Dots on Deuteronomy 29:28: A Polemical Response to Qumran’s Secret Laws

“The secret things belong unto YHWH our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever”—the verse has eleven dotted letters indicating erasure marks, but why? The answer lies in a controversial interpretation found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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Aleppo Codex (10th c.) with Deut 29:28 *puncta extraordinaria* highlighted.

Moses’s message in Deuteronomy 29 about the importance of keeping the commandments laid out in Deuteronomy, and the consequences of the Israelites violating their covenant with YHWH, ends with:

דברים כט:כח ‎הַ֙נִּסְתָּרֹ֔ת לַי־הוָ֖ה אֱלֹהֵ֑ינוּ וְהַנִּגְלֹ֞ת לָ֤֗נ֗וּ֗ וּ֗לְ֗בָ֗נֵ֙֗י֗נ֗וּ֙֗ עַ֗ד־עוֹלָ֔ם לַעֲשׂ֕וֹת אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵ֖י הַתּוֹרָ֥ה הַזֹּֽאת׃

Deut 29:28 The secret things belong unto YHWH our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

In the Masoretic Text, dots appear over the letters לנו ולבנינו ע. Scholars call these dots *puncta extraordinaria* (lit. “special dots”), and ancient scribes used them to communicate to later scribes that a given letter should not be copied because it is a scribal error.[1] Two modern scholars who studied the topic of dotted letters in detail deemed the dotted letters in this verse “cryptic” (Tov)[2] and “extremely enigmatic” (Talmon).[3] The words themselves are not more obscure or difficult than others that lack dots, so why did the proto-MT scribes single them out for erasure?

The Eleventh Dot

The problem here is especially acute: What sense could there be for erasing the *ayin* of עד but not the *dalet*, thereby leaving a single-letter word that does not exist in Hebrew? To make matters more complicated, this dot does not appear in all manuscripts; it appears in the Aleppo Codex (10th cent.) but is absent from the Leningrad Codex (1008).[4]

Following the rule of thumb that the more difficult-to-understand text is usually the more original (*lectio difficilior potior*), it makes more sense to assume that certain scribes removed this strange and hard to explain eleventh dot, than to suggest that the dot was added for some reason after the fact in some manuscripts. Thus, the version with eleven dots is likely the more original.

Another variant is noted in certain manuscripts of different rabbinic texts (e.g., Sifrei Numbers §69): The dot is missing from the *ayin* but appears instead on the *gimmel* of the previous word: והנג֗לות ל֗נ֗ו֗ ו֗ל֗ב֗נ֗י֗נ֗ו֗, making this first word unintelligible.[5] This variant underscores the core problem with the eleventh dot, namely, that erasing a letter from a word often yields gibberish as it does in these eleventh dot variants. This implies that the scribes were trying to communicate something else with these erasure marks, but what?

Rabbinic Midrash on Erasing the Words

Speculation on the meaning of the dots appears in a number of rabbinic sources.

Secrets Will Be Revealed: Avot de-Rabbi Natan B

Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (version B, 98, column B) reads the verse as speaking about access to secret knowledge. It cites the verse as follows:

הנסתרות לה' אלהינו ו'ה'נ'ג'ל'ו'ת לנו ולבנינו עד עולם—והלא אינו נקוד אלא עד (הא) [העיין]

“The hidden is for the LORD our God, and the revealed (dotted) for us and our children forever”—it is only dotted up until [and not including] the *ayin*.

It then understands the verse as saying:

יכול שהן גלויין לנו בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא אינן גלויין לנו (שנאמר) [ת"ל]... לפי שבעולם הזה אינן גלויין לנו אבל גלויים לנו לעתיד לבוא.

Perhaps they are revealed to us in this world but in the next world they are not revealed to us? The text says… since in this world they are not revealed to us, but in the next world they will be revealed to us.

