

New Covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity

Introduction

If we were to describe the nature of both Jewish and early Christian approaches to the common sacred Scripture of Jewish tradition, the canon which was in its final stages in the first century of the Common Era,¹ the notion of *midrash* would be of utmost importance. And this is how we suggest to define midrash:

Midrash is a mode of approaching a text that is derived from a religious worldview and motivated by various needs (linguistic, historical, moral, theological, literary etc.); it enables and encourages multiple and even contradictory meanings to be discovered in the text, since the intention of the text's author(s) is treated as irrelevant.²

Midrashic interpretation thus gives a new life to ancient texts. If not for that type of interpretation, the ancient writings would be gathering dust in remote corners with no one showing interest in them. Through midrash, however, generation after generation discovers in those texts new meaning befitting the current cultural-religious and even political

¹ M. GREENBERG, «The Stabilization of the Text of the Hebrew Bible, Reviewed in the Light of the Biblical Materials from the Judean Desert», in *JAOS* 76(1956), 157-167; S.Z. LEIMAN, *The Canonization of the Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, Hamden, CT 1976; H.E. RYLE, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, New York, 1985. For the canonization of the New Testament, see, for example, W.R. FARMER (with D.M. FARKASFALVY), *The Formation of the New Testament Canon: An Ecumenical Approach*, New York 1983; H. VON CAMPENHAUSEN, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Philadelphia, PA 1972.

² A. SHINAN – Y. ZAKOVITCH, «Midrash on Scripture and Midrash within Scripture», in S. JAPHET (ed.), *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, vol. 31, Jerusalem 1986, 259-277. See also Y. ZAKOVITCH, «Inner Biblical Interpretation», in M. HENSE (ed.), *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, Grand Rapids, MI 2012, 27-63.

climate of its existence. The image of later times echoed in new compositions penned by interpreters is consequently projected unto the past reflected by the old canonical writings. The future therefore shows itself as nothing but an improved past, while the building stones for the ideal future are cut from the depictions of by-gone era.³

As for the Epistle to the Hebrews (EH), it seems that its author did not intend to create a text supplied with a quasi-biblical canonical status. The epistle is, in fact, a sermon based on a secondary interpretation of a breath-taking mosaic of earlier sacred writings – passages from Pentateuch, Prophets and what we today view as the third part of Jewish biblical canon, Scriptures – which the EH perceives and treats as canonical. This essay aims at outlining how through interpretation these prooftexts were adjusted to serve the epistle's agenda of propagating its idea of the «New Covenant». Yet, it should be kept in mind that the Scripture was not necessary the only source of inspiration for the development of the epistle's idiosyncratic take on the new covenant. We should be open to the possibility that traditions outside of the Bible – written or oral – also contributed to the outlook found in the epistle.

Our essay, therefore, will be divided into two parts. We will first review the epistle's midrashic-like techniques, highlighting both the choice of biblical prooftexts and the modes of their interpretation. Afterwards, we will examine the EH's particular notions of the new covenant in the context of broader contemporaneous Jewish tendencies of interpretation regarding the foundational passage in Jeremiah 31,30-33,⁴ where the new covenant phrase first appears.

New Covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews: biblical prooftexts and midrashic strategies

New covenant in the EH has an explicitly priestly character. This outstanding feature of the epistle prompts us to note that already in the Pentateuch a chain of covenants is described, reaching its ultimate

³ See, for instance, Y. ZAKOVITCH, «A Garden of Eden in the Streets of Jerusalem», in *Greg.* 87(2006), 301-311.

⁴ On the interpretation of Jeremiah 31,30-33, see W. MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (ICC), Edinburgh 1986-1996, 817-827; J.R. LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36* (AnCB 21B), New York 2004, 464-472. See also there the excursus on «The New Covenant in the Literature of Judaism including Qumran» (472-474).

point in the covenant with Israeli priesthood. In the Torah Priestly Codex,⁵ we encounter a set of covenants that can be compared to four concentric circles with narrowing scopes. The first is made with the humanity as a whole after the Flood, with the rainbow as its sign (Gen 9,8-17); the second is made with Abraham and his progeny (Ishmael included), and its sign is circumcision (Gen 17,1-14). The third God's covenant is with the people of Israel with Sabbath as its sign (Exod 31,12-17), and, finally, there is the covenant with Phin'eas the priest and his progeny (Num 25,10-13). No sign is needed for the latter since the continuous existence of the priesthood as such signifies the covenant's unbroken validity. The memory of the priestly covenant appears also in the prophecy of Malachi (2,4-5.8).

Now, in the EH the motif of priestly covenant is intrinsically linked to the figure of Melchizedek, who features prominently in the epistle. What is the biblical backing for such a link? Melchizedek is the first priestly character mentioned in the Torah (Gen 14,18-20):

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹And he blessed him and said: «Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; ²⁰and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!». And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

We will argue, however, that traditions concerning Melchizedek had been widely known in oral form before the verses of Genesis describing him were written (see below). Moreover, this short Melchizedek passage is clearly an interpolation that disturbs the flow of the narrative about Abraham's victory over Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, and the release of Lot and the other hostages from the hands of intruders.⁶ In verse 17, the king of Sodom goes out to meet Abraham and in verse 21 he addresses him. The interpolation in between portrays Melchizedek offering bread and wine to Abraham and blessing him, which represents a kind of covenant meal closing the agreement between the two sides (cf. the description of the meal confirming the covenant between Laban and Jacob [Gen 31,44]).

