Davies 2010, 34).

For the community, an important interpretive tool was the periodization of history. This practice, quite widespread among the apocalyptic movements of the Hellenistic period (Atkinson 2022, 1–16), stemmed from the conviction that God had predetermined the division of the world's history into specific segments of time. By identifying these segments, it was possible to understand past and present events; crucially for apocalyptic movements, this also provided insight into future events. In the case of the Qumran community, periodization took two forms. On the one hand, the community viewed the past linearly as a sequence of successive stages in the history of the world. On the other hand, a divinely ordained order was perceived within history, manifesting itself in the repetitive and cyclical nature of time, analogous to the priestly service in the Temple (see 1 Chron. 24 and the Mishmarot texts [4Q320–4Q325]). By recognizing the paradigm according to which history unfolds, the community was able not only to understand present events through the lens of the past, but also to interpret past events through the lens of the present. In other words, the past, the present, and the future illuminate one another and reveal their meanings (Segal 2018, 240–241).¹³

¹³ Michael Segal (2018, 214–221) cites 4Q Narrative C (4Q462) 1 1–19 as an example of a text that interprets a historical event as the archetype of a future one. This text first refers to the Egyptian captivity as a time of darkness, then moves to a time of light (the post-exilic period), and finally to the return of darkness when the people of Judea once again experienced an “Egyptian captivity.” Thus, the author portrays the Egyptian captivity as the archetype of a future captivity foretold to occur in his own time, probably alluding to the Seleucid invasion of Jerusalem under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 BC). By contrast, the Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q383–385a; 4Q387–388a; 4Q389–390) is an example of the reverse procedure, whereby an earlier historical figure is interpreted in light of a later one. In this composition, Antiochus IV Epiphanes becomes a model for Nebuchadnezzar—a proto-Antiochus Epiphanes (Segal 2018, 232–236).

Among the texts that contain historiographical material, the Damascus Document (CD) offers the broadest perspective on how the Qumran community perceived the history of Israel.¹⁴ The text brings together the historiographical elements mentioned above: a reworking of biblical history, periodization, and calendrical calculations. It is divided into two main parts: the Admonition (CD I–VIII + XIX–XX) and the Laws (CD IX–XVI).¹⁵ Within the Admonition, one can further distinguish the historical section (I 1 through IV 12), which is structured into three discourses, each introduced by the formula “And now, listen” (CD I 1 through II 1; II 2 through 14a; and II 14b through IV 12a [Davies 1983, 56]). The purpose of the historical section was to explain to the members of the community its place within the divinely directed course of history and to give meaning to the events of the community’s own time. This, in turn, was meant to reinforce the community’s ideological foundations, strengthen its identity, and lift its members’ spirits during a difficult time (Baumgarten 2000, 1–15).

The historical section of the Damascus Document will serve as the main point of reference in our attempt to grasp the community’s perspective on the history of Israel. However, since the reflection on Israel’s history is treated only summarily in CD, other community texts will be brought into the discussion in order to broaden the perspective and shed further light on selected aspects of Israel’s past. In contrast to the community’s texts in which the history of Israel is invoked within a paraenetic framework, the following analysis of selected passages will proceed chronologically.

¹⁴ Although only fragments of ten manuscripts of this work were discovered at Qumran (4Q266–273; 5Q12; 6Q15), the two copies of the document found half a century earlier by Solomon Schechter in the synagogue in Cairo—that is, CD A (cols. I–XVI) and CD B (cols. XIX–XX)—enabled its substantial reconstruction. In the present article, references to the Damascus Document follow the critical edition by Joseph M. Baumgarten (1996).

¹⁵ From the standpoint of the document’s structure, the Admonition serves as an introduction to the legal section, its primary purpose being to outline the conflict between the community and its opponents regarding the proper understanding of the Law. After establishing that the community alone possesses the correct understanding of the Law and that only by joining it can one fulfill the Law correctly, the text transitions to the legal section (Goldman 2018, 392–393).