The rabbis are understanding the words עד עולם, “forever,” as “until the next world.” The point here is that while in this world humans have no access to God’s secrets, they will learn them in the next world.[6]

Keeping Hidden Commandments: Midrash Mishlei

Midrash Mishlei (§26) interprets the verse to be about the commandments and the dots to be a rebuke:

מלמד שאמרו ישראל לפני הב"ה: "רבונו של עולם, על מה שבגלוי אנו מצווים ואין אנו מצווים על מה שבסתר." אמ' להן הב"ה: "אף על שבגלוי אין אתם יכולין לעמוד."[7]

This teaches that Israel said to the Holy One: “Master of the World, we are commanded about things that are in the open, but we are not commanded about what is hidden.” The Holy One said to them: “Even that which is in the open you will be unable to maintain.”

According to the homily, the dots communicate God’s rebuke that the Israelites will not even succeed in keeping the revealed. Hence the words “for us and our children,” which refer to the revealed, are being erased with the dots. This midrash only works if the eleventh dot is ignored.[8]

Punishment for Hidden Sins: Bavli

The Babylonian Talmud records a tannaitic debate about the meaning of the dots, according to which “hidden” and “revealed” refer to sins committed in private or public:

למ[ה] נקוד על לנו ולבנינו ועל ע' שבע[ד]? מלמד שלא ענש ה'ק'ב'ה' על הנסת[רות] עד שעברו ישר[אל] את הירדן, דבר[י] ר' יהודה. אמ[ר] לו ר' נחמיה: וכי ענ[ש] על הנסתרות לעולם? והלא כבר נאמר: עד עולם? אלא כשם שלא ענש על הנסתרות לעולם, כך לא ענש על עונשין שבגלוי עד שעברו ישר' את הירדן.[9]

Why are there dots above לנו ולבנינו “for us and our children” and above the *ayin* of עד (“until”)? “This teaches that the Holy One did not punish [them] for violations of hidden things until the Israelites crossed the Jordan.”—These are the words of R. Judah. R. Nehemiah said to him: “Does [God] ever punish for hidden things? Doesn’t it say ‘forever’? Rather, just as he doesn’t punish for hidden things ever, so too he didn’t punish for public punishable offenses until the Israelites crossed the Jordan.”[10]

In these homilies, the Israelites are being told that the rules will change once they enter the land. The dots convey that the words “us and our children” should be temporarily erased until the conquest and settlement begin. Although the Bavli is explicit that it has the dot over the *ayin*, exactly how it is interpreting this dot is unclear.[11]

Erasing Different Words: Insight of the Tosafot

In their glosses on tractate Sanhedrin, the Tosafot (12th cent. France)[12] suggest an alternative understanding of what the dots mean to erase:

עי״ן שבעד נקוד כדי לנקד י״א אותיות כנגד י״א אותיות שבשם, לאשמועינן שהנקודה ראויה להיות על השם למעט משום דמעתה גם הנסתרות לנו ולבנינו, אלא שאין דרך לנקוד את השם.

The ע in עד is dotted in order that eleven letters will be dotted, to be equivalent to the eleven letters in the divine name, in order for us to learn that the dots should have been on the divine name so that we should know that from now on the secret things are also for us and our sons. However, it is not customary to put (cancellation) dots on the divine name.

In other words, the inexplicable 11th dot shows that the dots are purposely written in the wrong place, and that, instead, the scribe should erase the words comprising eleven letter, לי־הוה אלהינו, yielding:

\*הַנִּסְתָּרֹת וְהַנִּגְלֹת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת.

The secret things and the revealed things belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

The point of the verse, as corrected by the cancellation dots and understood by the Tosafot, is that both the secret and revealed things are given to us and our children forever. No one has special access. This explanation of the “true” place of the dotted letters has been adopted by any number of subsequent scholars and should be considered the consensus.[13]

Sifrei

This same understanding of the dots may be what is behind the exposition in Sifrei Numbers (§69):

אמ' להן: עשיתן גלויים אף אני אודיע את הנסתרים.

He said to them: “You have kept the revealed, so I will teach you the secrets.”