⁵ See M. HARAN, «Priest, Temple and Worship», in *Tarbiz* 48(1979), 177 (Hebrew).

⁶ See, for instance, C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12-36*, Minneapolis, MN 1985, 203-208.

We should ask what tendency this interpolation was supposed to serve. First, it allows to present Salem's-Jerusalem's sanctity as going back to the times of Abraham. According to this tradition, already then a priest was worshiping there the «Highest God» (Gen 14,18), who is identified further on in the main narrative as «the LORD» (Gen 14,22): «But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth”». Abraham recognized the sanctity of the place and thus gave its king-priest «a tenth of everything» he had (Gen 14,20b). If so, the sanctity of Jerusalem is not conditioned by the link to David and to the tribe of Judah (see 2 Sam 6,24; Ps 78,68-72), but rather by the one to Abraham, the father of the whole nation of Israel.⁷

In addition to it, the *Melchizedek* interpolation serves the agenda of the House of *Zadok*, a priestly family officiating at the Jerusalem sanctuary starting from the days of King Solomon.⁸ The connection between Jerusalem and the notion of justice/righteousness (*zedek*), reflected in the names of both Melchizedek and Zadok, is present too in the name of the king Adonizedek from the days of Joshua son of Nun (Josh 10,1). It also seems to be hinted at in the words of Isaiah lamenting over Jerusalem (Isa 1,21): «How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of *justice!* *Righteousness* lodged in her, but now murderers». The prophet, however, hopes that the city will return to its former glory (Isa 1,26): «And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of *righteousness*, the faithful city». Later rabbinic midrash connects between Melchizedek, Adonizedek and the city of justice (*Genesis Rabbah* 53,6): «*Melchizedek* (Gen 14,18) – this place justified the people who lived there; and Melchizedek (himself). *Adonizedek* (Josh 10,1) – Jerusalem is called righteousness (*zedek*): “Righteousness lodged in it” (Isa 1,21)».

According to the genealogical list in 1 Chronicles 5,29-34, Phin'ehas, the hero of the priestly covenants in the Torah, belongs to the House of Zadok: «The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abi'hu, Elea'zar, and Ith'am-

⁷ The strategy of establishing the link between Jerusalem and Abraham is likewise employed in the story of the offering of Isaac (*Aqedah*, see Genesis 22, especially verse 15 there). See Y. ZAKOVITCH, «The First Days of Jerusalem Sanctity under David: A Literary and Ideological Analysis», in L.I. LEVINE (ed.), *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, New York 1999, 16-35.

⁸ On the beginning of the relationships between Solomon and Zadok the priest, who anoints him for the kingdom, see 1 Kgs 1,39.

ar. Elea'zar was the father of Phin'ehas, Phin'ehas of Abishu'a... Ahi'tub of Zadok, Zadok of Ahim'a-az». Though Melchizedek's ancient priesthood can contribute to the legitimacy of the House of Zadok, the difficulty lingers as Melchizedek, the contemporary of Abraham to whom that ancient priesthood was entrusted, was an outsider to the people of Abraham.

By the time when the EH was composed, the Melchizedek interpolation in Genesis 14 was definitely perceived as an integral part of the biblical narrative, and as such, it was clearly of use to the epistle. The fact that Melchizedek is described as not only a priest but also the king of Jerusalem, could be viewed by the EH as constituting a precedent for the future covenant with David.⁹ Consequently, this king-priest combination can now be allied to David's descendant, Jesus, too (Heb 7,14): «For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests».

The epistle claims that Melchizedek was (7,3) «without father or mother or genealogy» – the claim which does not contradict the interpolation from Genesis 14, where unlike with other protagonists of the narrative, the reader remains in the dark regarding Melchizedek's ancestors. However, as the epistle emphasizes, the priest who was not from the tribe of Levi, received the tithe, the due priestly tribute, from Abraham (Heb 7,6), and thus he is greater than Abraham since the less important is supposed to be blessed by one who is greater, and it was Melchizedek who blessed Abraham (Heb 7,7). One notes that while emphasizing the tribute given by the lesser to the greater, the EH ignores and does not mention at all the bread and wine offered by Melchizedek to Abraham (Gen 14,18), though this could serve as a prefiguration of the Eucharist.¹⁰

An eschatological Psalm 110, ascribed to David in its title, returns to the figure of Melchizedek, the king-priest, in connection to Jerusalem, «Zion» (v. 2). It is this psalm that gives the epistle the legitimization to promote the idea of eternal priesthood «after the order of Melchizedek» as opposed to the similar claims made concerning the priesthood of the tribe of Levi (see Exod 40,15; Num 18,19; 25,13). The EH argues that it is, in fact, to Melchizedek and not to the sons of Aaron that the eternal priesthood belongs (Heb 7,3): «He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor

⁹ See 2 Samuel 23,5; Psalms 89,34-35.