2. From Creation to Exile

CD II 2–21 (= 4Q266 2 ii 2–21 + 4Q270 1 i 1–3)

For the Qumran community, history began even before the creation of the world, when God chose the righteous and rejected the wicked. It was known from the outset who would stray from His path and who would remain faithful to Him. God knew the exact number of each person's years and all the details of their life. When He sent prophets to instruct Israel, He did so for the sake of those who were predestined to escape His punitive wrath. From the beginning, God's chosen survivors were to be the members of the community, whose names had been precisely determined before the foundation of the world. If this was so, however, then what was the source of the evil that would take hold of those who would become wicked?

The community explains the origins of evil in the history of the world through the lens of the myth of the fallen angels known to the community and attested in the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 6–10).¹⁶ Thus, evil in the world did not come from the fall of humanity but from the fall of the angels, who, instead of fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them by God, succumbed to temptation and lust and entered into sexual relations with human women.¹⁷ As a result, the women bore giants who ravaged the earth, consumed its harvest and animals, and eventually preyed upon humans as well. The angels were also guilty of imparting forbidden knowledge to humanity. In effect, the world descended into violence and moral chaos. This, in turn, provoked the wrath of God, who drowned the giants in the waters of the Flood. And yet, their spirits survived and continued to torment humankind. In response, God commanded the angels to bind these spirits, but—at the

¹⁶ Six copies of this book (4Q201–206) were discovered in Qumran Cave 4. See Drawnel 2019.

¹⁷ The fact that the author of CD omits the story of Adam does not mean that it played no role in the community's writings. In the liturgical composition Words of the Luminaries (4Q504–506), Adam's fate becomes a paradigm for the fate of Israel, whereby the initial glory and exaltation ultimately end in downfall and the punishment of exile (4Q504 8 i 1–15). Hence, Adam is not only the first holy one but also the first sinner. The ultimate recovery from this great fall and restoration of Adam's glory will take place only in the new, eternal covenant (CD III 20; 1QS IV 22–23; 1QH^a IV 27). See Buster 2022b, 255–266.

request of Mastema, the leader of the demons—He allowed one-tenth of them to remain.¹⁸ Thus, even though evil was radically curtailed by God, it nevertheless remained in the world with His permission. This conviction is crucial to the Damascus Document author's subsequent reflection on the history of Israel.

CD III 1–20 (= 4Q266 2 ii 21–23 + 4Q269 2 1–6)

The author of the Damascus Document then proceeds to the history of the patriarchs of Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are portrayed as friends of God who kept His commandments within the framework of His eternal covenant.¹⁹ Later, however, there is a shift. The sons of Jacob cease to keep the commandments and suffer the consequences: their sons are taken into Egyptian captivity, where they descend even further into sin (this negative depiction of the Israelites in Egypt—combined with the omission of the events at Sinai—is unique within contemporaneous Jewish literature).

Although the Prince of Lights (the Archangel Michael) raised up Moses and his brother Aaron for the Israelites during the wilderness journey, the people remained ensnared by the Prince of Darkness, Belial (CD IV 13), who sent Jannes and his brother Jambres against them (CD V 17–19 [= 4Q267 2 1–3 + 4Q266 3 ii 5–6]; cf. Exod. 7:11–12). Likewise, despite God's intervention in bringing them out of the Egyptian bondage and leading them to the land of Canaan under Moses's leadership, the descendants of Jacob still refused to heed His voice and, guided by their own will and desires, murmured against Him. In doing so, they brought upon themselves the wrath of God, who turned His

¹⁸ Although this narrative—known from the Book of Jubilees (Jub. 5)—is not explicitly invoked by the author of CD, it clearly provides the backdrop for his discourse. The fact that fragments of seventeen copies of this book were discovered at Qumran (1Q17–18; 2Q19–20; 3Q5; 4Q176a; 4Q216–224; 4Q482; 11Q12) indicates that it constituted one of the principal sources for the community's theodicy. The myth of the offspring of the fallen angels was further developed in the Aramaic Book of Giants, fragments of which were also preserved at Qumran (1Q23–24; 2Q26; 4Q530–533; 6Q8). The community's interest in this myth demonstrates that it served as an important means of explaining the origins of evil, violence, and corruption of the world.