This midrash is assuming that the words “the LORD our God” should be erased, with a claim that effectively, both the “revealed” and “hidden” were available to all.[14]

Hidden Things for God (Ben Sira)?

What is the problem with saying that the hidden things are for God only? Why did the Second Temple scribes of Proto-MT object to this message to such an extent as to wish to erase the words “for YHWH our God” from the verse? In fact, that God has secrets unavailable to humans seems to be how the 3rd century B.C.E. Wisdom of Ben Sira understood the verse, when he wrote this very message in words reminiscent of the passage in Deuteronomy (Ben Sira 3:21–24, Geniza MS A):

פלאות ממך אל תדרוש,
ומכוסה ממך אל תחקור.
במה שהורשית התבונן,
ואין לך עסק בנסתרות.
וביותר ממך אל תמר,
כי רב ממך הראית.
כי רבים עשתוני בני אדם,
ודמיונות רבות מתעות.

What is too sublime for you, seek not;
Into things beyond your strength, search not.
What is committed to you, attend to;
What is hidden is not your concern.
With what is beyond you, meddle not;
More than enough has been shown to you.
Indeed, many are the speculations of human beings,
Evil and misleading fancies.[15]

The idea that God has secrets inaccessible to humanity seems rather uncontroversial.[16] In fact, this very passage from Ben Sira is quoted authoritatively by R. Levi in the Jerusalem Talmud (j. Sotah 7:5).[17] The problem, therefore, has little to do with the verse’s simple meaning and instead, is connected to how the verse was read by the Jews responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran,[18] who believed that they had “hidden laws known only to the sect.”[19]

A Second Temple Sectarian Context

The Community Rule (סרך היחד, Serekh Hayahad), a work that lays out many of the specific rules and beliefs of that community (1QS 5:7–13, Qimron ed.), states:

סרך היחד ה:ז ...כול הבא לעצת היחד ה:ח יבוא בברית אל לעיני כול המתנדבים ויקם על נפשו בשבועת אסר לשוב אל תורת מושה ככול אשר צוה בכול ח:ט לב ובכול נפש **לכול הנגלה ממנה** לבני צדוק הכוהנים שומרי הברית ודורשי רצונו ולרוב אנשי בריתם ה:י המתנדבים יחד לאמתו ולהתלהב ברצונו.

1QS 5:7 …Everyone who enters into the Council of the Community, 5:8 shall enter into the covenant of God in the sight of all those who devote themselves. He shall take upon his soul by a binding oath to return to the Torah of Moses, according to all which he has commanded with all 5:9 heart and with all soul, **according to everything which has been revealed from it** to the Sons of Zadok, the priests who keep the covenant and seek his will, and according to the multitude of the men of their covenant 5:10 who devote themselves together to his truth and to walking in his will.

The text continues:

ואשר יקים בברית על נפשו להבדל מכול אנשי העול ההולכים ה:יא בדרכ הרשעה כיא לוא החשבו בבריתו כיא לוא בקשו ולוא דרשהו בחוקוהי **לדעת הנסתרות** אשר תעו ה:יב בם [לאשמה][20], **והנגלות**עשו ביד רמה לעלות אפ למשפט ולנקום נקם באלות ברית לעשות בם (מ)שפטים י:יג גדולים לכלת עולם לאין שרית.[21]

He shall take upon his soul by covenant to separate from all men of deceit who walk 5:11 in the ways of wickedness. For they cannot be accounted in his covenant, since they have neither sought nor inquired after him through his statutes, **in order to know the hidden (ways)** in which they erred, 5:12 incurring guilt, **nor the revealed (ways)** which they treated with an arrogant hand, (thus) arousing anger for judgment and taking vengeance by the curses of the covenant. In them he (God) will execute great 5:13 judgments resulting in eternal destruction without a remnant.[22]

This section of the Community Rule uses the words from Deuteronomy 29:28—these are bolded above. It states that new members enter into a covenant with an oath that they will not only renew their commitment to the laws of Moses revealed to all Jews,[23] but will strive to keep the commandments in accordance with the secret knowledge progressively revealed to the sons of Zadok who run their sect,[24] and who in turn pass on this otherwise hidden information to members only.

