

**PESHER HABAKKUK** (1QpHab) is one of the "original" seven Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Cave 1 in 1947 and published in 1951. Its importance among the *pesherim*, and the Qumran literature as a whole, is due in part to its chronological primacy, in part to its relative completeness, and in part to the length of time it has been available for study. First among the prophetic *pesherim* to be discovered, *Pesher Habakkuk* has long served as the paradigm by which other examples of this genre are evaluated.

The *pesher* was written on thirteen columns of seventeen lines each, ending in the middle of the thirteenth column at the conclusion of chapter 2 of *Habakkuk*. The first column survives only at its right edge, as the left side has been lost, and the second column is seriously damaged in the center, although the text can be reconstructed with some confidence. The bottom of each column appears to be lacking the last line or two of the seventeen in most cases. The scroll is written in a Herodian script and is generally assigned to the second half of the first century BCE. It is one of the scrolls distinguished by the Tetragrammaton being written in paleo-Hebrew characters, unlike the rest of the text.

The orthography of the *pesher* is fuller than the orthography of the Masoretic Text of *Habakkuk*, in particular in its use of *vav* as a vowel letter, a feature typical of many of the Qumran scrolls. *Vav* is used for long and short vowels of the o and u groups. The plene spelling of words like *ki* with *alef* at the end, of the second masculine singular suffix on verbs as *th*, of the second masculine singular object suffix as *kh*, and of *y > '*  in words like *ky'ym* (although *gwym* is usual rather than *gw'yym*) is also characteristic of many of the Qumran scrolls.

The scriptural text of *Habakkuk* on which the *pesher* is based appears to be at variance from time to time with the Masoretic Text, and thus may have independent value for text-critical purposes. Some of these variants are of a fairly insignificant nature, but others are more important and at times agree with other ancient textual traditions of *Habakkuk*. Among them are the following: The *pesher* at 1QpHab ii.1 implies the reading *bogedim*, "traitors" (= Septuagint), at *Habakkuk* 1.5, where the Masoretic Text has *bag-goyim*, "among the nations." At *Habakkuk* 1.17, the *pesher* (vi.8) reads *harbo*, "his sword," for the Masoretic Text's *hermo*, "his net." At *Habakkuk* 2.5, in place of the Masoretic Text's *ve'af ki hay-yayin boged*, "wine, too, is treacherous," the *pesher* (viii.3) has *ve'af ki' hon yivgod*, "wealth, too, is treacherous."

In several passages, however, the *pesher* cites the verse in the lemma in one form and appears to comment on it

as if it had another. The best example of this is 1QpHab xi.9–13 on *Habakkuk* 2.16, which is cited as *sheteh gam 'attah ve-hera'el*, “drink also thou and stagger,” while the *peshet* of the verse refers to *'orlat libbo*, one “who did not circumcise the foreskin of his heart,” as if deriving from the Masoretic Text’s *ve-he'arel*, “and be circumcised.” This sort of interpretation might be described as being of a similar nature to the rabbinic *'al tiqre* (“do not read” one form of a word but read another) midrash, but, at the same time, might point to the availability and employment of more than one version of *Habakkuk* by the commentator.

The commentary on *Habakkuk* takes the form of citation from the biblical text followed by a comment, introduced by the words *pishro*, “its meaning,” or *peshet hadavar 'al*, “the meaning of the matter is in regard to.” A striking phenomenon of *Peshet Habakkuk* is its use of formulas for secondary quotation of words already quoted earlier but not commented on. It employs two such formulas: *ki' hu' asher amar*, “for this is what it says” (iii.2, 13–14; v.6), usually when the re-quotation is brought to support a preceding *peshet*; and *va-'asher amar*, “and as for that which it says” (vi.2, vii.3, ix.2–3, x.1–2, xii.6), when the *peshet* is to follow the re-quotation.

Some of the interpretive methods of the *peshet* have been compared, particularly by Brownlee (1951, 1956, 1959, and 1979), to specific hermeneutic principles that are known in later antiquity from rabbinic literature, and it is likely that the exegetical world to which the author of the *peshet* as well as the later rabbis belonged shared certain common approaches to the exegesis of the biblical text. Nevertheless, it is probably more valuable for the study of the *peshet* to describe what it does rather than to identify its method by employing terms that, strictly speaking, belong to a later period. The following delineation of the exegetical “methods” or techniques of the author is thus descriptive rather than definitive.