¹⁹ In the background of this text lies the tradition that Abraham possessed the Book of Noah, which contained the teachings of Enoch and Noah (Jub. 21:10). The Levitical milieu traced the origins of the future priesthood to these two figures—a theme that is further developed in the Aramaic Levi Document (Stone 1999, 133–149).

face away from them and did not permit them to take possession of the Promised Land.²⁰ The author of the Damascus Document then proceeds in one sentence from the wilderness period to the age of the monarchy and then to the conquest of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC, referring to the entire period as a time of departure from the covenant.

Two other community texts allow for a slightly more nuanced reading of the rather brief overview of Israel's history during the monarchy. The Halakhic Letter (4QMMT C 18–21 [= 4Q398 11 1–3]) states that while in the days of King David and King Solomon, the blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28:1–14 were partially fulfilled, from the reign of Jeroboam son of Nebat until the reign of the Judean king Zedekiah and the deportation into Babylonian exile, Israel experienced a period under the curse foretold in Deuteronomy 28:15–68. Similarly, the Apocryphon of Jeremiah offers a positive assessment of the monarchical period under David and Solomon (4Q385a 1a–b ii 4–6), while simultaneously criticizing the later part of the First Temple era, during which Israel suffered punishment for its sins: the kingdom was destroyed and plundered by foreign powers, and its people were taken into captivity (4Q387 2 ii 2–10 [+ 4Q385a 4 1–9; 4Q389 8 ii 1–4]). The unique, blessed period of David's reign is attributed to his character: in the community's memory, he was a pious man characterized by merciful deeds and reverence for the Law of Moses (4QMMT C 23–26 [= 4Q398 11 6–7 + 14–17 ii 1–2]).

In the community's brief summary of Israel's history from the fall of the angels to the Babylonian exile, one can discern a consistent paradigm in which

²⁰ Apart from the portrayal outlined above on the basis of CD, which is intended to draw a contrast between the community of the old covenant and that of the new within the broader context of the entire document, the motif of the Exodus is also employed in three other ways in the community's texts (Pajunen 2021, 137–161). The first is the presentation of the Exodus as a foretold event in literary compositions whose narrated time precedes the actual event of the Exodus (e.g., 4Q158 14 5–9). The second consists in invoking the Exodus through summaries or paraphrases that interpret the event from various perspectives, typically for the purpose of recalling God's salvific deeds toward Israel as a source of consolation and motivation in times of trial (e.g., 4Q185 1–2 i 14–15; 4Q374 2 ii 5–6; 4Q389 2 2–8; 4Q422 3 4–12; 4Q434 1 i 1–13; 4Q470 3 3–7; 4Q504 3 ii 5–19). Finally, the Exodus motif is also used as a paradigm for later events (e.g., 1QM XI 9–12). It was believed that since history unfolded according to a recurring pattern, the event of the Exodus made it possible to understand present and future events. The community perceived its own situation as a “second Exodus,” during which God would once again intervene and deliver His people just as He had in the first one.

unfaithfulness to the covenant and to God's commandments is invariably met with His punitive wrath. The exceptional figures in this history are the three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—as well as King David and his son Solomon, all of whom are depicted as men who were faithful to God and kept His words. For the patriarchs, these words include the revealed teaching contained in the Book of Noah, and for David and Solomon, they refer to the Law of Moses. It is on account of His covenant with these great figures of Israel's past that God once again resolves to extend His hand to Israel and deliver it from the hands of foreign rulers, yet only the chosen Remnant will experience this deliverance (cf. Isa. 1:9; 6:13; 10:20–23; 11:11–16; 37:31–32; Jer. 23:3; 31:7; Ezek. 14:21–23; Mic. 2:12–13; 4:6–7; 5:6–7; 7:18; Amos 5:15; 9:8–15; Zeph. 2:7; 3:12–13; Zech. 8:6, 11–12).

