

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON : A SUGGESTION ¹

By BLEDDYN J. ROBERTS, M.A., D.D.

PROFESSOR OF HEBREW AND BIBLICAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF
NORTH WALES, BANGOR

FOR many years the main problems connected with the early history of the Old Testament Canon have been allowed to rest undisturbed,² and it would seem, as indeed has been frankly admitted by one leading scholar,³ that only the discovery of brand-new material can help to answer the questions that were left unsettled half a century ago. In the present paper, however, there is no new material to introduce, nor even an essentially new theory. What is attempted is to bring some facts and hypotheses which are themselves familiar to bear on what might be called the pre-canonical phases, and the view is put forward that already in the pre-Christian era the Old Testament was treated as essentially canonical in the form it has now. In the first instance the investigation is a historical one, but it is also intended to have some relevance for our own understanding of what constitutes the authority of the Bible in terms of canonicity.

It is notable how recent introductions to the Old Testament quite commonly contain tentative suggestions that the idea of a canonical body of Scripture is much older than those final phases reflected in Rabbinic and Early Christian Writings. It is assumed that there was a pre-history for the principle of a Canon, which should be traced back for centuries before the synod of Jamnia, and its "official" recognition of the present canon. In a more

¹ A lecture delivered in the Library series of public lectures. A preliminary draft was given in a paper to the Society for Old Testament Studies at Oxford in July 1961. The following abbreviations are used: *B.J.R.L.* = *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*; *J.E.* = *Jewish Encyclopedia*; *J.S.S.* = *Journal of Semitic Studies*; *Z.A.W.* = *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*; *Z.N.W.* = *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*.

² A stimulating discussion by Floyd Filson, *What Books Belonged to the Bible?* (1957), does not fall within the ambit of the present discussion.

³ A. Jepsen, "Zur Kanongeschichte des Alten Testaments", *Z.A.W.*, lxxi (NF 30) (1959), p. 114.

direct way R. H. Pfeiffer,¹ G. W. Anderson,² G. von Rad,³ and many others think of an Old Testament Canon (not, of course, in its present form) as current from the sixth or the fourth century B.C. onward. In one sense such an hypothesis is the necessary complement to the idea of an Old Testament *Heilsgeschichte* because it is impossible to conceive of such a tradition being transmitted without the support of official recognition at the shrine and in the cult, and without cultic officers to proclaim it. It follows, too, that the history of the Old Testament canon is more intimately connected with the history of religion in the Old Testament than with the actual textual transmission. At the same time, it is extremely difficult to single out any early event in the religious history which will lead us into contact with the Old Testament in any canonical form.

The period of Ezra might, however, offer such a starting point and in the period from Ezra to the time of Christ we have the conditions for a suitable background to the general study. It is to Ezra that later Rabbinic teaching traces back the fundamental elements of Scripture transmission, and it was during the period after Ezra that there occurred the manifold crises which Judaism could survive only because of strict control imposed by a central religious authority. It was the time when Hellenism in some respects threatened the very existence of Judaism, Seleucid persecution literally slew many of its adherents, the Maccabeans first exploited and later dismayed Jewish loyalty, and partisanship became common and dissident movements inevitable. Through all its vicissitudes the loyalty of Jews to their faith must have been securely anchored to something more tangible than a mere adherence to a traditional faith. It must have even transcended the worship at the shrine, for the temple and the priesthood were themselves for part of the time actually violated, and for a much longer period in considerable disrepute. The substance of the present argument is that it was the Scriptures—even more than the Torah—which saw Judaism through its troubles, and provided spiritual guidance for a future development.

¹ *The Books of the Old Testament* (1957), p. 14.

² *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* (1959), pp. 11-18.

³ *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, ii (1960), p. 409.

Subsequent Judaism discussed problems of canonicity in the guise of questions about whether this or that book in the Old Testament "defiled the hands", but the nature of the discussions suggests that they belong to the end of an era rather than its beginning. That is why our immediate concern is with the three or four centuries which preceded the Synod of Jamnia.