¹⁰ See Mark 14,21-25; Matt 26,26-28; Luke 22,19-20; 1 Cor 10,16; cf. John 6,53-60.66.

end of life, but resembling the son of God he continues a priest forever». He is the one who «lives» (7,8) and is endowed with «an indestructible life» (7,15). In Psalm 110, the king is invited-ordered by God to sit at his right hand (Ps 110,1). The epistle follows the usual early Christian midrashic trajectory of applying to Jesus what was said in the Scripture to David and argues emphatically that, in fact, it was only Jesus, who was granted that honor (Heb 1,13): «But to what angel has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand”?».

It deserves notice that the meaning of the Masoretic Text of Ps 110,3 מִשְׁחָר לַךְ טַל יִלְדֶךָ is unclear (JPS: «From the dawn, yours was the dew of youth»). The Septuagint version, however, («I have begotten you» instead of «your youth») harmonizes the verse with the saying in Ps 2,7: «The LORD... said to me, “You are my son, today I have begotten you”». One also notes that the passage in Isa 9,6-7, starting with «For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder» is likewise applied to Jesus in Luke 1,31-33. The EH follows the Septuagint in harmonizing Ps 110,3 with Ps 2,7, applying both to Jesus. From its point of view, therefore, Jesus' sonship follows David's biblical pattern – it is a sonship that equals election expressed in the anointment-inauguration into the kingly-priestly mission.¹¹

Interestingly, the psalm presents the promise to Melchizedek as a well-known tradition (Ps 110,4): «The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”». Not only the verb «has sworn» but also the words *al divrat*, usually translated as «after the order of» but can be also understood as «according to my decree», indicate an oath, as in Eccl 8,2: «because of your sacred oath (*divrat shvuat elohim*) be not dismayed». Through an appellation to the motif of sacred oath, the EH is able to turn the saying in Psalm 110 into a proof-text of Jesus' priesthood (Heb 7,21):

Those who formerly became priests took their office without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath, The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: «You are a priest forever».

¹¹ See discussion in S. RUZER, «The Son of God as Son of David: Luke's Attempt to Bilibicize a Problematic Notion», in L. KOGAN – N. KOSLOVA – S. LOESOV – S. TISHCHENKO (edd.), *Bibel und Babel* 3, Winona Lake, IN 2007, 321-352.

Thus, the Davidic psalm becomes a proof-text for Jesus' great advantage over the priests before him.¹²

According to Heb 7,11, there was «no perfection» in the priesthood of Levi – therefore it was destined to be superseded by that of Jesus. With that change, the array of earlier Torah commandments pertaining to priesthood, which were previously weakened by imperfect performance of sacrifices (7,18), undergoes a metamorphosis too (7,12). Now the priesthood belongs to the Messiah from the tribe of Judah, from which, the epistle claims, no one has previously offered sacrifices on the altar (7,13).

Following the change of the priestly Torah, the covenant is transformed as well – the old one vacates the place to the new (8,7-13). The emphasis on the new covenant is clearly inspired by the famous passage from Jeremiah, which, as we will see immediately, the author of Hebrews interprets idiosyncratically (Jer 31,31-34):

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.³³ But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.³⁴ And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, «Know the LORD», for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

For Jeremiah, the covenant equals faithfulness to the Torah;¹³ in the biblical prophecy, the phrase «new covenant» is a metaphorical expression similar to the metaphor that we find in Isa 65,17 speaking about «new heavens and a new earth». There is no explicit indication in Jeremiah that stipulations of the new covenant may contradict those of the old one,¹⁴ it is emphasized instead that the new covenant is dis-

¹² It is also possible that originally instead of *al divrati* there appeared in the psalm *al dvar briti* – an error (haplography) occurring in the process of copying the text. The meaning would then be «because of (my covenant)» – cf. Deuteronomy 22,24 where *al dvar* clearly indicates the reason («because»).

¹³ For the equation of covenant and Torah, see also Hos 8,1; Ps 78,10.

¹⁴ But cf. M. WEINFELD, «Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel», in ZAW 80(1976), 17-56.

tinguished by the fact that now the people will truly accept and fulfil the Torah – it is so because now all will be knowledgeable of (the will of) God. In this context, Jeremiah employs another metaphor, that of writing on people’s hearts (Jer 31,33): «But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my Torah/law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts».¹⁵

In the EH, however, the new covenant metaphor undergoes transformation and the new covenant is presented as different from the old one in its content, thus making the preceding one redundant (Heb 8,13): «In speaking of a new covenant he (God) treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away» (see also 8,7 and 10,9). Covenant – the Greek term used, following the Septuagint, is *diathēkē* – is also interpreted in the epistle as testament (will), which becomes effective only after the death of the one who has made the will (9,16-17): «For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive». The atoning death of Jesus, therefore, comes to validate the new covenant that effects the forgiveness of sins (Heb 8,17), and this is in accordance with Jer 31,34 («... says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more») invoked in Heb 10,16-17.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah (31,31), we are dealing with the covenant made «with the house of Israel and the house of Judah». The quotation in the EH takes the path of generalization (10,15-16): «This is the covenant that I will make *with them* after those days, says the Lord: I will put *my laws* on *their hearts*...». One more midrashic change is also discerned in the quotation: instead of the singular «Torah=Law» of the original, the author of the epistle uses «laws» in plural. The epistle seems to have embraced here a broader Jewish perception of the Torah (God’s teaching) as being represented by a set of ordinances/commandments.¹⁶