Another sectarian work found in Qumran (and in the Cairo Genizah), the Covenant of Damascus, makes clear what this information was:

ברית דמשק ג:יב ...ובמחזיקים במצות אל ג:יג אשר נותרו, מהם הקים אל את בריתו לישראל עד עולם. **לגלות** ג:יד **להם נסתרות** אשר תעו בם כל ישראל שבתות קדשו ומועדי ג:טו כבודו עידות צדקו ודרכי אמתו וחפצי רצונו אשר יעשה ג:טז האדם וחי בהם.[25]

CD 3:12–16 …But with the remnant which held fast to the commandments of God, He made His Covenant with Israel forever, **revealing to them the hidden things** in which all Israel had gone astray. He unfolded before them His holy Sabbaths and his glorious feasts, the testimonies of His righteousness and the ways of His truth, and the desires of His will which a man must do in order to live.[26]

Accordingly, other Jews, even those who did keep the explicit commandments of the Torah, and certainly those who did not, were unaware of the hidden knowledge, revealed by God only to the sectarian leaders, and thus did not fulfill them.[27]

Thanks to this special knowledge of how to properly observe the laws of the Torah, the Qumran community distinguished itself from all other Jews. Thus, they were to separate themselves from all the evil sinners and take an oath to follow all that had been revealed to the leaders of their group—the correct legal norms, which only they knew.

Connecting the Dots

We have here two contrasting pictures: The Qumran community understands Deuteronomy 29:28 as hinting to the secret laws available only to their sect, while the scribes of the Proto-Masoretic text put erasure dots over the verse to stress that there are no secret laws. The scribes do not say why they wish to make this claim. The Qumran material offers a suggestion of how to connect the dots by bricolage,[28] but much depends on when the dots were added and by whom.

Shemesh and Werman’s Suggestion: Qumran Is Also Interpreting the Dots

Aharon Shemesh and Cana Werman proposed that the ancient sectarians were aware of the dotted letters and understood them in the same double sense as some of the midrashic readings, namely that the dotted words were to be taken twice, once as omitted and once as read.[29] As a result, “the ‘hidden things’ can be understood only if the verse is read in a two-fold manner. That is, initially:

[The] ‘hidden matters’ belonged to God and even members of the sect unwittingly transgressed them (i.e. reading as if the dotted words were NOT to be omitted, but included as part of the verse), but, at a later point, due to their adherence to God’s revealed commandments, they were rewarded by their revelation (i.e., now reading with omission of the dotted letters).[30]

This suggestion is problematic, however. First, although erasure dots are attested in a variety of Qumran manuscripts, we do not have this verse in any of the surviving manuscripts in Deuteronomy, so we have no evidence that the Qumran community had dots on these letters in their scrolls. Second, nothing in either the Community Rule or the Covenant of Damascus references or even hints at dots. Moreover, these dots appear in the Proto-MT texts, the text-type adopted by the proto-rabbinic group, and one that does not exist as such in Qumran.[31]

Therefore, it is unlikely that the Qumran group knew a text with these dots. Moreover, Shemesh and Werman’s hypothesis, which understands the claims in Qumran as a midrash of sorts on pre-existing dots, would leave us where we started, with no real explanation for why the dots were added.

My Suggestion: A Polemical Response to Qumran’s Secret Laws

A simpler path, I propose, is that the dots were added as a polemical device, to undercut the Qumran group and its analogs, who claimed the benefit of special revelation. The scribe who put the cancellation dots did not believe that this group possessed legitimate secret teachings, and cut the biblical ground from underneath the Qumran sect by having the verse state explicitly that all Jews were subject to and had access to the same divine revelation.

