THE INTERCHANGE OF THE PREPOSITIONS BET AND MEM IN THE
TEXTS FROM QUMRAN

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In 1959, Professor N. M. Sarna published an article entitled
"The Interchange of the Prepositions Beth and Min in Biblical Hebrew."¹ He sought to demonstrate that the use of the prepo-
sition bet in the meaning "from", recently discovered in North-
west Semitic² and asserted for biblical Hebrew by the medieval
Jewish grammarians,³ could be proven to exist in the Hebrew

¹ JBL 78 (1959), 310-316.
² See the material cited by Sarna, op. cit., 310 f. and notes, as
well as C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (Rome: Pontifical
Biblical Institute, 1965), 92 f.; M. Dahood, Ugaritic-Hebrew
Philology (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 29; J.
Friedrich - W. Röllig, Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik (Rome:
Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), rule 251 and note, and C.
Brekelmans, "Some Considerations on the Translation of the
Psalms according to M. Dahood-I, The Preposition b = from
in the Psalms according to M. Dahood", Ugarit-Forschungen 1
J. Barr, Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testa-
ment (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 175-7 has challenged
the existence of bet = "from" in the Bible.
³ Sarna, op. cit., 311 and notes. Cf. W. Chomsky, "The
Ambiguity of the Prefixed Prepositions m, l, b in the Bible",
JQR N.S. 61 (1970/1), 87-9. It is remarkable that the only
Scriptures. Sarna adopted a systematic methodology for confirming the existence of this phenomenon: (1) Seven examples were cited to show that "either b or mn may be employed interchangeably as the subordinating preposition with the same verb."4 (2) Next, he noted that "the ablative use of prepositional b has twice been preserved by the Kethib, whereas the Qere reflects the more usual form with mn."5 (3) Sarna adduced five examples of parallel passages which demonstrated "the interchangeability of the two prepositions."6 While he recognized that dialectal considerations might account for this last group, he cited (4) six examples in which the alternation of the prepositions within the same passage was "undoubtedly" for "purely stylistic reasons."7 After this methodical demonstration, Sarna suggested that the assumption of the use of b for m(in) would be of help in the elucidation of some difficult passages in Job. Needless to say, it was his intention that this conclusion might throw light on other difficult biblical passages. Yet it is probable that the history of this interchange did not end with the composition of the last biblical verse. Evidence of continuation

references to modern research in Chomsky's article are to the various editions of Gordon's work on Ugaritic. Professor Daniel Lasker of Ben Gurion University was kind enough to call to my attention the reference in Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, I,41 (end).

4 Sarna, op. cit., 311.
6 Ib.
into the Hellenistic period may be available in the Greek Bible translations. This study is devoted to showing that the usage persisted into post-biblical Hebrew as found in the Qumran Scrolls.

In order to establish the occurrence of the phenomenon in Qumran literature, we shall follow Sarna's methodology. Examples in support of the interchange will be set out in several categories:

(1) Variants between Qumran biblical texts and the MT: E. Y. Kutscher listed three cases in which 1QIsa had the preposition "bet" where the MT had "mem."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MT</th>
<th>1QIsa</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is. 46:6</td>
<td>מכים לכיס</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is. 48:16</td>
<td>מעת בעת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is. 66:6</td>
<td>מעיר ליער</td>
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</tbody>
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Kutscher explains the first example as conditioned by the continuation of the verse, and takes the other two to be "exegetical." Kutscher also adduced three examples in which the

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9 Ha-Lashon We-Ha-Reqa' Ha-Leshoni shel Megillat Yesha'yahu Ha-Shelemah Mi-Megillot Yam Ha-Melaḥ (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1959), 309.

10 Op. cit., 311. For a comparison with the ancient versions, see Kutscher, loc. cit.
scroll has mem where the MT has bet.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{MT} & \quad \text{1Q\textsuperscript{a} Isa} \\
\text{Is. 6:13} & \quad \text{משלחת בשלחין} \\
\text{Is. 9:18} & \quad \text{מעזרת במצרים} \\
\text{Is. 10:24} & \quad \text{משלחת בחשון}
\end{align*}
\]

Two cases may be cited from 11Q\textsuperscript{a}Ps\textsuperscript{a} in which the scroll has mem where the MT has bet.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{MT} & \quad 11Q\textsuperscript{a}Ps\textsuperscript{a} \\
\text{Ps. 119:87} & \quad \text{בעזיאו col. 10:6} \\
\text{Ps. 139:21} & \quad \text{גמהים ומכמהים col. 20:13}\end{align*}
\]