¹⁵ This metaphor is similar to those employed in Exod 13,9 and Deut 6,8; 11,18 that were used – again, by means of concretization – for establishing the ordinance of *tefillin* (phylacteries). See, e.g., *b. Berakhot* 6a; *y. Kiddushin* 1.8 [61b]. For other metaphors of the kind, see, for instance, Prov 6,20-21.

¹⁶ See, for instance, *b. Makkot* 23b.

The EH's foundational presupposition is that every covenant is based on the blood of sacrificial offerings (9,18-22): «Hence even the first covenant was not ratified without blood. For when every commandment of the Torah/law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats... and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins». The biblical proof text for this perception is, of course, Exod 24,7-8:

Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, «All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient». ⁸And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, «Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words».

The author of the EH views the blood of sacrifices as meant to atone for sins (Heb 9,22), whereas in heaven the purification will be accomplished (v. 23) «with better sacrifices than these» – namely with the blood of Jesus, the blood of the new covenant.¹⁷

In the light of this idea, becomes clear the epistle's emphasis on the imagery of the Day of Atonement (Heb 9,6-7). It portrays Jesus as officiating at the eschatological *Yom Kippur* as both the high priest and the atoning sacrifice, whose blood will atone for the transgressions of many once and for all (9,11-16) so that there will be no need in further sacrifices or Days of Atonement. The blood of usual animal offerings is unable to eliminate sins (10,4), thus the need in repeating the atonement ritual every year anew (10,3); Jesus, however, through the one sacrifice, that of himself, will put an end to that repetitiveness.

Following in the steps of a distinguished biblical tendency,¹⁸ the EH is conspicuously critical of the existing array of sacrifices. It thus argues (Heb 10,5-6): «Consequently, on his (Messiah's) coming into the world, it was said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure"». The direct biblical reference here is to Ps 40,7-9:

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire; but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering thou have not required.⁷ Then I said, «Lo, I

¹⁷ Cf. Matt 26,28: «for this is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins».

¹⁸ See, for example, Isa 1,10-18; Am 5,21-22; Mic 6,6-8; Ps 51,16-19.

come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me; ⁸I delight to do your will, O my God...».

The epistle interprets «the scroll of the book» as the Torah, the Pentateuch, representing the old covenant, which with the coming of Jesus is vacating its place for the sake of the new one (Heb 10,9). Further, (vv. 16-18) one more quote from Jeremiah 31 is brought to strengthen the point: the sins have been forgiven and therefore there is no place for more sacrifices.

It deserves notice that the claim that Jesus atones for all the sins contains a problematic side too; to counter possible easygoing attitude to transgressions this great promise is accompanied by a threat (Heb 10,26-30):

For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, «Vengeance is mine, I will repay». And again, «The LORD will judge his people».¹⁹

Let us summarize this part of our discussion. The idea of the new covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews is presented as the right understanding of Jer 31,31-34 in light of Torah's perception of the priestly covenant. The pattern of the foundational Israeli past as based on covenants is naturally – and midrashically – transferred to eschatological redemption. Moses, through whom the ancient covenant was established, saw in the vision only the «prototype» of the heavenly sanctuary, whereas Jesus has entered it and officiates there. In the past, there were multiple priests, but now there is only one eternal priest, new Melchizedek, and only one sacrifice, the atoning value of which is much greater than of all the yearly *Yom Kippur* offerings. If we accept the dating of the epistle in the pre-70 decade,²⁰ its position appears to be that the present sacerdotal order is temporal and to be replaced.

¹⁹ With reference to Deut 32,35-36.

²⁰ See discussion in H.W. ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, MN 1989, 6-9.

If the epistle was composed after the destruction of the Temple,²¹ its message to Jesus' followers would be not to put hopes in the Temple's restoration because they already have a much greater high priest officiating in the heavenly sanctuary.

The perception of the new covenant in the EH overlaps partly with those attested elsewhere in the earliest traditions coming from the Jesus movement. Thus the motif of the forgiveness of sins is likewise featured prominently in the foundational saying of Jesus at the Last Supper as documented by Matthew (26,28): «For this is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins». Dramatic reinterpretation of the Scripture is also part of the meaning of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3. The perception of the new covenant, however, as a new *priestly arrangement* remains a distinguishing marker of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The New Covenant of Jeremiah in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the light of other early Jewish reinterpretations

We have outlined the midrashic strategies of the EH *vis-à-vis* biblical tradition in the epistles' portrayal of Jesus as the heavenly high priest of the new covenant, a new Melchizedek. In this section, we first turn to highlighting the EH's perception of the situation of its addressees, Jesus' followers. According to our author, what distinguishes this situation is that even if the final redemption has not yet arrived, their existence is already that of the new covenant – inaugurated by their Messiah's atoning death and ascension (Heb 10,14-17; cf. 9,15):

¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

¹⁵And the holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ¹⁶«This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds», ¹⁷then he adds, «I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more».