God has given us all the “hidden” and the “revealed” laws, so we can all fulfill the law in all its details.[32] This point was so important to the scribes of Proto-MT, that they were willing to go so far as to suggest deleting words from the Torah itself.[33]

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/dots-on-deuteronomy-29-28-a-polemical-response-to-qumrans-secret-laws)

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1. See discussion in my [“Why Is Esau’s Kiss Dotted?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/why-is-esaus-kiss-dotted) *TheTorah* (2019).
2. Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 204.
3. Shemaryahu Talmon, “Prolegomenon,” in Romain F. Butin, *The Ten Nequdoth of the Torah* (New York: Ktav, 1969; reprint of, Baltimore: J.H Furst, 1906), xviii.
4. Similarly, while it appears in MSS Vat ebr. 9 (1287) and Vat ebr. 9 (14th cent.), it is absent from the Kennicott Bible (1476).
5. The dotting above follows that of MS Vatican 32. The exact spread of the dots in the Sifrei differs radically between the manuscripts. Nevertheless, the fact that any dot at all appears on this word is unique and worthy of notice. For a detailed list of where the dots are in each manuscript, see the apparatus in Menachem Kahana, *ספרי במדבר: מהדורה מבוארת* [*Sifre on Numbers: An Annotated Edition*] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2011), 1.168 [ln 27]. In his commentary (*Sifre on Numbers*, 4.478), Kahana notes that the word והנגלות is also dotted in one way or another in MS JTS L 823 of the Lekah Tov, as well as in the Vatican MS of Avot de-Rabbi Natan B, which will be discussed presently.
6. For an analysis of the purely midrashic explanations of dotted passages offered by the Rabbis, with no concern for the sort of questions raised here, see Avigdor Shinan, “The Ten Midrashic Interpretations of the Ten Dotted Passages of the Pentateuch,” in Sara Japhet (ed.), *The Bible in the Light of its Interpreters: Sara Kamin Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1994), 198-214 [Hebrew]. Shinan suggested that, according to the Rabbis, many of the dotted letters in narrative accounts indicate that “things are not what they seem.”
7. Hebrew text follows, Burton L. Visotzky, *מדרש משלי* [*Midrash Mishle*] (New York: JTS, 2002), 171.
8. As Midrash Mishlei does not include the dotted words in its opening quotation, it is difficult to know which dots the darshan is working with.
9. Text follows the Karlsruhe Reuchlin 2 MS (13th cent., Ashkenazi).
10. In his Laws of the Torah Scroll, R. Judah ben Barzillai (late 11th–early 12th century) has a very different version of this debate in the Bavli:

נקוד על לנו ולבנינו ועל עין שבעד. ולמה נקוד? אמ[ר] ר' יוסי: אמ[ר] הקדוש ברוך הוא ליש[ראל]: בני כשם שא[י]ני תופס אתכם על האונסין כך א[י]ני תופס אתכם על הגלויין. אמ[ר] לו ר' יהודה: והלא כשקיבלו תורה מסיני לא קיבלוה אלא גלויין? שנ[אמר]: מימינו אש דת למו. אלא כך אמר להן: כשם שאיני תופס אתכם על האונסין כך איני תופס אתכם על הנסתרין.

There are dots above לנו ולבנינו “for us and our children” and above the *ayin* of עד (“until”). Why are there dots? R. Yossi said: “The Holy One said to Israel: ‘My children, just as I don’t hold you accountable for things you are forced to do, so too I don’t hold you accountable for things that are revealed.” R. Judah said to him: “But when they accepted Torah at Mount Sinai, they specifically accepted it for things that are revealed, as it says ‘on his right, the fire of law.’ Rather, he said to them: ‘Just as I don’t hold you accountable for things you are forced to do, so too I don’t hold you accountable for hidden things.”