There are two main features of the religious history of the Jews in this period which stand out for the present purpose; firstly the growth of Rabbinic exegesis and secondly apocalyptic writing. Both, it is submitted here, presuppose the existence of a biblical canon which coincides with the present Hebrew Old Testament. It must be emphasized that this does not mean that at such an early period the text itself was fixed in its minutiae or even its variant readings. Such a suggestion would at once be easily disproved by reference to the Massoretic text itself; moreover, as will be shown, it would hardly strengthen the argument of this paper. Nevertheless it is impossible to understand the history of Judaism in either of the above respects unless we accept the conclusion that the scriptures as such, in Torah, Prophets and Writings, were regarded as authoritative.

A. Rabbinic Evidence.

For Rabbinic exegesis three sources are relevant, which, though usually treated as separate items, together provide evidence for the early existence of Holy Writ. They are (i) Rabbinic type glosses in the Old Testament text, (ii) the Aramaic Targums, and (iii) the Rabbinic sayings and Scriptural quotations.

(i) Rabbinic glosses form the subject of an examination by J. Weingreen,¹ and need not be further extended in the present context. He argues successfully that many of the glosses in the Massoretic text reflect a continuity of exegesis consistently followed through from biblical times into the Mishna. The glosses are not merely editorial notes or expansions, but rather "the beginnings of what became in later times standard and approved commentary".² He quotes as instances Ps. i. 3 ("in all that he does he prospers"), conflate readings such as 1 Sam. ii. 2, Amos iv. 12, Ps. lv. 16, Ps. xviii. 7 (cf. 2 Sam. xxii. 7), Amos

¹ "Rabbinic Type Glosses in the Old Testament", *J.S.S.*, ii, 2 (1957), 149-62.

²*Ibid.* p. 155.

vi. 8. By means of the identification of this special kind of gloss Weingreen assumes—and it is a reasonable assumption—that in them we find specimens of the perpetuation of a tradition, a continuity which can be traced backwards in the history of Judaism as well as forwards into the Mishna, and the Rabbinic period itself. And the fact that the glosses identified by Weingreen are present in the LXX shows that they do, indeed, go back well into the pre-Christian era.

In another way, too, it may be held that the Rabbis put into practical use exegetical principles which presuppose their right to interfere with the text. In the Babylonian Talmud Ber. 34b, it is said that the Prophets spoke of nothing other than the days of the Messiah ; and the Rabbis thereby show that they encouraged dogmatic interpretation. There is nothing to suggest that by this interpretation they introduced something new and foreign to their tradition. What is implied is that the prophetic oracles were already regarded as inspired Scripture, capable of being the vehicle of a special message of good tidings for future ages ; indeed, they were formally scrutinized in order that their Messianic meaning might be elicited.

It is significant that what the Rabbis did, both in their glosses and in their interpretation, was to add to the text merely that which was evoked by it. The prestige of the text was not thereby impaired, but actually enhanced. The identification mark of an exegetical gloss just as of any other type of gloss is that it demonstrably disturbs a textual sequence ; before it could do this there must have existed a text-form which was recognized as a self-consistent whole, and which enjoyed common acceptance tantamount to canonical standing. The same conclusion would apply to dogmatic or Messianic interpretation of the text.

The Rabbis insisted that their tradition was basically uniform and continuous ; they never claimed for themselves the right to challenge Scripture or even to interfere with it except for elucidation. They always exercised this control, and as far back as we can trace the general idea of a Torah—that is, right back to the beginnings of Old Testament religion—the man of God, be he priest or prophet, exercised just this kind of control. And it is certainly true of the post-exilic period, as witness such well-known

incidents as Haggai's altercation with the priests (Hag. ii. 10 ff.), and Zechariah's instruction to the priests (Zech. vii. 1 ff.). For the present argument there is no need to trace the practice to an earlier period.

(ii) The relevance of the Aramaic Targums is that in their earlier forms all the available Targumic texts point to the existence of a parent text which approximates to the standard text (Massoretic) and deviates from it only by the addition of interpretative matter. For the present purpose, as indeed for most purposes of elucidating the significance of the Targums, it is necessary to distinguish between the so-called "official" Targum Onkelos and, "official" to a lesser extent, Targum Jonathan on the one hand, and the free, midrashic Targums on the other. The former are in some ways more important for the present study because they represent the Hebrew text more directly. But they are also more difficult to use for our purpose because of the view generally held that both Targums, Onkelos and Jonathan, in their present form are to be regarded as late. It will be remembered that Kahle¹ has argued that Targum Onkelos, as it stands, belongs to the Babylonian transmission in the period after A.D. 70 and before the fall of the Nehardea Academy in the third century. The thesis is presented with a wealth of linguistic arguments, and seems conclusive. But Kahle's concern is for the final redaction of Targum Onkelos, and it does not necessarily follow from the thesis that there was no such thing as a "Targum Onkelos" in the pre-Christian era. Such an assumption is as one-sided as many others in Kahle's reconstructions, such as that the Massoretic text was first created in the time of Akiba and that the Septuagint was first produced for use in the Christian Church. On both the latter issues Kahle's views have been challenged, and it would appear that the same criticisms are valid concerning his treatment of the two Targums.²