It is here that comparison with another roughly contemporaneous eschatologically minded group may prove instructive – namely, the community behind the Dead Sea Scrolls, also going, as it were, through a prolonged period of anticipation for final redemption. The portrait of Jesus as new eternal Melchizedek seems to converse with

²¹ See previous note.

that of Melchizedek as an angelic figure at the center of the final Day of Atonement, found in the 11Q*Melchizedek* scroll from Qumran.²² However, since the new covenant motif is not present in that scroll, it will remain outside our discussion.

First illuminating new covenant-centered evidence is provided by *Pesher Habakkuk* from Cave 1, dated – either the composition as a whole or its final redaction – to mid-first century B.C.E.²³ Col. 2 of the scroll contains reference to the notion of the new covenant (1QpHab 2.1-10):

[... The interpretation of the word concerns] the traitors (הבוגדים) with the Man of 2 the Lie, since they do not [believe in the words of] the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of 3 God; and (it concerns) the traito[rs of the] new [covenant] si[n]ce they did not 4 believe in the covenant of God [and dishonoured] his holy na[me]. 5 Likewise: *Blank* The interpretation of the word [concerns the trai]tors in the last 6 days. They are violator[s of the coven]ant who will not believe 7 when they hear all that is going [to happen t]o the final generation (כול הבאות על הדור האחרון), from the mouth of 8 the priest whom God has placed wi[thin the Commun]ity, to foretell the fulfilment of all 9 the words of his servants, the prophets, [by] means of whom God has declared 10 all that is going to happen to his people Is[rael] (את כול הבאות על עמו).

The scroll states that the prophetic (מפי אל) gift of reinterpretation of biblical prophecy, given to the Teacher of Righteousness (מורה צדקה) persecuted by the evil Jerusalem priest, pertains to its eschatological meanings. Moreover, the eschatological message of the Teacher – who is possibly due to reappear later as the end-of-days priest – is repeatedly rejected by the «traitors», including by those living in the present interim period, defined as that of the new covenant. The reference seems to be to those «traitors» who are unable to remain faithful to the community's calling in the times of distress, the times of prolonged delay in eschatological redemption. That the delay is at the core of the predicament is spelled out in col. 7 of the *Pesher* (1QpHab 7.1-8):

²² D. FLUSSER, «Melchizedek and the son of Man», in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, Jerusalem 1988, 186-192; H.W. ATTRIDGE, «Melchizedek in Some Early Christian Texts and 2 Enoch», in A. ORLOV – G. BOCCACCINI (edd.), *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, Leiden 2012, 388-410; L.T. STUCKENBRUCK, «Melchizedek in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature», in *JSNT* 41(2018), 124-138.

²³ See H. ESHEL, «The Two Historical Layers of *Pesher Habakkuk*», in A.K. PETERSEN ET AL. (edd.), *Northern Lights on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Leiden 2009, 107-117. Cf. J. JOKIRANTA, *Social Identity and Sectarianism in the Qumran Movement*, Leiden 2013, 165.

And God told Habakkuk to write what was going to happen to ² the last generation, but he did not let him know the consummation of the era (ואת נמר הקץ לא הודיעו) ³ And as for what he says *Hab* 2:2 «So that /may run/ who reads it» ⁴ Its interpretation (פשרו) concerns the Teacher of Righteousness (מורה הצדק), to whom God has made known (אשר הודיעו) ⁵ all the mysteries (דברי עבריו הנביאים) *Hab* 2:3 «For the vision has an appointed ⁶ time, it will have an end and not fail» ⁷ Its interpretation (פשרו): the final age will be extended and go beyond all that (כיא רזי אל להפלה) ⁸ the prophets say (אשר דברו הנביאים), because the mysteries of God are wonderful (כיא רזי אל להפלה).

Accordingly, the faithful are called upon not to follow the example of the “traitors”, but to steadfastly uphold the eschatological hope (1QpHab 7.9-14):

9 Hab 2:3b «Though it may tarry, wait for it; it definitely has to come and will not *10* delay». Its interpretation (פשרו) concerns the men of truth *11* those who observe the Torah, whose hands will not desert the service *12* of truth when the final age is extended beyond what they expect (בהמשך עליהם הקץ האחרון) because *13* all the ages of God will come at the right time, as he established *14* for them in the mysteries of his prudence (ברזי ערמתו).