1. Concerning this problem (how the Bavli understands the eleventh dot), Romain F. Butin, *The Ten Nequdoth of the Torah* (Baltimore: J.H Furst, 1906), 103, concluded that he had to “simply confess our inability to grasp the exact meaning of the explanations it gives for the *nequdoth*.”
2. What we call the Tosafot commentary on the Talmud is not of a piece. There were many Tosafot style commentaries on the Talmud, and what we have is a potpourri. The Tosafot commentary on Sanhedrin was written by a student of R. Peretz ben Elijah of Corbeil (d. 1295), though it also makes extensive use of the earlier Tosafot commentary of R. Samson of Sens (ca. 1150–ca.1230). See Ephraim E. Urbach, *בעלי התוספות: תולדותיהם, חיבוריהם, שיטתם* [*The Tosaphists: Their History, Writings, and Methods*], 5th enlarged ed. (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1986 [orig. 1954]) 2.657–658.
3. See, for example, Lajos Blau, *Masoretische Untersuchungen* (Strassburg, 1891), 30-34; Butin, *Ten Nequdoth,* 100-107.
4. It is possible to understand this homily as being the same as that of Avot de-Rabbi Nathan B, namely that if they keep the law in this world, in the next world they will learn the secrets. Nevertheless, see Aharon Shemesh and Cana Werman, “Hidden Things and their Revelation,” *ReQ* 18 (1998): 416, who also understood this text as I have above, following Tosafot, as insisting that both the “revealed” and the “hidden” were available to the entire nation.
5. Translation from Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (New York 1987), 158. See *ibid.,*160–161, for the suggestion that these remarks against those led astray were aimed at Jews who were delving in cosmogonic and theogonic speculations, associated with Greek learning. Ben Sira wanted them to be content with the law, for it to be sufficient for them. For another suggestion, associating the secret teachings opposed by Ben Sira with ideas developed in IV Ezra, see Michael Stone, *Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 106–118.
6. Editor’s note: For an argument that this is the simple meaning of the verse, see David Levin-Kruss, [“Is Judaism Meant to have Exclusive Religious Secrets?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/is-judaism-meant-to-have-exclusive-religious-secrets) *TheTorah* (2013).
7. Editor’s note: For more on this, see Tzvi Novick, [“Land or Torah: What Binds Israel as a Nation?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/land-or-torah-what-binds-israel-as-a-nation) *TheTorah* (2020).
8. This belief was likely shared by the Essenes. I have argued against the identification of the Qumran community and the Essenes, insisting that these were similar responses to the same set of situations, which shed light on each other, but with no set of sources having a privileged place in the interpretation of the other set. See, for example, Albert Baumgarten, “The Rule of the Martian as Applied to Qumran,” *Israel Oriental Studies*14 (1994): 121-142; "The Temple Scroll, Toilet Practices, and the Essenes," *Jewish History* 10 (1996): 9-20; "Who Cares and Why Does it Matter? Qumran and the Essenes Once Again," *Dead Sea Discoveries*11 (2004): 174-190. For the most pertinent and reasoned disagreement with my conclusions see Jonathan Klawans, “The Essene Hypothesis: Insights from Religion 101,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 23 (2016): 51-78. In contrast to Klawans, I would insist that the object of instruction in a course such as Religion 101 is to teach the students not to make simplistic identifications and comparisons but to respect the differences which often matter most to the members of the groups under study. For another attempt to square the Qumran-Essene circle, see also Stone, *Secret Groups,* 55-59, 137, with extensive bibliography.
9. Shani Tzoref, “The ‘Hidden’ and the ‘Revealed;’ Esotericism, Election, and Culpability in Qumran and Related Literature,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Sixty*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and Shani Tzoref, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 299, citing numerous other scholars, *ibid.,*n. 2.
10. The text reads לאששמה, but the second *shin* is likely a scribal error.
11. Elisha Qimron, *מגילות מדבר יהודה: החיבורים העבריים* [*The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings*], בין מקרא למשנה [Between Bible and Mishnah](Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2010), 1.218.
12. Translation from James H. Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community and Related Documents (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations)*(Tübingen/Westminster: Mohr Siebeck/ John Knox, 1994), 21-23.