¹ *The Cairo Geniza*, 2nd edn. (1959), pp. 191 ff.

² P. Wernberg-Møller has adequately dealt with an ambiguity in Kahle's discussion in a recent article, "Prolegomena to a re-examination of the Palestinian Targum fragments of the Book of Genesis published by P. Kahle, and their relationship to the Peshitta" (*J.S.S.*, vii, 2, pp. 253-66, cf. p. 261, n. 3). It is true that Kahle states in the second edition of his *Cairo Geniza* that Onkelos received "its present form in Babylonia", but Wernberg-Møller shows how, in general,

It is significant that Kahle concludes that the "official" Onkelos and Jonathan Targums coincide chronologically with the Akiba "standardization" of the Massoretic text; both movements obviously belong together in the same general movement in the history of Bible transmission. But we cannot assume that consequently Targum Onkelos actually originated in this movement, any more than the actual text of the Massorettes. On the contrary, we could reasonably expect an earlier existence for both, alongside each other, on the grounds that neither Akiba nor Onkelos can be shown to be the creators of the texts associated with their names. Furthermore, the near identity of *IQIsb*¹ with the Massoretic text demonstrates such an early, pre-Massoretic phase of that text, and it might well be the case that an earlier, pre-Onkelos phase can be likewise assumed for the Targum. It is such a Targum that could best explain a feature of the present Targum Onkelos to which Kahle himself has drawn attention, namely that it "contains a word for word translation of the Hebrew text of the Torah, *reproducing exactly, however, the interpretation presupposed in Mishna and Talmud*" (italics mine).² There is nothing to suggest anywhere that the Rabbis first introduced their interpretations into the Targums at the putative time when Targum Onkelos was "first" produced; on the contrary, it could have been included at a very early stage, just as it was exercised in the Hebrew text itself, and just as it is incorporated in the free Targum.

The case of Targum Jonathan is more easily proved. This Targum contains interpretations of a midrashic character, and, Kahle actually argues from his earlier position, as stated in *Cairo Geniza* (1st edn.) and, later, in *Z.N.W.*, 1958, in the general run of the discussion. Cf. "Das palästinische Pentateuch Targum und das zur Zeit Jesu gesprochene Aramäisch", *Z.N.W.*, xlix (1958), 100-16. The present writer shares Wernberg-Møller's feelings in this matter, and has assumed that the Kahle position is very much as it was. If, indeed, the other alternative holds, then the general position held in this article is supported by Kahle's statement, though not by his discussion.

¹ Cf. B. J. Roberts, "The Second Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (*IQIsb*)", *B.J.R.L.*, xlii (1959-60), 132-44. I take this opportunity of correcting an error which unfortunately slipped into the introductory part of the paper, where I stated that the scroll was amongst those taken to U.S.A. and subsequently transferred to the Hebrew University. *IQIsb* was actually among the scrolls originally acquired by Professor Sukenik and, since its discovery, has been in Israel.

² *Op. cit.* p. 197.

although it bears the marks of later recensional activity, even Kahle admits the presence of elements which are pre-Christian. Kahle's emphasis on the later revision to bring it into line with the "official" Targum Onkelos does not particularly affect the argument, since our main concern is to establish the existence of pre-Christian Targums whose later recensions do not negate the assumption of Rabbinic exegetical control at an earlier stage.

