

## Corpse-Blood Impurity: A Lost Biblical Reading?

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The sources of direct contamination caused by the dead, according to Numbers 19, are touching the corpse itself (vv. 11, 13), presence in the same tent with the dead (vv. 14, 18), and touching in the open או במת או בעצם אדם או בקבר, “a person who was killed or who died naturally, or human bone, or a grave” (v. 16; see also v. 18).<sup>1</sup> There is no mention of the blood of a corpse in the entire chapter. Yet tannaitic literature took it as given that corpse-blood conveys impurity, and disputes addressed only details of minimum quantities. Thus the Mishnah, listing what defiles in a tent, reports:

A quarter-*log* of blood [that issued after death], a quarter-*log* of mixed blood from one corpse—R. Akiva says: Even from two corpses—, the blood of a newborn child all of which has flowed out—R. Akiva says: Any quantity soever. But the Sages say: A quarter-*log*.<sup>2</sup>

The starting point of the Mishnah is the agreed assumption that corpse-blood defiles by a quarter-*log* minimum.<sup>3</sup> The dispute is limited to the questions of whether this minimum quantity of corpse-blood, less than which does not defile, must be from a single corpse, and whether even a smaller quantity defiles if it con-

<sup>1</sup> Translations of Scripture, Mishnah, and Babylonian Talmud are adapted, with greater or lesser freedom, from NJPS; Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933); and Isidore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1961), respectively. Translations of other works when not identified are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *M. ʿOhal. 2:2*. See Abraham Goldberg, *The Mishnah Treatise Ohaloth, Critically Edited and Provided with Introduction, Commentary and Notes* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1955), 15–16. Other laws concerning corpse-blood are found in *m. ʿOhal. 3:2*, 3, 5.

<sup>3</sup> The quarter-*log* has been variously estimated as ca. 125 grams. See also *m. Naz. 7:2–3*; *m. Nid. 10:5*; *t. Naz. 5:1*; *t. ʿOhal. 4:13–14*; *Sifre Zuta*, as discussed below; *b. Hul. 72a*.

stitutes all the blood of a (minor) person.<sup>4</sup> Other sources reveal that this rule was considered an ancient one even by the Tannaim themselves.

R. [E]liezer says: At first the elders were divided. Some said: A quarter-*log* of blood and a quarter-*kav* of bones [defile]; and some said: A half-*kav* of bones and a half-*log* of blood. A later court said: A quarter-*log* of blood and a quarter-*kav* of bones [defile] *terumah* and *kodashim*; A half-*kav* of bones and a half-*log* of blood [defile] the *nazir* and the Temple. (*t. Naz.* 5:1)<sup>5</sup>

In early times (“at first”), we are told here, the “elders” disputed the matter of the minimum amount of corpse-blood that defiled, and after several generations it was decided that for some purposes the minimum would be a quarter-*log*, and for others, such as the impurity of a *nazir*, it would be a half-*log* (see *m. Naz.* 7:2). The terms “at first” and “elders” seem to point to early halakic traditions, at least from the perspective of R. Eliezer or the Tosefta.<sup>6</sup> According to both Talmudim as well, the sages of the second, later stage in the sequence (the “later court”) delivered their opinion as a “midrash” or as an “oral tradition” from “Haggai, Zecharia and Malachi” (*y. Naz.* 7:2 56c; *b. Naz.* 53a).<sup>7</sup> In other words, both Talmudim report a tradition that these halakot are ancient and rooted in the earliest days of the oral law. Jacob Nahum Epstein went so far as to date the dispute of the “elders” to the second generation of the “Pairs” (*m. ʔAbot* 1).<sup>8</sup> This assignment is indeed a mere speculation. However, both stages in the evolution of corpse-blood impurity preceded R. Eliezer, a member of the Yavne generation (late first century C.E.). This early halakah addresses only the issue of the minimum quantity of blood that imparts impurity; the rule itself that blood imparts impurity was axiomatic for those elders as well, and required neither statement nor justification. The rule, then, that blood conveys impurity is earlier than the earliest stage of the halakah documented in our sources.