Some of the *peshet*-comments explain the text on the most elemental level, paraphrasing and at times expanding the biblical text in the *peshet*. The interpretation may involve merely the change of the form of the interpreted word in the rewriting, or the employment of a synonym to replace it such as *qallim*, “swift” (ii.12), to replace the biblical *nimhar* (*Hb.* 1.6). In one notable example, the biblical verse “[And he] shall scoff [at kings] and mock at rulers” (*Hb.* 1.10a) is further expanded poetically in the *peshet*: “Its meaning is that they shall mock at great ones and despise honored ones; they shall make fun of kings and princes and scoff at a great army” (1QpHab iii.17–iv.2). In one passage (1QpHab vi.11–12), a verbatim citation of *Isaiah* 13.18, “they shall not have mercy on the fruit of the womb,” is employed as the interpretation of *Habakkuk* 1.17, “he shall not have mercy.”

One interpretive device consists of the specification of references to terms that are generic and unspecific in the biblical text; what the prophet left vague, the author of the *peshet* makes clear. This, of course, is unsurprising in the interpretation of a prophetic text, although the technique is to be found later in rabbinic *midrash* and *targum* in their readings of nonprophetic texts as well. Examples are the assertion that the *rasha'*, “wicked one,” of *Habakkuk* 1.13 is “the man of the lie” (v.11), the association of the “righteous one” who will live by his faith (2.4) with the “keepers of the law in the house of Judah” (viii.1), and the equation of *gever yahir*, “arrogant man,” of *Habakkuk* 2.5 with the Wicked Priest (viii.8). The kind of *'al tiqre midrash* alluded to earlier is also represented by the *peshet* of *Habakkuk* 1.3 (i.5–6) where *'amal*, “toil,” of the biblical text is interpreted as *ma'al*, “treachery.”

The reading of the *peshet* often changes the referent of a biblical clause as at *Habakkuk* 1.13, “too pure of eyes to look upon evil,” which refers in the original to the Lord, but is interpreted at 1QpHab v.7–8 as alluding to the faithful “who did not go astray after their eyes during the period of wickedness.” In other cases, an entity specified in the biblical verse is “pesheted” as a different one, such as the identification of the Chaldeans of *Habakkuk* with the *Kittim* of the *peshet*. This is a product of the author’s rereading of the prophetic text as pointing to his own day. Sometimes multiple interpretations are given to the biblical text as at 1QpHab ii.1–10 on *Habakkuk* 1.5. The term *bogedim*, “traitors,” is repeated three times, associated with “the traitors with the man of the lie” (ii.1–2), “the traitors against the new covenant” (ii.3), and “the traitors toward the end of days” (ii.5–6).

Many of the historically specific interpretations of the *peshet* begin with the identifications or associations seen above, which are then fleshed out with further details; there does not have to be any stronger connection to the biblical text. Thus, once certain verses are claimed to allude to the *Kittim* or to the Wicked Priest, their content is characterized in an appropriate fashion. It does not take much for the author of the *peshet* to turn *Habakkuk* 2.15 (in his version), “Woe to the one who gives his neighbor to drink, adding his poison and making him drunk, in order to gaze upon his festivals,” into a description of the attack on the Teacher of Righteousness by the Wicked Priest on Yom Kippur (1QpHab xi.2–8). Likewise, “Lebanon” and “the city” of *Habakkuk* 2.17 are “the council of the community” and “Jerusalem” with the attendant violence and corruption inflicted upon them by the Wicked Priest following naturally.

There are two major subject areas covered in the commentary itself, one relating to the internal religious politics of Jerusalem and the Temple priesthood, and the other discussing the international repercussions of the

appearance of the *Kittim* on the scene. These topics follow the pattern of the biblical book itself, as the prophet Habakkuk moves back and forth between domestic and foreign affairs in his prophecy, despite the way in which this forces him to interrupt and resume his treatments of the individual themes. Thus, in chapter 1 of *Habakkuk*, the *peshet* interprets verses 2–4 as referring to a domestic adversary and 5–11 and 14–17 to an international enemy. The single verse 1.13, however, the author of the *peshet* associates with Habakkuk's domestic foes, the "house of Absalom" and the "man of lies," despite the fact that it interrupts the flow of references to the *Kittim* in his commentary. The author of the *peshet* has noticed that the language of 1.13 employs the terms *habbit*, *tsaddiq*, and *rasha'*, which were used in 1.3–4, a passage that describes Habakkuk's domestic adversary. Although the *peshet* is not a commentary in any traditional sense on the text of *Habakkuk*, its author clearly is more faithful to the text than has often been stated.