It is generally agreed that the "unofficial" Targums contain pre-Christian material, but it is premature to assess their special significance for the present study. There have been recently some very important additions to this class of Targums, and most of them are still unpublished and we are dependent on introductory comments. They include the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch in the sixteenth-century copy at the Vatican, Neofiti 1,¹ the Qumran Targum of Job,² the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon³ together with fragments from the Cairo Geniza.⁴

At present it might appear that the pre-Christian, unauthorized Targums contained elements which challenged later Rabbinic, official comment in the Mishna, as indeed is shown in Kahle's discussion of the Palestinian Targum of Exod. xxii. 4-5,⁵ where the rendering is in direct contradiction to Mishnaic interpretation. On the other hand, van der Ploeg's⁶ description of the Qumran Job contains the statement that it is a literal translation of a text that approximates to the Massoretic but is not identical with it. The point here is that the Targum is a literal translation and consequently may be regarded as supplying what is tantamount to an "official" Aramaic rendering.

What emerges is the likelihood that there existed, in pre-Christian times, Aramaic renderings of Scriptures for the use of the religious communities, for instance in Aramaic speaking synagogues, which reflect Rabbinic influence, and possibly consisted of a literal translation directly under Rabbinic control. It

¹ Diez Macho, "Nuevos fragmentos del Targum Palestinense," *Sefarad*, xv (1955), 31-39.

² J. van der Ploeg, *Le Targum de Job de la Grotte II de Qumran* (11Q tg Job) (1962).

³ N. Avigad and Y. Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon* (1956).

⁴ Cf. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*, 2nd edn. (1959), pp. 191-208.

⁵ *Op. cit.* pp. 205 ff. ⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 11.

is irrelevant to the argument that such Targums also embodied lengthy midrashic interpolations of an early or a later date ; these are, like other interpolations, readily identified and, in any case, represent attempts to make the " holy " words more intelligible and true.

(iii) Along with Rabbinic glosses and controlled Targums, evidence for the existence of canonical Scripture may be found in the manner the Rabbis introduced biblical quotations into their disputations. Of course, all types of Rabbinic writings, Mishna, Talmuds, and commentaries, abound in quotations ; indeed, basically the Rabbis explained Scripture by means of Scripture. But there are a few observations which need to be specially mentioned concerning the use of Scripture by the Rabbis. Firstly, the continuity which we saw in practice in Rabbinic glosses is observed also in the use of quotations. The chain of tradition, says Pirke Aboth i. 1, links Moses with Joshua, then the Elders, the Prophets and finally the Men of the Great Synagogue. Then come the named members of that same tradition. The Rabbis did not introduce at any stage a new element in their teaching or a new attitude to the Scriptures that might suggest that canonization was to take place or was taking place in their time. The Men of the Great Synagogue simply handed on, through Simon the Just, who was himself one of their number, to Antigonus, then to Jose ben Joezer and Jose ben Jochanan and so on. The Scriptures had always been authoritative, as indeed had been the Massorah.

Another significant feature is that the Rabbis do not seem to have distinguished, for purposes of quotation, between any section of the tripartite canon ; nor do they regard the Torah as in any way more authoritative than the rest. A passage from 1 Chron. xxix. 14 is quoted in Pirke Aboth iii. 7 with the same finality as Exod. xx. 24 in the previous verse. There is a reference in Babylonian Talmud Meg. 3a that " the meaning of the Torah is expressed clearly but the other parts are enigmatic ", and this might be regarded as suggesting a different attitude to the Torah, but the passage deals with the production of Targums and not with any authority attached to different parts of the Old Testament.

In fact there are occasional passages where a verse from the Prophets can even be used to refute the Torah. Mishna *Jadaim* iv. 4 tells of an Ammonite proselyte who wished to join a congregation, and Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua, both from the first generation of official Teachers (Tannaim) and consequently from A.D. 10-80, argued the case. Gamaliel refused permission, quoting Deut. xxiii. 3. Joshua, favouring the applicant, held that Isa. x. 13 by implication meant that the Ammonites were no longer under the ban of Deuteronomy. But, said Gamaliel, Jer. xlix. 6 refers to the return of the captivity of Ammon, to which Joshua replied that Jer. xxx. 2 refers to the return of Israel and Judah, which had not yet taken place. "And", the section ends, "they permitted the Ammonite to come into the congregation." That is, we find here, as indeed in many other places, that the Torah is not only being elucidated by reference to other passages but is also qualified by them.

