

**Scripture and law in the Dead Sea Scrolls, by A P Jassen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Hardcover. Price: USD 99.99.**

Jassen's work on *Scripture and law in the Dead Sea Scrolls* is aimed at filling a gap in the research of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and their relationship to the legal literature of related legal texts in the Second Temple period as well as the later rabbinic literature by particularly focusing on the hermeneutical principles employed by these texts. According to the purpose statement in the introductory chapter, Jassen's goal in this book is "to engage the larger question of comparative history of law in ancient Judaism through analysis of the hermeneutic strategies and techniques" (p. 5) employed by the writers. Though he recognizes that one cannot speak of a fixed canon at the time of the Second Temple writings, including the DSS, it is nonetheless evident that the authors of the scrolls did have "authoritative texts" which they used to prove theological points. In fact, one of the questions Jassen tries to answer in this book is what exactly did constitute "authoritative texts" for the authors of the DSS, and what differences there were, if any, in their treatment of these "authoritative texts" as compared to other texts, and how the hermeneutics of the DSS writers differed from that of other Second Temple writings and those of the rabbinic period.

The first three chapters of the book serve as an introduction to the research into the particular texts explored in chapters 4–11. The bulk of the research is concerned with legislation concerning the prohibition of certain activities on the Sabbath (chapters 4–10), and in chapter 11 Jassen looks at other legislation that uses non-Pentateuchal texts along with Pentateuchal ones to clarify legislation on certain issues such as oaths and measurements. The reader is guided along by clearly stated research questions and propositions, and each chapter begins with an initial description of the research employed in the chapter and a conclusion which summarizes the results of the research. The final concluding chapter summarizes both the initial research questions and the results. The book contains an impressive bibliography as well as source, authors and subject indexes.

The introduction (Chapter 1) outlines the history of research in the DSS among

scholars in the past and notes that the hermeneutics of legal texts was somewhat neglected. Jassen defines what he means by “authoritative texts”, outlines his methodology and briefly summarizes what the other chapters are about.

In the second chapter Jassen explains how Second Temple Jews used what they appeared to consider “authoritative texts” to explain and re-apply them to their own times. Since there was no “fixed canon” as yet, the writers of the DSS and other Second Temple texts did this by rewriting the actual text of “scripture”, whereas later, during the Rabbinic period, the actual text of “scripture” was not changed, but cited and then interpreted, often subtly subverting the original meaning of the original. Jassen uses the examples of later books of the Old Testament, in particular Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as other works such as *Jubilees* and the Temple Scroll, to substantiate his argument that in the DSS and during the Second Temple period the rewritten texts in fact gained authority by themselves. The result of both methods of interpretation (i.e. rewriting in the DSS & Second Temple texts, and citation followed by interpretation in Rabbinic texts) is the same: both the rabbis and Second Temple Jews applied the text as they saw it to their own situations. As a result, the DSS, other Second Temple texts and rabbinic texts form a continuous line of development in terms of their interpretive methods, though they sometimes converge and sometimes diverge from one another.

In the third chapter, Jassen shows that his research is not only significant for identifying the similar or different methods of interpretation used in the texts he is studying, but he also shows that his research is important for gaining a better understanding of how the canon of the Hebrew Bible came to be as it is. He believes that the study of the three fields of law, scripture interpretation and development of the canon must go hand in hand “in order to provide a full and accurate portrait of the evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism” (p. 66). In other words, how “scripture” was produced and how it was interpreted are not two different fields of study but are interlinked in a “mutually enriching manner” (p. 66). Therefore, one should not label portions of the DSS too quickly as “scripture” or as “rewritten” scripture since during the Second Temple period (which includes the DSS) “scripture”

was not yet as fixed as some would make it. Jassen believes that in order to “see Second Temple Jewish literary activity in its fullest expression, we must free ourselves from the limitations so appropriately labelled by Robert Kraft as the “tyranny of canonical assumptions”“ (pp. 66–67). However, he does not note that somewhere between the Second Temple texts and the Rabbinic texts the “canon” did indeed become fixed, with a more or less agreed text (what became later the Masoretic Text), and books such as 1–2 Chronicles were included in what became “the canon”, whereas other books such as *Jubilees*, which obviously had some importance for the DSS community, were not. The “canonical” texts in the end were no longer changed in order to interpret and apply them for the current community, whoever they were (and are), and whenever and wherever they lived (or live).