13. Ed Sanders has called this “Covenantal Nomism.” See Ed P. Sanders, “Common Judaism Explored,” in *Common Judaism- Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Adele Reinhartz and Wayne MacCready (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 11–24. As the title of the volume indicates its essays focus on Sanders’s elaboration of aspects of “Common Judaism” and of the place of “Covenantal Nomism” in that context.
14. My analysis agrees with that proposed by Shemesh-Werman, “Hidden Things,” 418–421, who correctly noted that the process of revelation of the “hidden” things to the sectarian group was a progressive one, over time. This conclusion is widely shared, as noted by Tzoref, “‘Hidden’ and the ‘Revealed’,” 314–317.
15. Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings*,9.
16. Translation from Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1987), 85.
17. As Zev Farber called to my attention, the analogy between the secret knowledge passed down in the Qumran group and the Pharisaic oral torah transmitted to its members and observed by them is striking. However, there was an important difference. The Pharisees were a “reformist” group, that hoped to convince other Jews to observe their special laws. They crossed the seas to make a proselyte, whatever that may mean (Matt 23:15). Their opponents accused them of misleading the entire nation from the highest to the lowest with their false teachings (4QpHab). See further, Albert Baumgarten, “The ‘Outreach’ Campaign of the Ancient Pharisees: There is no Such Thing as a Free Lunch”, *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome,*ed. B. Isaac and Y. Shahar,(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 11-28. The interpretation of the dotted letters in Deuteronomy 29:28 proposed below fits well with this “reformist” approach. The Qumran group was “introversionist.” The rest of the Jewish world was hopelessly lost. They had no interest in sharing their special knowledge with other Jews. Their only concern was for themselves.
18. Literally the work of a *bricoleur*or handyman in French, who has a simple batch of tools which must be adopted to any task at hand. Bricolage is a term coined by Claude Lévi- Strauss for the way storytellers fill in the missing connections between the pieces of the stories they tell by employing the simple conventional tools found in their toolkit. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966), 16–33.
19. As stated already at the beginning of their article: “This claim is based on a double reading of the verse (i.e. Deut. 29:28)”, Shemesh-Werman, “Hidden Things,” 409.
20. Shemesh-Werman, “Hidden Things,” 412-413.
21. Emanuel Tov notes that a similar text, which he calls MT-like, does appear in Qumran, but not Proto-MT. See, [Part 3: Socio-Religious Background and Stabilization](https://www.thetorah.com/article/socio-religious-background-and-stabilization) in Emanuel Tov, [“The (Proto-)Masoretic Text: A Ten Part Series,”](https://www.thetorah.com/series/proto-masoretic-text) *TheTorah* (2017).
22. The bold step of calling words in the Torah into question simply to undercut another Jewish group with an opposing ideology fits with the suggestion of David Flusser who proposed that the rabbinic tradition of the “benediction against the minim” should be understood as a response to the proud separatist claims in 4QMMT. David Flusser, “4QMMT and the Benediction Against the Minim,” *Judaism of the Second Temple Period, Volume One, Qumran and Apocalypticism* (Grand Rapids/Jerusalem, 2007), 70-118. This contribution has the same goal: to fill out the response to the claims of exclusive knowledge of divine revelation made by some Jews in antiquity and to assert that both the “revealed” and the “hidden” were a national possession, by means of the cancellation dots in Deut 29:28. It is possible that a similar thing happened with the anti-Samaritan polemic, at least according to those scholars who believe that Mount Gerizim is the original reading for Deuteronomy as opposed to Mount Ebal. See Jonathan Ben-Dov, [“An Altar on Mt Ebal or Mt Gerizim: The Torah in the Sectarian Debate,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/an-altar-on-mt-ebal-or-mt-gerizim-the-torah-in-the-sectarian-debate) *TheTorah* (2016); Eyal Baruch, [“Mount Gerizim and the Polemic Against the Samaritans,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/mount-gerizim-and-the-polemic-against-the-samaritans) *TheTorah* (2016).
23. I thank the editors of TheTorah.com for elegant editing of the original contribution submitted, and Zev Farber in particular for suggesting manuscript evidence and rabbinic sources that fill out the picture presented here.