3. From the Return from Exile to the Calling of the New Israel

CD I 1–II 1 (=4Q266 2 i 1–25 + 4Q267 1 1–8 + 4Q268 1 1–17)

Referring back to the causes of the exile, the author of the Damascus Document reiterates the fact that it was not God who abandoned Israel but Israel who abandoned God. It was only in response to Israel's turning away from Him and breaking His covenant that God departed from the Temple and left Nebuchadnezzar free to conquer Jerusalem and carry its inhabitants into Babylonian captivity. Still, for the sake of the covenant with Israel's ancestors, God resolved to preserve the Remnant of Israel and allowed it to return to the Promised Land. The punishment, however, was not postponed: in God's design, Israel was to remain in "bondage" for another 390 years. This period, described by the author of the Damascus Document as the "time of wrath" (CD I 5), should be interpreted symbolically because it alludes to Ezekiel 4:5 and the "time of iniquity," during which Israel would bear its iniquity for its transgressions (Fraade 2021, 31).²¹ Yet, the 390-year punishment did

²¹ If one were to assume that the community took the 390-year period literally, the time of wrath would extend from 587/586 to 197/196 BC, placing the emergence of the community in the reign of Antiochus III the Great, who expelled the Ptolemies from Palestine, and the appearance of the Teacher of Righteousness around 175 BC—that is, during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This timeline, however, conflicts

not persuade the Remnant of Israel to repent and return to God. On the contrary, the Remnant turned away from God just as the previous generations had done, and God responded by choosing from among the fallen Remnant the righteous sons of Aaron and Israel—that is, priests and laymen. On this foundation, the community of the new covenant would soon arise.

Initially, the group chosen by God acted without guidance, unable to find the right path. Then, after a twenty-year period of uncertainty during which the priests and laymen sought a new way of life in radical separation from their former existence centered on Jerusalem as the religious center, God raised up a leader for them who would be remembered as the Teacher of Righteousness. It was he who revealed to them the hidden things in which Israel had gone astray; it was also he who prepared them for the end time—a time when God would ultimately intervene and grant them eternal life on account of their faithfulness to the new covenant (CD III 12b–20). In the meantime, however, the Teacher died, raising the community's hopes that the end of time was imminent. According to their predictions, the “end of time” would occur forty years after the Teacher's death (CD XX 14). In this context, the number forty should be understood, if not symbolically, then at least as an indication that the end would come in the next generation rather than the present one (Collins 2011, 314). When this did not occur, the community became convinced that the end time had been prolonged (1QpHab VII 7).

The author of the Damascus Document divides the history of post-exilic Israel into four epochs (Laato 1992, 605–607): (1) the time of wrath—from the exile to the emergence of the community, lasting 390 years; (2) the time of groping (uncertainty)—from the emergence of the community to the raising up of its leader, lasting 20 years; (3) the time of the Teacher's activity and the revelation of hidden things; and (4) the time of trial and expectation—from the Teacher's death to the messianic era, lasting approximately 40 years. Although the Damascus Document does not explicitly state how long the period of the Teacher's activity was, it has been suggested that it may have lasted around 40 years, since this is precisely the number needed to bring the post-exilic period to a total of 490 years ($390 + 20 + 40 + 40$)—a duration significant for the

with the evidence provided by the *pesharim*. This conflict supports the view that the Qumran community treated the number symbolically. The reference to Ezekiel's 390-year period may have been intended to suggest that the emergence of the community was part of God's plan and had been foreseen for ages.

periodization of history in the contemporary apocalyptic movement of which the Qumran community was part (Werman 2006, 250).