In chapters 4–10 Jassen then proceeds to show how specific laws concerning Sabbath keeping (or rather, things one was forbidden to do on the Sabbath) were interpreted and applied in different DSS, late biblical books (Ezra-Nehemiah), *Jubilees* and Rabbinic literature. He focuses on two Scripture texts, namely Isaiah 58:13 and Jeremiah 17:21–22. The particular prohibitions Jassen is interested in are the prohibition of speech and thought on the Sabbath, based on Isaiah 58:13 (dealt with in chapters 4–8), and the prohibition of carrying anything on the Sabbath, based on Jeremiah 17:21–22 (dealt with in chapters 9–10).

Each chapter covers a particular set of texts: chapter 4 considers the *Damascus Document*; chapter 5 looks at *4QHalakah B*; chapter 6 *Jubilees* and rabbinic literature, all considering how these texts interpret and apply the words “and not speak a word” (on the Sabbath) in Isaiah 58:13. Jassen concludes that none of the DSS quote Isaiah or Jeremiah explicitly. Rather, key words and phrases form the basis of rephrased and more specific legislation that is vague in the prophetic texts, buttressed by relevant Pentateuchal sources which were never used alone. Rabbinic literature on the other hand increasingly prefers Pentateuchal scriptures as proof texts, and in later rabbinic texts it appears that the Sabbath laws no longer refer to Isaiah or Jeremiah at all, even though their legislation regarding Sabbath laws are much clearer than the preferred Pentateuchal sources. For this reason, Jassen suggests that the Pentateuch enjoyed a

greater force of authority than other proof texts, even if they were regarded as “authoritative”.

In chapters 7–8 Jassen investigates if and how the DSS and other Second Temple literature and the Rabbinic texts amplified the prohibition of certain types of speech to include the prohibition of thoughts on the Sabbath, particularly thoughts concerning work to be done during the following week. He comes to the conclusion that this discussion occupied Jewish exegetes for a period of about 1000 years, but though earlier texts take the prohibition of thoughts for granted, later Rabbinic legislation considered it impracticable to restrict thoughts since it was impossible to monitor them. The whole debate about this sounds like something out of Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The next two chapters (9–10) are concerned with the study of the prohibition to carry anything into or out of a certain space, based on Jeremiah 17:21–22. Jassen finds that all the texts consider Jeremiah as far too vague to be of practical use, and so they all modify it to make it more specific to their situation by precisely defining key terms such as “burden”, including guidelines concerning what exactly is prohibited and the exact spaces where one is prohibited from carrying anything. Jassen observes that the DSS and later rabbinic literature refer primarily to Exodus 16:29 as their proof text and for formal language, though connections to Jeremiah can still be perceived in the DSS and certain other Second Temple literature. Only in Nehemiah and *Jubilees* is the influence of Exodus not perceived at all.

Jassen concludes his research by briefly considering eight DSS texts dealing with legislation on a variety of issues such as oaths or measurements which use non-Pentateuchal sources as proof texts (mainly from the prophets). As before, though the DSS use non-Pentateuchal sources freely to prove their point, they always appear together with Pentateuchal sources which moreover are always the primary sources, with non-Pentateuchal texts being the secondary sources.

As a Christian reader who is less acquainted with ancient Jewish texts I found the book very informative and enriching. It certainly does partly fill a gap in scholarship regarding law and exegetical principles in the DSS, and the connection to ancient

Jewish sources helps readers understand the development of certain Jewish legislation in the context of the long standing debate that began during the Second Temple period or even before and continues until the present day.

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