Peshet Habakkuk, like other similar writings from the caves of Qumran, probably has more to teach us about the history of the late Second Temple period than about the meaning of *Habakkuk*, but like other Qumran *pesharim*, it often conceals its message behind a series of code names, which presumably were meaningful to its writer and his expected audience. The attempt to identify the major actors in the *peshet's* code has therefore been a priority of Qumran scholarship. Unlike Peshet Nahum (4Q169), no actual historical names are to be found in Peshet Habakkuk, thus eliminating one of the possible aids to locating a time frame for the *peshet*. Some of the names or epithets can be deciphered with greater confidence than others. Thus in the portion of the *peshet* that comments on the international scene at the time of the writer, the leading role is played by the *Kittim*, who have been virtually universally identified as the Romans (despite the attempt of certain Qumran scholars in the early years after the discoveries to identify them with the Greeks).

The Chaldeans of *Habakkuk* are the model for the description of the Romans by the author of the *peshet*, and he emphasizes the rapidity of their conquest, their power, and their plundering of captive nations (ii.10–iv.13). The practice of the Roman army in sacrificing to their standards is apparently the subject of the *peshet* (vi.2–5) on *Habakkuk* 1.16. There is nothing in this section that refers uniquely to the fate of the Jews in Palestine or to the particular details of the Roman conquest of Palestine, which leads some scholars to insist that the *peshet* was composed before that conquest. *Habakkuk* 1.12–13 gives the author of the *peshet* a hope for the future (v.1–7), asserting that the gentiles will not succeed in destroying God's people. Following the lead of the prophetic text

(1.14–17), however, the remaining references to the *Kittim* concern their worship of their weapons and their merciless ravaging of their weak opposition.

Even our ability to focus the international portion of the *peshet* on the Romans, however, is not sufficient to establish the chronological framework of the rest of the *peshet*. On the one hand, the *peshet* is one of our important documents for establishing Qumran chronology, and on the other, it needs a coherent chronological framework in which it can be embedded. One of the thorny problems continues to be the specific period being described in the *peshet's* characterization of inner-Jewish tensions. Is it the second century BCE, the era of the early Hasmonians, or is it the first half of the first century BCE, the time of Alexander Jannaeus and his sons? While the earlier period was the dominant choice among scholars for the first several decades of Qumran scholarship, the first century BCE has recently gained more adherents because the international dimension of the *peshet*, that of the Roman presence, belongs primarily to that era.

The identities of individuals such as the *moreh ha-tsedek* (Teacher of Righteousness; i.13, ii.2, v.10, vii.4, viii.3, ix.9–10, xi.5), the *ish ha-kazav* ("man of the lie;" ii.1–2; he appears also in Peshet Psalms<sup>a</sup> [4Q171] 1–10.i.26 and iv.14), the *matiff ha-kazav* ("the spouter of lies;" x.9), and the *kohen ha-rasha'* (the Wicked Priest; viii.8, ix.9, xi.4, xii.2, 7), and of groups such as *bet Avshalom* ("house of Absalom;" v.9) thus remain the subject of dispute after nearly fifty years of study. The identity of the *moreh ha-tsedek* will probably never be ascertained because the Qumran texts do not offer us a list of leaders of the sect and because no convincing identification is possible based on non-Qumran writings. On the other hand, virtually every Hasmonian high priest has been suggested to be the Wicked Priest who persecuted the sect. Thus Milik identified him with Jonathan, Cross with Simon, and Nitzan with Alexander Jannaeus (Nitzan, 1986). Others have suggested Jannaeus's sons, Hyrcanus II or Aristobulus II. In fact, some scholars are of the opinion that more than one Hasmonian leader was assigned that sobriquet.

According to the *peshet*, the Teacher of Righteousness was an inspired interpreter, "whom God had informed of all of the secrets of the words of his servants the prophets" (vii.4–5); his followers were "the men of truth, practitioners of the law [*torah*]" (vii.10–11). The "law of God" was rejected by the opponents of the teacher (i.11). It is unlikely that these opponents were followers of the Wicked Priest because at v.11–12 it is the "man of the lie" who "rejected the law in the midst of their whole council." In the latter passage, the exegesis of "while the wicked destroys one more righteous than he" (*Hb.* 1.13) strikingly avoids the "Wicked Priest versus Teacher of

Righteousness" identification, with the "man of the lie" being specified as the "wicked" one of the biblical text. The commonly accepted restoration of the "wicked priest" in Peshar Habakkuk i.13, commenting on *Habakkuk* 1.4, which refers to "wicked and righteous" should thus probably be rejected. The Wicked Priest does not make his first appearance in Peshar Habakkuk until viii.8, and the failure of the exegete to seize upon obvious opportunities to introduce him earlier probably emphasizes the need to distinguish between the opponents of the teacher described in the early portion of the text and those in the later sections. Thus, the opponents of the teacher in the first part of the *peshar* are the "traitors with the man of the lie," "the traitors to the new covenant," and the "ruthless ones of Israel" (ii.1-6). The "house of Absalom" is accused of not aiding the teacher against the "man of the lie" (v.10).