Although many apocalyptic texts share a 490-year period of waiting for divine intervention, they differ in their calculations (Werman 2006, 253). The *Animal Apocalypse* (1 Enoch 85–90) and the *Book of Daniel* (Dan. 9:24–27) base their calculations on weeks of years (7×70 years), which is a reinterpretation of Jeremiah 29:10, where the prophet announces that seventy years must pass before Israel can return from Babylonian exile. The *Animal Apocalypse* uses a symmetrical division where each week corresponds to one shepherd ($12 + 23 + 23 + 12 = 70$ shepherds; 70×7 years = 490 years). The *Book of Daniel*, by contrast, counts seven weeks (= 49 years) from the destruction of Jerusalem (587/586 BC) to its rebuilding in the early Persian period, then 62 weeks (= 434 years) from the rebuilding to the early Hellenistic era, and finally one week (= 7 years) corresponding to the crisis associated with the persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The *Apocalypse of Weeks* (1 Enoch 93) and 11Q Melchizedek (11Q13) base their calculations on jubilees (one jubilee = 49 years, cf. Lev. 25), dividing the 490-year period into ten jubilees and expecting the “end of time” in the last, or tenth jubilee. The *Apocryphon of Jeremiah* also draws on this latter scheme and supplements the sparse material in the *Damascus Document* concerning the post-exilic history of Israel from the community's perspective.

Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q383–385a; 4Q387–388a; 4Q389–390)

The manuscripts that make up the *Apocryphon of Jeremiah* are quite fragmentary, but the partial overlap of their contents makes it possible to recover an interesting account of the post-exilic history of Israel.²² The focus of the *Apocryphon's* reflection is the period extending from the destruction of the First Temple to the decree of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 BC). This period opens with the First Blasphemer, identified with King Nebuchadnezzar, and closes with the Second Blasphemer, who most likely represents Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Dimant 2001, 96). The time between these two figures is divided into ten jubilees, yielding a total of 490 years (49×10). Although the *Apocryphon* and the *Book of Daniel* use different units in their calculations (jubilees vs.

²² All references to the text of the *Apocryphon* and to the fragments that overlap with it are based on the critical edition by Devorah Dimant (2001, 91–260).

weeks of years), they agree that the 490-year period ended with the military intervention of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. At the same time, the Apocryphon diverges in that respect from the Damascus Document, which counts the 490-year period from the destruction of the First Temple to the anticipated beginning of the messianic era.

The Apocryphon of Jeremiah portrays Israel's post-exilic history as a continuation of Israel's sinful condition, which is characterized by apostasy from the Law and unfaithfulness to God. The causes of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its people to Babylon include the rejection of God's commandments, the failure to observe festivals, the profanation of God's name, the defilement of the Temple, the sacrifice of children to demons,²³ and the lack of faith among the people (4Q385a 3a–c 5–11 + 4Q387 1 2–6 + 4Q388a 3 2–7). In consequence, God sent the Blasphemer, the king of the nations, to exact punishment upon Israel. Over time, however, the ruler lost control over the conquered kingdom, which ultimately enabled the exiles to return to the land of Judah. Still, despite receiving another opportunity from God and being placed under the care of the priests (the sons of Aaron), Israel continued to do what was evil in God's sight (4Q390 1 2–4). The sole exception was the first group of returnees, whose aim was to rebuild the Temple (cf. Ezra 1–3) and who understood all that they had received from their forefathers, keeping God's commandments (4Q390 1 5–7).