What, then, is the source of this rule, unmentioned as it is in Scripture? Remarkably, no homily, *דרשה*, deriving the rule from any verse in Numbers 19, the chapter on corpse impurity, is found in the *Sifre*, the main surviving midrash on Numbers. The discussions in the *Sifre* are devoted rather to secondary issues related to blood impurity and assume that the fundamental rule on blood impurity is already known.<sup>9</sup> An explicit homily deriving it from the main scriptural passage on corpse impurity, Numbers 19, is found only in the Babylonian Talmud:

<sup>4</sup> For the reasoning behind each opinion, see *t. ʔOhal.* 3:2–3. There is an allusion to the dispute in *y. Naz.* 7:2 56c.

<sup>5</sup> See also *t. ʔOhal.* 4:13–14 and parallels.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob N. Epstein, *Introduction to Tannaitic Literature: Mishna, Tosephta and Halakhic Midrashim* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1957), 507–8. In *b. Naz.* 53a the reading of the *beraita* is “the first elders.”

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion in J. N. Epstein, *Introduction*, 507–8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> See the dispute concerning the blood of a baby born after eight months of pregnancy, *Sifre Num.* 125.

R. Oshaia said [explaining R. Akiva's opinion cited earlier, that a dead fetus in his mother's womb is rendered impure], Scripture says: (האדם) בנפש במת הנוגע *Whoever touches a dead body in a human body* (Numbers 19:13). Now what can a dead body in a human body refer to? You must say it refers to a [dead] fetus in the womb of its mother. And R. Yishmael? He requires this verse to establish that quarter-log of blood from a dead body conveys impurity, as it is said: הנוגע במת בנפש האדם *Whoever touches a corpse, a body* [lit., בנפש, a soul] *of a person*. What is the נפש (soul) of a person which defiles? You must say it is a quarter-log of blood. (*b. Hul.* 72a)<sup>10</sup>

Whereas R. Akiva derives the impurity of a dead fetus from the compound phrase **במת בנפש האדם** (“a corpse, a body of a person,” as if “a corpse *in* the body of a person”), R. Yishmael, disputing R. Akiva's conclusion, uses the verse to affirm the impurity of blood. His homily rests apparently on an inference from the similar language (גזרה שווה) in Deut 12:23, **כי הדם הוא הנפש**, “for the blood is the life” (lit., “the soul”),<sup>11</sup> that the word **נפש** in the context of the corpse's impurity also implies blood, and hence that **בנפש** conveys impurity.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the sense of R. Yishmael's question, “What is the **נפש** (soul) of a person that defiles?” is “What is the quantity of blood that the life of a person depends on?” And the answer is that sages estimated that amount at a quarter-log.<sup>13</sup> Now, since it is R. Oshaia, the collector of *baraitot*, who transmitted the homiletic source for R. Akiva's view concerning the impurity of a dead fetus, cited earlier in the talmudic passage, we can take the source to be tannaitic. However, R. Yishmael's homily on the same verse, deriving from it the impurity of *blood*, is *not* brought as a tannaitic text. It is the *stam*—the anonymous discourse of the Talmud that constructs the homily (“And R. Yishmael, he would expound the verse . . .”) in order to provide an alternative to the homily of R. Akiva. Nonetheless, a similar tannaitic homily does survive elsewhere, in the context of priestly impurity in Leviticus:

*And say to them: None shall defile himself for any [dead] person (לנפש) among his kin (Lev 21:1). I have here only the dead person. From where do I know to extend*

<sup>10</sup> In the plain sense of the phrase **הנוגע במת בנפש האדם אשר ימות** the **ב** in both **במת** and **בנפש** indicates transitivity (Joüon-Muraoka, 448), and the phrase **האדם אשר ימות** is in apposition to **במת**. The homily ascribed to R. Akiva takes the **ב** of **בנפש האדם** in a spatial sense (“in”) (ibid., 486), the phrase **האדם בנפש** as subordinate to **במת**, and **אשר ימות** as modifying **במת**. The homily ascribed to R. Yishmael takes the **ב** as in the plain sense of the phrase.

<sup>11</sup> Or similar verses that associate **נפש** with blood, such as Lev 17:14: “For the life [נפש] of all flesh—its blood is its life. . . . for the life of all flesh is its blood.”