(2) Variation between the MT and the biblical text which is reflected in a sectarian composition: 1QH 5:13 reads, wa-tašel nefesh 'ani bi-meq' on 'arayot. This passage is a mosaic of biblical phraseology: Jer. 20:13 and Ps. 35:10 (cf. 72:12) supply the verb and predicate; the object of the preposition comes from Nah. 2:12; Jer. 20:13 has the preposition miyyad, and Ps. 35:10 uses m(in). Nah. 2:12 has no preposition. Nevertheless, our Qumran text exhibits the preposition bet.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} On the addition of the second mem in 11Q\textsuperscript{a}Ps\textsuperscript{a}, see J. A. Sanders, The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (DJD IV) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 41.

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. 1QH 5:18 f. as restored in J. Licht, Megillat Ha-Hodayot (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute 1957), 102. If the proposed reading, [wa-tasel nil\textsuperscript{tr}af mi-bor 'arayot], is accepted, it lends further support to our example of the interchange. But note also the alternatives mi-koaḥ and mi-paḥ cited in Licht's textual note on bor.
Either the author of the hymn had a variant biblical text before him, or, more likely, this is an example of the use of bet to mean "from". The line may therefore be translated: "You rescued the poor man from the lion's den".

(3) Interchange of the subordinating preposition: The previous example (1QH 5:13) shows that bet could be employed as the subordinating preposition in cases normally requiring m(in). This phenomenon can be further documented. In 1QH 1:23, the nif'al of the root b't ("to be terrified") governs the preposition bet. In 3:14 this same verb form governs m(in). Biblical usage exhibits a compound preposition beginning with mem.

1QH 1:21 reads 'eleh yada'ti mi-binatkhah. 1QM 10:16 has 'eleh yada'nu mi-binatkhah. 1QH 14:12 has wa-'ani yada'ti u-mi-binatkha. From the continuation it is clear that the waw is either otiose or explicative. Yet 1QH 15:12 reads wa-'ani yada'ti be-binatkha. This last passage has bet where the other three have m(in).

(4) Poetic parallelism of bet and mem: Such a case occurs in 1QS 3:19.

be-ma'ayan 'or toledot ha-'emet
u-mi-megor ḥoshekh toledot ha-'awel

From a spring of light (come) the generations

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13 The term toledot, literally "generations," has a complex meaning at Qumran. See J. Licht, Megillat Ha-Serakhim (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1965), 85. G. Scholem, "Hakkarat Panim We-Sidre Sirṭuṭin", Sefer Assaf, ed. U. Cassuto (Jerusalem 1942/3), 477-9 would have us translate "nature", but this does not seem to fit the context. Toledot at Qumran refers to the origin, nature and activities of the thing described. This term is certainly worthy of a thorough study.
of truth,
And from a source of darkness (come) the
generations of unrighteousness.

In the passages quoted so far, it was possible to marshal
literary or textual evidence in favor of understanding a given
bet as meaning "from". For the following examples, no such
support can be cited. Nevertheless, the evidence from the pas-
sages discussed above allows us to assume that the interchange
was still operating when the scrolls were composed and copied.
We may therefore use it to solve textual problems and to avoid
needless textual emendations. These examples are taken from
the Qumran legal materials:

The sectarian law—the nistar—must be kept secret by the
sect. The maskil (sectarian scholar-teacher) is required, in
the words of 1QS 9:17, u-ле-satter 'et 'aṣat ha-torah be-tokh
'anshe ha-'awel. Rejecting P. Wernberg-Møller's proposed
emendation of be-tokh to mi-tokh,14 we still translate, "To
keep secret the counsel of the Torah from among the men of in-
inguity."15

1QS 7:10-12 contains an allusion to the voting procedure
at Qumran.16 The passage begins, we-khen la-'ish ha-nifṭar be-
moshab ha-rabbim 'asher lo' be'-eṣah.... We translate, "And

15 For a fuller discussion of this passage see my Halakhah at
Qumran (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 27.
105ff. See also E. Ferguson,"Qumran and Codex 'D'", RQ 8
(1972), 75-80.
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likewise, as to the man who is absent from the session of the assembly, without permission..."17

The few examples discussed here do not exhaust the possibilities. However, it cannot be assumed that every bet in Qumran literature means "from". But the evidence marshalled suffices to buttress the possibility that the interchange of the prepositions bet and m(in) is in evidence at Qumran, and that we are therefore entitled to appeal to this interchange in interpreting Qumran literature.

17 For a complete discussion, see Halakhah at Qumran, 69 f.