This positive view of the first group of returnees stands out against the overall negative assessment of post-exilic Israel, as in the sections that follow, the evaluation of subsequent generations is closely aligned with that of the author of the Damascus Document (although the Apocryphon offers slightly more detail). Thus, after the Temple-rebuilding project failed and later generations once again turned away from God, the Apocryphon—speaking through the voice of Jeremiah—pronounced judgment upon Israel, saying that it would sink ever deeper into sin while being ruled by the angels of destruction (4Q390 1 7–12). From the perspective of the author of the Apocryphon, Israel's return to the land of Judah did not entail the return of God Himself. Just as God's turning away from Israel was the consequence of Israel's turning away from Him, so too will He turn His face back toward Israel only when Israel returns to the God of Israel. This, however, will only be possible once the full measure of guilt has been

²³ The author of Pseudo-Daniel is also convinced that the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar was caused by the sacrifice of children to demons (4Q244 12 1–5).

expiated—when time reaches its fulfillment in the final, tenth jubilee (4Q389 8 ii 5–6 + 4Q385a 4 6–9 + 4Q387 2 ii 8–12 + 4Q387 2 iii 1–2 + 4Q388a 7 ii 1–5).²⁴

At the climax of the 490-year period appointed by God, the Second Blasphemer, the king of the nations, will appear on the stage of history, committing abominations and bringing about the destruction of Israel, and the land will be surrendered to the angels of Mastema (4Q387 2 ii 5–iii 5 + 4Q385a 4 1–9 + 4Q389 8 ii 1–4). This will be accompanied by Israel's descent ever deeper into sin: its people will forget the covenant, the Law, the Sabbath, and the festivals (4Q390 1 7–9), while the priests of Jerusalem will go back to worshipping foreign gods (4Q387 2 iii 6 + 4Q388a 7 ii 6–7), resorting to violence and oppression in the process (4Q390 2 i 10). In his description, the author is undoubtedly alluding to the decree of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the desecration of the Temple, which in his view constitutes a tangible sign of God's abandonment of Israel and a punishment for the sins of the past and present generations (Werman 2006, 238–239).

In his portrayal of Israel's history after the exile, the author of the Apocryphon deliberately draws a parallel between pre-exilic and post-exilic Israel, portraying both within a Deuteronomistic paradigm that he shares with the author of the Damascus Document: sin/fall → punishment/repentance → salvation/renewal → sin/fall → punishment/repentance → salvation/renewal. This ever-recurring pattern of failed renewal needed to be broken. To this end, God intended to preserve a small group of survivors from among Israel (4Q390 1 i 10) through whom He would accomplish the ultimate restoration of Israel. The remainder of the Apocryphon has not been preserved, but the author's conviction regarding the divinely preserved portion of Israel leads us back to CD I 3–7 (see also III 12b–14). There, it is stated that after a period of 390 years beginning in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, God caused a shoot of Israel and Aaron (i.e., the laity and the priests) to spring from the Remnant of Israel and established with it a new, eternal covenant. Anyone who enters this covenant and remains faithful to it will inherit eternal life and all the glory of Adam (CD III 20, cf. 1QS IV 22–23; 1QH^a IV 27; see footnote 17).

²⁴ This conviction is consistent with the Apocalypse of Weeks, whose author announces God's salvific intervention in the tenth week (1 Enoch 91:15–17).

4. New Israel versus Old Israel

Depending on the context, the author of the Damascus Document refers to three forms of Israel (Bergsma 2008, 172–189): historical Israel (compromised), Israel contemporary with his community (likewise compromised), and Israel represented by his community (new and true). While the community does not explicitly describe itself as the “new Israel,” the establishment of a new covenant (CD VI 19; VIII 21), grounded in new revelation, implicitly points to the birth of a new Israel rather than the renewal of the existing Israel (Davies 2008, 33–42). The new revelation is mediated by the Teacher of Righteousness, who—from a typological point of view—appears to the community as the new Moses and a new Ezra (Davies 2010, 36). Moreover, the author of the Damascus Document speaks of the community of the old covenant as “the first ones” (CD I 16; III 10; VI 2; VIII 17; XX 8–9; Fraade 2021, 30), thus implying the existence of a second, new Israel (Davies 2008, 33–34). This is reinforced by the author’s clear emphasis on the fact that in Israel’s history, it was “*their sons*” (CD III 5; III 9), “*their men*” (CD III 7), “*their kings*” (CD III 9), and “*their warriors*” (CD III 9) who sinned and suffered punishment—a clear sign that he distances himself from the sinful generations of the past.