The parallel with the Epistle to the Hebrews’ invectives against the weakness threatening Jesus’ followers in their prolonged sojourn in the desert of the interim period is striking (cf. Heb 3,7 – 4,11):

Therefore, as the holy Spirit says (Ps 95,7-11), «Today, when you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. ¹⁰Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways’. ¹¹As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall never enter my rest’». ¹²Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called «today», that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we share in Messiah, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, ¹⁵while it is said, «Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion». ¹⁶Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses?...¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. 4... ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Unlike the epistle, the explicit analogy with Israel’s sojourn in the desert at the times of Exodus is lacking in *Pesher Habakkuk*. However, some of the perceptions attested elsewhere in the Scrolls do reflect

the need to supply the intermediary pre-eschatological period imposed on the Qumranic covenanters by the actual turn of events with an appropriated meaning – and then the new «sojourn in the desert» imagery is evoked.²⁴

One also notes that unlike the EH, the nature of transformation, marking the entrance into the new covenant stance, is not elaborated in the *peshet* – but for the mention of the leading role of the Teacher of Righteousness. It is, however, indicated in the *Damascus Document*, another Qumranic witness for applying the notion of the new covenant to the Dead Sea Scrolls community defined as that «his holy anointed ones» (CD-A 6):

... of *his holy anointed ones* (במשיחו [במשיחי] הקודש)... God remembered the Covenant with the forefathers, and he raised from Aaron men of discernment and from Israel men of wisdom, and he caused them to hear. And they *dug the Well* (ויחפורו את הבאר), the well which the princes dug, which the nobles of the people delved with the stave (Num 21,18). *The Well is the Torah* (הבאר היא התורה), and those who dug it were the returnees of Israel who went out of the land of Judah to sojourn in the land of Damascus... The Stave is the Interpreter of the Torah... and the nobles of the people are those who come to dig the Well with the staves... *that they should walk in all the age of wickedness – and without them they shall find nothing – until he comes who shall teach righteousness at the end of days* (להתהלך במה בכל קץ הרשע וזולתם לא ישיגו עד עמד יורה הצדק באחרית הימים). None of those brought into the Covenant shall enter the Temple to light his altar in vain.... They shall take care to act *according to the exact interpretation of the Torah during the age of wickedness* (לעשות כפרוש התורה לקץ הרשע). *They shall separate from the sons of the Pit, and shall keep away from the unclean riches of wickedness acquired by vow or anathema or from the Temple treasure* (להבדל מבני השחת ולהנזר מהון הרשעה הטמא בנדר בחרם ובהון המקדש)... They shall... keep the Sabbath day according to its exact interpretation, and the feasts and the Day of Fasting *according to the finding of the members of the New Covenant* in the land of Damascus (באי הברית החדשה בארץ דמשק).

The members of the community are described as anointed with the Spirit;²⁵ it seems, that it is the gift of the Spirit that makes them privy

²⁴ See G.J. BROOKE, «Moving Mountains: From Sinai to Jerusalem», in G.J. BROOKE – H. NAJMAN – L.T. STUCKENBRUCK (edd.), *The Significance of Sinai. Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (Themes in Biblical Narrative 12), Leiden-Boston, MA 2008, 73-90.

²⁵ Cf. the self-definition of the members of the community as anointed of the holy Spirit in the fragments of the *Damascus Document* found in Cave 4 (4Q270 Frag. 2 2.6-14).

to the true (pre-) eschatological interpretation of the Torah. This new counter-intuitive reinterpretation is characteristically presented here as «digging up the Torah» which has been covered by desert sand – a clear nod to Torah's previous reception during the Exodus. Moreover, the text presents the Spirit-induced revelation of the new understanding or new interpretation of the Torah as the foundational feature of the new covenant, to which the members of the community belong. The emphasis on the new covenant is a clear sign of conversation with Jer 31,31-34 – with the focus on Jer 31,33-34, where the promise of the heart-deep understanding of the Torah is put forward. It stands to reason, however, that the Qumranic community of the sons of light would likewise apply to itself the ending of the Jeremiah passage («for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more»), as their election by God is reflected, inter alia, in forgiveness of their sins (cf. 1QSa 1).

Another outstanding feature of the new covenant understanding of the Torah, related to in the *Damascus Document*, is the centrality of the Temple issue, expressed in the estrangement from the Jerusalem sanctuary – the motif featuring prominently, *mutatis mutandis*, in the EH. One wonders if it might have been encouraged by the same Jer 31,31-34 passage that ignores the Temple function in future restoration of the covenantal relationships with Israel.

Although various modes of estrangement from the Jerusalem sanctuary – not only Qumranic, but also Jewish Hellenistic, Pharisaic, etc. – may be viewed as characteristic of the period, in both the EH and *Damascus Document* it has a distinctively eschatological flavor. It is usually claimed that with all Qumranic negativism with regard to the standing Jerusalem Temple, the Scrolls do envision its restoration at the end of days. In light of such evidence, one is prompted to ask whether when the author of the Hebrews mentions in passing Jesus' future triumphal return (9,28), he likewise foresees him officiating in some kind of earthly sanctuary – in parallel to being the eternal heavenly high priest. The epistle does not provide an answer to the question.