<sup>12</sup> This homily is used by Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah, Tum'at Met* 2:12) as the source for the rule on the impurity of a quarter-log of blood. See more on this below.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Milgrom sees in this quantity and its justification evidence that the rabbis took the root of all impurity to be death and the risk of death. He fails to note, however, that the rabbis identified only the blood of a corpse, not the blood of a living person, as a cause of impurity. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (3 vols.; AB 3, 3A, 3B; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 3:767.

the rule to include blood? Scripture teaches: *לנפש*, and it says: *for the blood is the life* (*נפש*) (Deut 12:23). (*Sifra* Emor 1:2)

In fact, there is only one tannaitic homily that derives the rule of blood impurity from the main biblical section devoted to corpse impurity, Numbers 19, and that is in the *Midrash Sifre Zuta* on Numbers.<sup>14</sup> Nearly eighty years ago, Jacob Nahum Epstein published, in the first volume of *Tarbiz*, a large Geniza fragment of the *Sifre Zuta* in which a long continuous midrash on *parashat Parah* (Numbers 19) was preserved.<sup>15</sup> A fresh reading of this section is included in a collection of Geniza fragments of halakic midrash published recently by Menahem I. Kahana.<sup>16</sup> It includes a homily concerning corpse-blood impurity that does not use the word *נפש* at all, but takes a different route.<sup>17</sup> This route, however, is problematic, as we shall see. Nonetheless, a careful reading reveals what may be the true source of the ancient rule of corpse-blood impurity.

The *Sifre Zuta* expounds the opening words of Num 19:11:

[א] “הנוגע במת” —  
 יכול כל שהוא? אמר<sup>18</sup> שוב: “במת”.<sup>19</sup> [...] .  
 הא מה הדבר, אחר שריבה הכתוב, מי עט.  
 אמרו: כזית מן המת טמא, שכן היא תחילת יצירתו.  
 [ב] אין לי אלא הנוגע בכזית [ת] מן המת ומנ’ אף הנוגע בעצם? תל’ לוי “או בעצם”.  
 יכול כל שהוא? אמר<sup>20</sup> שוב: “בעצם”.<sup>21</sup> [ ] .

<sup>14</sup> On the special character of this work, see esp. Solomon Schechter, “Fragments of Sifre Zuta,” *JQR* 6 (1894): 656–63; H. S. Horowitz, *Siphre D’be Rab: Fasciculus primus: Siphre ad Numeros adjecto Siphre zutta* (Leipzig: Libraria Gustav Fock, 1917), XV–XXI (his edition is on pp. 227–336); Jacob N. Epstein “Sifre Zuta Parashat Parah” (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 1 (1930): 46–78; idem, “A Rejoinder” (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 3 (1932): 232–36 (both reprinted in Jacob N. Epstein, *Studies in Talmudic Literature and Semitic Languages* II [ed. Ezra Z. Melamed; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1968], 141–73); idem, *Introduction*, 741–46; Saul Lieberman, *Siphre Zutta (The Midrash of Lydda)* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1968); and most recently Menahem I. Kahana, *Sifre Zuta on Deuteronomy: Citations from a New Tannaitic Midrash* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Epstein, “Parah.”

<sup>16</sup> Menahem I. Kahana, *The Geniza Fragments of the Halakic Midrashim, Part I* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 214–23.

<sup>17</sup> The word *נפש* is used there only as a source for the impurity of “mixture” blood: “From where do I know to extend the rule to mixture blood? Scripture teaches: *נפש*” (Kahana, *Geniza*, 217).

<sup>18</sup> In the Geniza fragment: ‘א, abbreviation for *אמר*.

<sup>19</sup> The omitted section raises, and rejects, the possibility that the minimum measure for flesh from a corpse conveying impurity is the size of a lentil.

<sup>20</sup> In the fragment: ‘א.

<sup>21</sup> At this point in the Geniza fragment there is a sentence that Epstein considers out of place. See Epstein, “Parah,” 62, note to lines 28–29.