The author of the Damascus Document draws a demarcation line not only between the old and the new Israel but also between the new Israel and the Israel of his own day, as expressed most clearly in CD III 12–14: “But of those who held firm to God’s commandment, those who remained of them, God established his covenant with Israel forever, revealing to them the hidden things in which all of Israel went astray.”²⁵ While the phrase “all of Israel” refers to the post-exilic Remnant, the first occurrence of the term “Israel” refers to the Qumran community (Fraade 2021, 42). The Damascus Document does not hold back in its assessment of Israel of the author’s own day and, in the context of the future eschatological judgment, equates its fate with that of the gentile nations. From the community’s perspective, Israel of the author’s own day is as compromised as Israel of the past was, which is why neither matters as neither has a future—the future belongs to the new Israel alone (Davies 2019, 231).

In the context of the relationship between the new Israel on the one part and the old and contemporary Israel on the other, one may speak of

²⁵ Translation quoted from Fraade 2021, 41.

what Fraade calls “continuity amidst discontinuity” (Fraade 2018, 428). On the one hand, the community regards itself as the true Israel and distances itself from both the old and contemporary Israel—in its perspective, Israel of the past and Israel of the community’s own day merge into one, just as the new Israel will merge with the future Israel in the coming eschaton (Davies 2008, 33, 40). On the other hand, although the community dissociates itself from historical Israel, its identity as the true Israel can only be understood by acknowledging its continuity with historical Israel, with whom it shares the same history, the same Torah, the same ancestors, and the same God—a God who, for the sake of the promise made to their common forefathers, brought the community into being for the salvation of Israel.

In light of the above, the community becomes living proof of God’s faithfulness toward the old Israel. The tension and ambiguity are evident in the passage from CD III 12–14 cited above, in which the community both is and is not Israel. In all of this, the demarcation line—between the people of the old covenant and those of the new covenant, between the old and new Torah, and between the former unfaithfulness and present fidelity—is synchronic rather than diachronic. As the new Israel, the community does not view itself as a linear continuation of the old Israel, since the “old Israel” exists in parallel to the new and is heading toward inevitable disaster. The old Israel is not “old” merely in a temporal sense; it is “old” primarily because it persists in the old paradigm of sin → punishment → renewal → sin, from which one can only escape by joining the new Israel, which possesses knowledge of the hidden things concealed by God in the Law and the Prophets.

The community’s appeal to history has a clear purpose: the time of ultimate choice has come, and one must either join the community of the new covenant as a beneficiary of the future blessings (Deut. 28:1–14) or remain on the side of the old Israel, bringing upon oneself the foretold curses (Deut. 28:15–68). Thus, the new covenant confronts Israel with the question posed by the old covenant and sets before it life and death (Deut. 30:19). Although God chose the righteous and rejected the wicked even before the foundation of the world, which of these two groups one will belong to now depends on one’s decision. Therefore, one’s fate is not yet sealed, and the door remains open, even though time is short because the end of time is inevitably approaching (CD IV 8–11).

Having expressed its deep conviction about where it stands within sacred history and where it will stand when that history approaches its fulfillment (Fraade 2021, 36), the community then proceeds to the legal section of the

Damascus Document, as the choice that has been made entails the obligation to observe the stipulations of the new covenant. Thus, it seems evident that the history of Israel outlined by the author of CD served primarily to reinforce the community's members' commitment to this radical choice and to situate that choice within the broader framework of world history. Moreover, there was certainly a need for additional motivation for those who struggled with discipline and perseverance in the austere way of life. The community's elaborate system of penalties (CD IX 16 through X 14) indicates that entering the covenant entailed continually striving to remain faithful to it. The true Remnant, despite having a precise interpretation of the Torah, was not free from sin. In this respect, the fate of the new Israelites did not differ from that of the old Israelites.