It does not appear that for quotation purposes disputes over canonization—if, indeed, the phrase "to defile the hands" does refer to this canonization, as is generally assumed—made any difference to the authority of Scripture. The three books brought in question by the Rabbis, namely Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, are readily quoted by name, and, in the Mishna, Ezekiel has apparently been more frequently cited than Jeremiah.¹ Another book quoted by name is the Apocryphal work Ecclesiasticus which quite often figures in the Talmud, despite the passage in Babylonian Talmud San. 100b with its categorical denial that it does not "defile the hands".²

B. Apocalyptic evidence.

The material for this part of the inquiry is to be found mainly in literature outside the main stream of orthodox Judaism, namely the New Testament, Christian Pseudepigrapha and the Qumran scrolls. But it will be seen that here, as in Rabbinic usage, the Old Testament itself can also be regarded as having evidence of its own canonicity. Whether or not Rabbinic Writings might be added to the list of apocalyptic sources is a moot point. On the one hand, it is commonly accepted that apocalyptic fell into dis-

¹ Cf. Danby, *The Mishna Translated*. . . , p. 811.

² Cf. I. Levi, "Sirach", *J.E.*, xi. 390.

repute among the Pharisees about the time of the great crisis of A.D. 70, and consequently was practically ignored in subsequent Rabbinic theology. On the other hand, there is a substantial amount of Rabbinic argumentation which does use apocalyptic, even in a fundamental way. Thus, Babylonian Talmud Meg. 3a¹ says, "Jonathan ben Uzziel produced the Targum of the Prophets. He further sought to reveal by a Targum the inner meaning of the Hagiographa but a *bath qol* went forth and said, 'No'. "Why?" 'Because the date of the Messiah is foretold in them.' " It will be seen later that "secrecy" in the matter of Messianic predictions and the whole nature of "fulfilment" forms an important element in the technique of apocalyptic writing: at present it may suffice to note that, despite the apparent rejection of apocalyptic by Rabbinism after the first century A.D., traces of it are still retained in the Talmud itself.

But to return to the more obvious material. The nature of apocalyptic writing in the New Testament has received considerable attention in recent years, and one result has been to show how carefully it was circumscribed, and how clearly it followed precise lines of a special technique and discipline. K. Stendahl,² for instance, sees the Early Church as a *Chaburah*, a closely-knit community with its unique midrashic interpretation, distinct from the Rabbinic *halakha* and *haggadah*, and in technique more akin to the *peshar* writings of Qumran. It might be argued that Rabbinic *halakha* was also circumscribed, and subject to control; the main point of Stendahl's case, however, is not thereby impaired. For New Testament purposes the Old Testament texts were not sources for legislation and subtle disputation on merit and justification, as the Rabbis had used them, but contained the words of prophecy which were to be interpreted in terms of fulfilment. C. H. Dodd³ has shown that in the New Testament passages of Scripture were scrutinized and interpreted in the light of contemporary events, and their meaning determined accordingly. There were, he continues, certain accepted assumptions

¹ Soncino edition, ad. loc.

² *The School of St. Matthew* (1954). Professor Stendahl is mainly concerned with St. Matthew, but his interpretation seems to be capable of modified application to other gospels.

³ *According to the Scriptures*, (1952.)

behind which lay a deliberate scheme which must have been evolved in very early days, possibly initiated by Jesus himself.¹ Thus and thus, says the New Testament continually, are the Scriptures or the Prophets fulfilled, and generally the "fulfilment" is apocalyptic both in thought and vocabulary.

We find similar characteristics in all the Qumran *peshet* documents. Now the word *peshet* is not confined to the scrolls, for it is also a technical word in the book of Daniel where it is used for the interpreting of dreams and of cryptic writing, just as it is used in Qumran for interpreting Scripture as oracles with a hidden meaning. "God", says the Habakkuk scroll, "has sent the Righteous Teacher to explain all the words of His servant the Prophets, by whom God has announced everything that must happen to His people."² The prophets recorded only the mysteries, divinely revealed, but they did not comprehend the oracles in their full meaning. This was the prerogative of the exegete, the Righteous Teacher, given by God to the community. In this sense the *peshet* demonstrates and teaches the actualization of the prophecies,³ in much the same way as the New Testament claims fulfilment. Furthermore, again similar to the New Testament, the source of "fulfilled" Scriptures is not confined to prophetic books, for there is at least one *peshet* scroll of the Psalms. This similarity between the Scrolls and the New Testament should not be pushed too far for there are significant divergences between them, but it serves to underline the general point that during the early Christian era and before this time there existed among the adherents of the Old Testament a technique of interpretation which followed similar and well-defined lines, and which produced apocalyptic fulfilment. Basic to the technique was the acceptance of the divine word as a cryptic oracle, whose full meaning was achieved only by apocalyptic revelation. It is arguable that the cryptic nature of the oracle was part of its divine authority, and this, in turn, postulates the essential canonicity of the actual oracles themselves. It is part of the "mystery" of canonical Scriptures that they "hide" the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

² Col. 2, lines 8-10.