הא מה הדבר, אחר שריבה הכתוב, מיעט.  
 אמ[ר]: עצם [כשעורה מטמא במגע ובמשא.  
 ...]<sup>22</sup>

[ג] אין לי אלא הנוגע במת ובעצם, ומנין<sup>23</sup> אף הנוגע בדם? [תל' לו]: "או בדם".  
 יכול כל שהוא? [א']<sup>24</sup> שוב: "בדם".  
 כמה הוא דמו של אדם, שיעורו [בבינוני] ת רביעית.<sup>25</sup>

[1] *He who touches the corpse* (19:11) —

Could it be that this is the case for any quantity whatever? He said again: *corpse* (19:13). [...]

How so? After scripture extended it restricted.

They said: An olive size of a corpse is impure, for so is the beginning of its creation.

[2] This accounts for one who touches an olive-size of a corpse. How do we know that this applies even to one who touches a bone? Scripture teaches: *or human bone* (19:16).

Could it be that this is the case for any quantity whatever? He said again: *bone* (19:18) [...].

How so? After scripture extended it restricted.

They said: A bone as large as a barleycorn conveys impurity by touch and by carrying [...].

...

[3] This accounts for one who touches a corpse or a bone. How do we know that this applies even to one who touches blood? [Scripture teaches]: *or blood*.

Could it be that this is the case for any quantity whatever? [He said] again: *blood*.

How much blood does a person have? Its minimum measure is, on the average, a quarter-log.

In each of the three sections, the homilist addresses one of the sources of corpse impurity—[1] flesh, [2] bone, and [3] blood—and the minimum measures for each. The structure of each of the sections is the same—the key word for the source of impurity is taken from one verse; the question is raised whether there is a lower limit on the quantity that would cause impurity; it is answered in the affirmative by reference to the repetition of the key word in another verse, according to the prin-

<sup>22</sup> The omitted section addresses the issue of the impurity of a limb from a living person.

<sup>23</sup> Kahana, *Geniza*, 217: ומכ; Epstein, "Parah": ומנין. However this may be, what is intended is clearly an abbreviation of ומנין, attested also in the *Yalkut Shim'oni*, probably written inaccurately in the Geniza fragment.

<sup>24</sup> Epstein ("Parah," 63, note to line 3) suggests that the א, the abbreviation for אמר, was erroneously attached to the preceding בלשהו.

<sup>25</sup> *Sifre Zuta* 19:11. Kahana, *Geniza*, 216–17. Cf. Horovitz edition, 306–7, where the text is poorly and incompletely reconstructed from *Midrash Hagadol*, *Yalkut Shim'oni* and the commentary of Rabenu Shimshon of Sens to *m. °Ohal.* 2:1.

ciple of “ריבוי ומיעוט”, extension and restriction”;<sup>26</sup> and finally the assertion that the sages established a particular limit for that source. (Sections 2 and 3 open with links to the previous section; sections 1 and 3 provide brief justifications for the particular limits established.)

The last section of the midrash, however, is most astonishing. The purported quotation that justifies the very existence of blood impurity, “Scripture teaches: *or blood*,” and the repetition that implies the minimum measure, “He said again: *blood*,” do not exist at all in the entire biblical chapter!<sup>27</sup>

A solution to the riddle is provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls. Impurity conveyed by the blood of a corpse appears in several sources in this literature. We find it twice in the *War Scroll*:

When the slain fall down, the priest shall keep blowing afar. They shall not come to the midst of the slain (so as) to become defiled in their unclean blood, for they are holy. They shall [no]t profane the oil of their priestly anointing through the blood of nations of vanity. (1QM 9:7–9)<sup>28</sup>

And when they have departed from the slain in order to enter the camp, they shall all sing the hymn of return. In the morning they shall wash their clothes and cleanse themselves of the blood of the guilty corpses. (1QM 14:2–3)<sup>29</sup>

And once in the *Temple Scroll* (11Q19 50:4–7):

וכול	4
איש אשר יגע על פני השדה בעצם אדם מת ובחלל חרב	5
או במת או בדם אדם מת או בקבר וטהר כחוק המשפט	6
	זהה <sup>30</sup> 7