Conclusions

The central theme in the Qumran community's vision of the history of Israel is the contrast between the attitude of the old-covenant community and that of the new-covenant community. Looking at the past, the community repeatedly shifts its perspective between the "former times" or the "first generations" and the present generation living in "the end of days." This juxtaposition of the old and new Israel serves to draw a sharp distinction between those who obey God and walk in His way (that is, the way of the community) and those who have departed from that path and rejected God's Law. In the community's perspective, this duality existed even before the foundation of the world and extends throughout the history of Israel and the world. All of this unfolds according to God's design and has been foreseen and foreordained. World history appears as the cyclical repetition of the same paradigm in which humanity rebels against God, then—by His permission—experiences the consequences of its sins, and once again seeks salvation in Him, while He repeatedly reaches out to humanity (Grossman 2002, 88). Thus, the history of Israel reflects the condition of all humanity, which is why the author of the Damascus Document goes back to the origins of evil in his reflections.

In the admonition that briefly outlines pre-exilic history (CD II 14 through III 12) from the time of the Watchers (i.e., the "fallen angels") to the Babylonian exile, the author of the Damascus Document depicts humanity's continual struggle to fulfill God's will. By invoking the myth of the fallen angels, the community traces the origins of evil while directing the argument toward

its ultimate defeat, in which the community will play a decisive role. From the beginning of the world, human will and desires have continually come into conflict with the will and desire of God. This conflict of desires—divine and human—is marked by successive falls and punishments experienced by humanity and by all Israel throughout history (Fraade 2021, 40). The pre-exilic period thus appears as a continuous history of the fall of humanity and Israel.

Within the dark and sinful pre-exilic history, there are also figures whom the community sees as coming close to the ideal of a human being who is obedient to God and reflects His image: Noah, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Kings David and Solomon. It is on account of the promises made to these great figures that God does not abandon His covenant with Israel and does not allow the punishment of exile to turn into Israel's complete erasure from world history. What unites these great figures of Israel is their fidelity to the Law. At the same time, however, God had hidden certain things within this Law that were revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness. Therefore, anyone who wishes to remain faithful to the Law in the manner of these great figures can do so only by relying on the new revelation. The custodian of this revelation is the community of the new Israel. This contrast between old Israel and new Israel is a constant backdrop to the community's reflection on the past.

A pivotal point in Israel's history was the experience of exile as punishment for the sins of pre-exilic Israel. In fact, it was the time of exile that allowed the Remnant to be separated from the degenerate Israel. That Remnant, however, still had to atone for its guilt, and while the first generation of returnees, in the community's view, pursued the plan for Israel's restoration, the survivors went astray over time and turned away from God's Law. The return to the land of Judah did not bring about Israel's return to God and God's return to Israel. As a result, the Remnant remained in "bondage," being subdued by neighboring rulers, assimilating into foreign cultures, and ultimately sinking into its own sins. This degeneration culminated in the priests' worship of foreign gods and the abandonment of the interpretation of the Law that had been handed down from generation to generation. The author of the Damascus Document moves rather quickly from the period of exile to the foundation of the community, thus creating a chronological gap. His aim was not simply to recount Israel's history but to justify the emergence of the community of the new Israel.

Despite the absence of historiographical texts at Qumran, historical motifs in the community's paraenesis essentially serve the same function as the biblical historiographical texts known to us: interpretations of history provide

lessons from the past, reinforce an attitude of fidelity to God, and strengthen the contemporary readers' sense of identity. Historical reflection provides the community with models, heroes, and negative exemplars, contributing to the formation and identity-building of its members as the community seeks the meaning and essence of its existence in the face of various crises. The history of earlier generations is meant to become a history in which the community sees itself as the key element; a history which, in God's design, will separate the community's members from those who long ago ceased to be part of it.

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