³ Cf. B. J. Roberts, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Old Testament Scriptures", *B.J.R.L.*, xxxvi (1953-4), 75-96.

will of God as well as reveal it. Because of their traditional sanctity and authority—possibly as the closely guarded property of the shrine—the oracles became a source of encouragement and hope, and it is on this foundation that the apocalyptic interpreter erects the superstructure of Kerygmatic fulfilment which makes the foundation itself more meaningful.

Of course, the content of the interpretation is not esoteric or mysterious ; on the contrary, it is part of the blessing offered to those who accept the apocalyptic teaching. Thus, in the New Testament, we read that after the day of Pentecost the converts “ met constantly to hear the apostles teach ”,¹ and subsequently, especially in the Pastoral Epistles, there is concern for “ sound teaching ”. In Qumran it might be said that orthodoxy was a condition of full membership of the community ; the novitiate embarks on a course of training and finally is examined “ in all matters relating to the teaching ”.² The description of the sect at work fits perfectly into this setting. “ Wherever there are ten men present they shall engage in research in the Law day and night ”,³ and always under the supervision of a priest, who, like the Righteous Teacher—also a priest—, was traditionally the guardian of Holy Writ.

At the same time, the ability to interpret was a mystery and a secret. It is about Jesus that it is said he spoke in parables that the people do not understand. At the end of 4 Esdras xiv. 44-46 we are told that at Ezra’s dictation five men wrote what God had ordered him to say, and in forty days ninety-four books were written in all. Then “ the Most High spoke to me, saying, ‘ The twenty-four books ⁴ thou has written, publish, that the worthy and unworthy may read, but the seventy thou shalt keep to deliver them to the wise among thy people ’.” The suggestion that the reserved books were apocalyptic is a natural one ; what is significant, however, is the implied attribution of “ secret ” writings even to the time of Ezra himself, and that they were the preserve of the sages. It reminds one forcibly of the prohibition made to

¹ Acts ii. 42 (NEB).

² *IQS.* col. 6, lines 13-23.

³ *Ibid.* line 6.

⁴ *Viz.* the present Hebrew Canon. Cf. *Secrets of Enoch*, lxviii. 2, where it is said that Enoch wrote 366 books, and handed them over to his sons.

Jonathan ben Uzziel that he was not to Targumize the Hagiographa, "because the date of the Messiah is foretold in them".¹

But to return to the question of the relationship between Bible and interpretation in apocalyptic, it is patently obvious that both are inextricably interwoven. Sometimes the connection reminds us of a Targum, as, for instance, in the book of Jubilees,² where the apocalyptic comment is interposed in the paraphrased biblical text; but the emphasis always lies on the importance of recording the oracles "for a testimony for the generations for ever", which is quite in line with the "fulfilment" idea of the New Testament and Qumran.³

Enoch, again, though regarded in much the same light as was the prophet Habakkuk by the Righteous Teacher, nevertheless also becomes the interpreter. "Enoch", we are told at the outset,⁴ "was a righteous man, whose eyes were opened by God, and saw the vision of the Holy One in the Heavens, which the angels showed me, and from them I heard everything, and from them I understood as I saw, but not for this generation but for a remote one which is to come". In a later context we read,⁵ "And I, Enoch, was blessing the Lord of Majesty and the King of the Ages, and lo the Watchers called me—Enoch the Scribe—and said to me, 'Enoch, thou Scribe of Righteousness, go, declare to the Watchers (fallen angels)—words of doom'."

That the practice of a technique of apocalyptic interpretation might possibly be traced back into the Old Testament itself becomes especially clear by means of one of the connecting-links between Qumran and the Old Testament. The subject demands a more detailed treatment than can be included here, but in outline it can serve to bolster the general argument of this paper. It deals in the first place with the officer in the Qumran community known as the *Maskil*,⁶ which might be rendered "Interpreter".

¹ Cf. above, p. 173.