In the later portion of the *peshar* (vi.12-end), after the conclusion of the section on the *Kittim*, the interpreter focuses on the eschaton ("the last days;" vii.7, 12), predicts that those who fulfil the law will be rescued by God (viii.1-3), and exhorts them to maintain their faith in him (vii.10-14). The several references to "law" [*torah*] may indicate that, as frequently in Second Temple Judaism, differences in *halakhah*, in religious practice, were what divided groups from one another. It is only here that the Wicked Priest makes the first of his several appearances in the later segment of the *peshar*. He had been an individual of whom the author of the *peshar* approved at one time, but who had strayed from the path for the sake of greed (viii.8-11). His subsequent suffering (and perhaps death) is described almost gleefully by the *peshar* as the *Kittim* do to him as he has done to others in the past (viii.16-ix.7).

The sinful acts of the Wicked Priest consist primarily of amassing wealth and persecuting the Teacher of Righteousness (ix.9-11, xi.4-8, xii.2-10). Inserted amid references to the priest, however, is a passage about the "preacher of the lie" (x.9, xi.1), whose followers will be punished for their opposition to "God's chosen ones" (x.13). It is not clear whether the "preacher of the lie" is the same as the "man of the lie" or whether he represents another former adherent of the priest who betrayed him. It is generally agreed that the Wicked Priest's attack on the Teacher of Righteousness on Yom Kippur (xi.4-8) refers to one of those controversies regarding the calendar in which the Qumran group found itself involved. [See *Calendars and Mishmarot*.]

The conclusion of the *peshar* (xii.10-xiii.4) is remarkably tame, as the attack on idolatry by Habakkuk generates no contemporary allusions in the *peshar*, although there are two references to a perhaps apocalyptic "day of judgment" (xii.14, xiii.2-3).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Basser, Herbert W. "Peshar Hadavar." *Revue de Qumrân* 13 (1988), 389-405.
- Bernstein, Moshe J. "Introductory Formulas for Citation and Recitation of Biblical Verses in the Qumran Pesharim: Observations on a Peshar Technique." *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1 (1994), 30-70.
- Brooke, George J. "The Kittim in the Qumran Commentaries." In *Images of Empire*, edited by L. C. A. Alexander, pp. 135-159. Sheffield, 1991.
- Brooke, George J. "The Pesharim and the Origins of the Dead Sea Scrolls." In *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, edited by M. O. Wise, et al., pp. 339-352. New York, 1994.
- Brownlee, William H. "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls." *Biblical Archaeologist* 14 (1951), 54-76.
- Brownlee, William H. "The Habakkuk Midrash and the Targum of Jonathan." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (1956), 169-186.
- Brownlee, William H. *The Text of Habakkuk in the Ancient Commentary from Qumran*. Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, 11. Philadelphia, 1959.
- Brownlee, William H. *The Midrash Peshar of Habakkuk: Text, Translation, Exposition with an Introduction*. Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, 24. Missoula, Mont., 1979.
- Burrows, Millar. "The Meaning of 'šr 'mr in DSH." *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952), 250-260.
- Elliger, Kurt. *Studien zum Habakuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer*. Tübingen, 1953.
- Feltes, H. *Die Gattung des Habakukkommentars von Qumran (1QpHab): Eine Studie zum frühen jüdischen Midrasch*. Würzburg, 1986.
- Nitzan, Bilha. *Peshar Habakkuk: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea (1QpHab); Text, Introduction and Commentary* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem, 1986.
- Silberman, Lou H. "Unriddling the Riddle: A Study in the Structure and Language of the Habakkuk Peshar." *Revue de Qumrân* 3 (1961-1962), 323-364.
- Talmon, Shemaryahu. "Notes on the Habakkuk Scroll." *Vetus Testamentum* 1 (1951), 34-37.
- Wieder, Naphtali. "The Habakkuk Scroll and the Targum." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (1953), 14-18.

MOSHE J. BERNSTEIN