<sup>26</sup> The terms are characteristic of midrashim from the school of R. Akiva. See Epstein, *Introduction*, 529.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in the quotation of this midrash in the commentary of Rabenu Shimshon to *m. °Ohal. 2:1*, the first quotation of the word “blood” is deleted, and there remains only, “Scripture teaches: *or*.” On the other hand, the second quotation does remain, “He said again: *blood*.” However, the Gaon of Vilna deletes the word “blood” and emends: “He said again: *or*.” See *Hagahot Hagra 4*, on R. Shimshon to *m. °Ohal. 2:1*, printed in the Vilna Talmud with *Seder Tohorot*, after Tractate *Nidah*. Epstein suggested that the homily is on the similarity of the word אדם meaning “person,” which does appear in the verse, with אדם (*idam*), Aramaic for blood, and reads the words in v. 16 או בעצם אדם, “or a human bone,” as if it were או ב־אדם, “or blood.” The quotation of the repeated reference to blood, “You say again: *blood*,” would accordingly refer to בנפש האדם in v. 13, but this suggestion is, in my opinion, rather forced. See Epstein, “Parah,” 63, note to line 3.

<sup>28</sup> Trans. Jean Duhaime, in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 2, *Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 115.

<sup>29</sup> Trans. Duhaime, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Elisha Qimron, *The Temple Scroll: A Critical Edition with Extensive Reconstructions* (in Hebrew; Beer Sheva/Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press and Israel Exploration

And every man in the open field who touches the bone of a dead man, or one who is slain with the sword, or a dead man, or the blood of a dead man, or a grave—he shall cleanse himself according to the statute of this ordinance. (My emphasis.)

This is a paraphrase of the list in Num 19:16 of contacts “in an open field” which cause impurity (ובכל אשר יגע על פני השדה בחלל חרב או במת או בעצם אדם או בקבר). However, the *Temple Scroll* adds to that list “the blood of a dead person” (בדם אדם מת). Yigael Yadin proposed that the impurity of blood in the *Temple Scroll* was derived from the use of the phrase נפש אדם in the chapter of the Torah under discussion: כל הנגע במת [...] לכל נפש אדם. בנפש האדם אשר ימות הנגע במת לכל נפש אדם (נפש) . . . . Whoever touches a corpse, the body (נפש) of a person who has died” (Num 19:11, 13). This phrase, Yadin argued, was interpreted as referring to blood in accordance with the verse כי הדם הוא הנפש (נפש) (Deut 12:23), in the same manner as in the homily in the Babylonian Talmud discussed above. In his view, the phrase “blood of a dead person” in the *Temple Scroll* is none other than an interpretative paraphrase of the verse “Whoever touches a corpse, the body (נפש) of a person who has died” (Num 19:13). This reconstruction, however, produces two serious difficulties. First, whereas Yadin reconstructed the homily from the language of Maimonides, and Maimonides in turn derived his language from the anonymous discussion of the Babylonian Talmud mentioned above, tannaitic sources contain not a trace of such a homily on the verses of Numbers 19.<sup>31</sup> Second, Yadin’s proposal deriving blood impurity from the phrase נפש אדם in v. 13 leaves unexplained the presence of this rule in the *Temple Scroll*’s paraphrase of v. 16, listing bone, corpses, and grave, but where the word נפש does not appear.<sup>32</sup>

Now, these added words in the *Temple Scroll* are precisely the words in the phantom quotation of Scripture in the passage in *Sifre Zuta*. Moreover, the context is also identical. The *Temple Scroll* inserts the words או בדם אדם מת, “or the blood of a dead person,” into its paraphrase of v. 16, “And every man who in an open field should come into contact with the bones of a dead person, or one slain by a sword, or a corpse, or the blood of a dead person, or a grave.” The *Sifre Zuta* seems to read the words או בדם, “or blood,” in the context of v. 16 as well, since its phantom quotation includes the word או (“or”), typical of the list of the contaminating objects in this verse.

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Society, 1996), 73. Trans. Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Shrine of the Book, 1983) 2:389.

<sup>31</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tum'at Met* 2:12.

<sup>32</sup> Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 1:335. Yadin’s own answer to this difficulty is that by this placement the author of the scroll intended to extend the rule of blood impurity to contact in the open field.