² Cf. R. H. Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*. Jubilees, Introduction, p. 1.

³ Cf. Jubilees, xxiv. 28-33, which gives the story of Rehoboth and Beersheba with marked apocalyptic features.

⁴ Book of Enoch i. 2 (Charles's translation).

⁵ Ibid. xii. 3.

⁶ I am happy to record that Geza Vermes has largely anticipated me on this point in the translation and comments in his Pelican book, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 1962. Cf. pp. 21 ff. It is good when two minds, quite independently,

The office he held is described in nine passages in the Scrolls,¹ and it is obvious that he had control of the spiritual affairs of the community, particularly in “instructing members in the mysteries of truth”. Secondly, we find evidence of a special use of *Maskil* in the later books of the Old Testament. In Daniel xi. 33 the *maskilim* “shall make many understand, though they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days”,² and in vii. 8 the verbal form of the word is used, apparently in a technical sense, to indicate that Daniel was considering the apocalyptic significance of his vision. In Daniel v. 11, 12, 14 the same word is used to describe Daniel’s special gifts of “understanding”, and it is no new idea that, in apocalyptic, Wisdom and Interpretation are practically fused into one activity. Similar usages may be found in Ezra and Nehemiah, and a very pertinent example is to be found in Neh. viii. 8 where the word is used for the “meaning” of the Law of God, interpreted by the Levites when Ezra proclaimed it. In Amos v. 13 we might have, in what is commonly accepted as a gloss, a passage which instructs the Interpreter (*Maskil*) to abstain from comment in what must be, according to the rest of the oracle, an evil time.

Lastly, we have thirteen³ Psalms with *maskil* in their title, and another where the word occurs in the text. Two points may be made here. In xlvii. 8, the use of the word makes it obvious that the *maskil* was a recognized type of Psalm. The second is a comment made by Kirkpatrick⁴ on Ps. lxxviii. 2 (a *Maskil* Psalm) as far back as 1906. “The Psalmist”, he says, “has no mere narrative of facts to recount, but a history full of significance for those who can penetrate its hidden meaning.”

coincide. I do not particularly favour his translation of the term as “Master”, and I think he has gone rather too far in associating the office with the Levites.

¹ *IQS* col. 3, line 13; col. 9, line 12; col. 9, line 21; *IQSb* col. 1, line 1; col. 3, line 22; col. 5, line 20; *CD* col. 12, line 21; col. 13, line 22; *IQH* fol. 8, line 10.

² *RSV* translation. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (1960), makes the point that “the members of the community called themselves *maskilim*, claiming no doubt to be in the succession of Daniel’s *maskilim*” (p. 62 and elsewhere).

³ Psalms, xxxii, xlii, xlv, lvi, lii, liii, liv, lv, lxxiv, lxxviii, lxxxviii, lxxxix, cxlii. Psalm xlvii. 8.

⁴ Cambridge Bible. *The Book of Psalms*, ad loc.

This observation was made long before anything was known of Qumran, for even the Damascus Document, though discovered in 1896, was not published until 1910. It also belongs to a period long before any form-critical work on the Psalms. But it is amazingly confirmed by both, and for this reason it is likely to reflect the actual contents of the Psalm itself. And despite the apparently mixed nature of the *Maskil* Psalms, they are all marked by one common feature. They are Psalms of encouragement in evil days, and, as a rule, make abundant use of God's intervention in history and in creation for the salvation of His people. Even Psalm xlv, which is a hymn of praise, can, by virtue of its being a Royal Psalm, be included in this category, for the ideal King was among the saviours of Israel.

My main point in this discussion, however, is to show how, for the troublesome period to which apocalyptic writing belongs, there were in Judaism professional exegetes whose task it was to interpret the Scriptures along well-defined lines. There were two sides to their interpretation, namely, "oracle" and "fulfilment". The oracle, it is suggested, was almost always the recognized, authoritative, revealed Scriptures. If this is not the real meaning of "canonical" it is difficult to know what is.

Thus, both from the side of Rabbinic tradition and from that of apocalyptic interpretation, it would appear that long before the Mishnaic and Christian disputations on canonicity the Hebrew Old Testament was regarded as a corpus of Scripture. In it was the authoritative word for the learned to define creed and behaviour; through it the evangelist could proclaim the saving grace of God. And it is as such that Holy Writ will always be recognized by the believer.