A comparison with one more Qumranic text, 4Q*Florilegium*, is also instructive. Although the explicit new covenant motif is absent here, the scroll does put a great emphasis on the interim period before the restoration of the ideal Temple – meaning, while the estrangement from the existing sanctuary is still acutely felt (4Q174 1.1-13):²⁶

²⁶ For the variety of scholarly evaluations of the 4Q*Florilegium* stance on the temple issue, see D. DIMANT, «4QFlorilegium and the Idea of the Community as Temple»,

(1)... 2 Sam 7:10-11 «[nor will] a son of iniquity [afflict] him [aga]in as in the past. From the day on which (2) [I appointed judges] over my people, Israel». This (refers to) the house which [he will establish] for [him] in the last days, as is written in the book of (3) [Moses: *Exod 15:17-18* «The temple of] YHWH your hands will establish. YHWH shall reign for ever and ever»... (5)... He will appear over it for ever; foreigners shall not again lay it waste as they laid waste, in the past, (6) the tem[ple of I]srael on account of their sins. And he commanded to build for himself a *temple of man*, to offer him in it, (7) before him, the works of thanksgiving. And as for what he said to David: 2 Sam 7:11 «I [shall obtain] for you [rest] from all your enemies»: (it refers to this,) that he will obtain for them rest from a[ll] (8) the sons of Belial, those who make... the s[ons of] (9) light fall... *Blank* (10) [And] YHWH [de]clares to you that 2 Sam 7:12-14 «he will build you a house. I will raise up your seed after you and establish the throne of his kingdom (11) [for ev]er. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me». This (refers to the) «branch of David», (צמח דוד) who will arise with the Interpreter of the Torah (עם דורש התורה) who (12) [will rise up] in Zi[on in] the [l]ast days (באחרית הימים), as it is written: *Amos 9:11* «I will raise up the hut of David which has fallen». This (refers to) «the hut of (13) David which has fall[en], w]hich he will raise up to save Israel (4Q174 1:1-13).

As suggested in the research, the text speaks of three temples.²⁷ First, the corrupt historical one that already was destroyed and to be destroyed again because of Israel's sins. Last, the eschatological ideal Temple to be established with God's own hands. And in between, the «sanctuary of man/Adam» – seemingly, the community itself – bringing before God prayerful supplications instead of sacrifices and thus effecting the forgiveness of sins. This «sanctuary of man» embodied in the community clearly belongs to the interim, pre-messianic period, whereas the establishment of the future ideal Temple is postponed until the coming of the branch of David and his priestly counterpart.

The explicit emphasis on the future restoration of the Temple distinguishes the stance of the scroll from that of the EH. One may note, however, a shared motif of prayerful supplications as substitute for atoning sacrifices during the interim period: It is this motif that is used in the epistle to describe Jesus' atoning activities before becoming the

in A. CAQUOT ET AL. (edd.), *Hellenica et Judaica*, Leuven 1986, 165-189; G.J. BROOKE, *Exegesis at Qumran; 4QFlorilegium in Jewish Context*, Sheffield 1985, 136 and 179. Cf. J.J. COLLINS, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, New York 1995, 107, according to whom the 4QFlorilegium «sanctuary of man», whether understood as a real temple or the Qumran community, does not belong to the end of days but represents an interim arrangement.

²⁷ See previous note.

ultimate sacrifice and the eternal priest in the heavenly sanctuary. In the EH, therefore, this collective Qumranic characterization morphs into the outstanding feature of Jesus' mission (Heb 5,7): «In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear».

Conclusion

Whereas in the EH Jesus is presented as eternal heavenly priest already officiating in the heavenly tabernacle, in the Scrolls we are dealing with the elect community as a current alternative sanctuary. With members of the sons of Aaron priestly families constituting the elite of the Qumran community, the Scrolls, unlike the EH, do not have any need to appeal to the Melchizedek interpolation from Genesis 14 to justify the change of the priesthood arrangement. One also notes that the expectation of future restoration of currently corrupt Temple (already destroyed in the times of the EH if the epistles' later dating is accepted) to its eschatological glory is much more pronounced in the Scrolls.

These are important differences, yet there are meaningful overlaps too.²⁸ The EH and the Scrolls share the emphasis on their respective communities as belonging to the new covenant prophesized by Jeremiah. In both cases, this perception is presented as based on a (mid-rashic) re-interpretation of Scripture. The epistle and the Qumranic sources, moreover, agree that this new covenant is both a priestly one and defined to a large extent by the estrangement from the Jerusalem Temple – for the sake of a more sublime priestly arrangement, admittedly different in each case. In both cases, this movement away from the acknowledged Jewish sanctuary definitely contains a potential for the parting of the ways. In the EH, however, it is more of a potential than a realized situation. The author, as suggested, tries hard to uproot the nostalgia for the Temple still characterizing his intended audience. It certainly deserves notice that the epistle's terms of elaboration – biblical prooftexts, midrashic interpretation, backdrop late Second Temple Jewish traditions – remain internally Jewish. No appeal

²⁸ Some scholars even suggested that the intended audience of the epistle were former Qumranites who had joined the Jesus movement. See discussion in ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 10 and n. 90 there.

is made to general philosophical ideas and there is no mention at all of the Jewish-Gentile conundrum so central to, say, Pauline epistles addressed to gentile addressees – conundrum that would be instrumental in the parting of the ways process.²⁹

Postscript: later rabbinic responses

Later rabbinic sources – representing a kind of anti-eschatological reaction to earlier disappointments and disasters – are not completely devoid of elements of acute eschatological anticipation and looking for signs of the near end. However, when it comes to elaborations on the Jeremiah's new covenant notion, they – unlike both the Epistle to the Hebrews and Dead Sea Scrolls – do not apply it to their own times and communities, projecting it instead unto eschatological future.