In light of all the above, we may assume that both sources, the *Temple Scroll* and *Sifre Zuta*, had in their text of Num 19:16 a reading that included in the list “or a corpse, or a human bone or a grave” also the words *או בדם*, “or blood.” Such a reading indeed does not survive in any other witness, direct or indirect, for the biblical text, but the fact remains that two independent and reliable witnesses seem to testify to that reading. If this is indeed the case, this gloss would have penetrated the Bible prior to the composition of the *Temple Scroll*. The words *או בדם אדם*, “or human blood,” may have eventually disappeared as a result of *homoioteleuton*, because of their similarity to the words *או בעצם אדם*, “or human bone.”<sup>33</sup>

Another possibility is that the *Temple Scroll* and *Sifre Zuta* both preserve a shared paraphrastic tradition, an early “midrashic” integration of a halakic addition into the verse. The location of this addition is not identical in the midrash and in the *Temple Scroll*. In *Sifre Zuta* the order is corpse, bone, blood; in the *Scroll*, bone, one who is slain, corpse, blood. However, what we find in the *Temple Scroll* is a paraphrase that changes the order of the verse at the outset, making it difficult to reconstruct the exact biblical text it used.

The language of the midrash implies that the words *או בדם*, “or blood,” appeared twice in the passage, for it expounds on the doubling of the words, *אמר בדם או בדם*, “said again: or blood.” The exegete may have had these words again in his reading, or exegesis, of v. 18, *ועל הנגע בעצם או בחלל או במת או בקבר*, “on him who touched the bone or the person who was slain or died naturally or the grave”; alternatively this may be merely a mechanical repetition of the structure of the previous parts of the homily.

That rabbinic literature generally, and halakic midrashim specifically, occasionally preserve scriptural readings varying from those of the MT is well known.<sup>34</sup> Preservation of such a variant reading here in *Sifre Zuta* is certainly possible, for, as Epstein demonstrated, this section of *Sifre Zuta* contains some exceptionally early material, both important historical references and early linguistic features.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> I owe the last suggestion to Michal Bar Asher-Siegal.

<sup>34</sup> Victor Aptowitz, *Das Schriftwort in der rabbinischen Literatur* (Vienna: Alfred Hodler, 1906–15); David Rosenthal, “The Sages’ Methodical Approach to Textual Variants within the Hebrew Bible” (in Hebrew), in *Isac Leo Seeligmann Volume: Essays on the Bible and the Ancient World* (ed. Yair Zakovitch and Alexander Rofé; Jerusalem: Elchanan Rubenstein, 1983), 2:395–417, and the literature cited there; Menahem Kahana, “The Scriptural Text Reflected in MS Rome 32 of Sifre to Numbers and Deuteronomy” (in Hebrew), in *Talmudic Studies* (ed. Yaacov Sussman and David Rosenthal; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 1:1–10; Vered Noam, “Rediscovered Fragments of Variant Biblical and Midrashic Texts” (in Hebrew), in *Issues in Talmudic Research: Conference Commemorating the Fifth Anniversary of the Passing of Ephraim E. Urbach, 2 December 1996* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2001), 66–79; idem, *Megillat Ta’anit: Versions, Interpretation, History with a Critical Edition* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 257–59.

<sup>35</sup> Epstein, “Parah,” 52–53.

He observed further that the anonymous midrash in the pericope he published transmits without comment the early halakah of the “elders” concerning the minimum amounts of bone and blood that defile—half-*kav* for bones and half-*log* for blood, not as was settled later a quarter each—before the rule was changed by the “later court.”<sup>36</sup> This rule, not a trace of which remains in the Mishnah, reflects, as we have already seen, the earliest glimmerings of the tannaitic period. Our own neighboring homily may have also preserved an ancient variant text of the Scripture, as well as a primordial exegetical tradition.

The *Temple Scroll* from Qumran, then, solves the riddle of an enigmatic tannaitic midrash; the rabbinic homily sheds light on the source of an obscure rule in the Qumran writings. The two together provide us with either a common ancient biblical exegesis or a variant reading of scriptural text that has long since disappeared.

<sup>36</sup> Epstein, *Introduction*, 508; idem, “Parah,” 67 and note to line 67.

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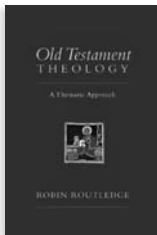
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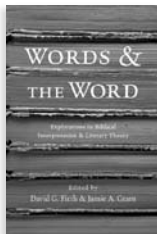
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