One first notes the sparsity of Jeremiah 31 related traditions in early rabbinic sources, which in itself calls for explanation.³⁰ Moreover, most of the appearances of the new covenant motif are, in fact, parallels following the same basic pattern as in *Sifra* Be-Huqotai 1:³¹

«And I will have regard for you» (וּפְנִיתִי אֵלֵיכֶם, Lev 26,9). Here is a parable; that is what it is like: it is like a king who hired many workers, among them one, who worked for him for many days. When the workers entered to be paid, that worker entered too. The king told him: My son, I will have regard for you. To these there, who did little work for me, I am paying a little (right now), but your great reward will be given to you in the future. So it in this world, where Israel asks for reward from God Almighty and the nations of the world ask for reward from him too. And he tells Israel: my children, «I will have regard for you» – these nations of the world, who did little work for me, I am repaying a little (right now), but your great reward will be given to you in the future. This is why it is said: «And I will have regard for you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and will confirm my covenant with you» (Lev 26,9). Not like the first covenant, which you broke, as it is said (Jer 31,32) «my covenant which they broke...», but a new covenant which will

²⁹ In the final account, those Christian scribes who sometime in the middle of the second century supplied the epistle with the inscription «To the Hebrews» were not necessarily off the mark. See ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 9-13.

³⁰ As has been suggested, in the context of Jewish-Christian competition, when one side put much emphasis on certain biblical passages, the other tended to avoid addressing them. See Y. ZAKOVITCH, *The Bible - A Divine Revolution*, Jerusalem 2019, 268-269.

³¹ Both similarity to and differences from the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 20,1-16 are suggestive. For a general discussion, see, for example, B.H. YOUNG, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching*, Mahwah, NJ 1989.

be never broken, as it is said (Jer 31,31): «Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah».

The point of reference here as in the EH is Israel's Exodus from Egypt with an effort to harmonize Jer 31,31-34 with the Torah of Moses (Leviticus). Israel is criticized for abandoning the covenantal relationships with God. There is a recognition that as the result of that abandonment, those are the «nations», which right now enjoy the advantages of the covenant – but only temporarily. One may possibly discern here a polemical reaction to Christian claims. The midrash is in agreement with those claims with regard to the malfunctioning of the old covenant and the optimistic expectation for the new one. The Israel-nations dichotomy, however, is resolved here differently. The new covenant will give much greater reward to Israel compared to that of the nations. In the terms of concentric covenantal circles outlined at the beginning of the article, the tension here is between the first, general, and the third, Israel-centered, circle (and possibly the second too) – with no interest in the fourth, the priestly one. Suggestively, no elaboration is discerned on the mechanism of inner transformation promised in the prophecy.

Parole chiave

Epistola agli Ebrei – Nuova alleanza – Sacerdozio – Melchisedek – Redenzione messianica – Giudaismo e Cristianesimo

Keywords

Epistle to the Hebrews – New Covenant – Priesthood – Melchizedek – Messianic redemption – Judaism and Christianity

Sommario

L'articolo sottolinea la reinterpretazione midrashica delle Scritture come elemento condiviso dalle tradizioni giudaica e cristiana. In questo quadro il riferimento al passato è proiettato in un futuro escatologico. Questa tendenza generale si rinviene anche nell'Epistola agli Ebrei che, mentre richiama la Nuova Alleanza di Ger 31, proietta il carattere sacerdotale della Torah-Alleanza nella redenzione messianica in Gesù. Le particolari strategie dell'Epistola, in particolare il ricorso al sacerdozio di Melchizedek e l'accento sull'insufficienza redentiva degli eventi dell'Esodo dall'Egitto, vengono discusse comparandole con altre

elaborazioni del motivo della Nuova Alleanza, sia contemporanee all'Epistola sia attestate nelle fonti rabbiniche. In questo modo l'articolo rileva il ruolo dell'Epistola nel *parting of the ways* tra giudaismo e cristianesimo.

Summary

This article starts with highlighting the midrashic approach to Scripture as a foundational pattern shared by early Jewish and Christian traditions. It is in the context of such an approach that the past is projected onto the eschatological future. The authors show how this general tendency is replayed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, while appealing to the New Covenant prophecy in Jeremiah 31, projects the priestly character of Torah-based covenants on the messianic redemption in Jesus. The particular strategies of the epistle, most prominently its emphasis on the Melchizedek type of priesthood and on the insufficient character of previous redemptive events such as Exodus from Egypt, are discussed in comparison with other elaborations on the motif of the New Covenant – either roughly contemporaneous or attested in later rabbinic sources. The discussion allows to better appreciate the place and role of Hebrews in the trajectory of the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity.

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