

PESHER HISTORY AND METHOD

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore both the historical backdrop of *Pesher* and the hermeneutic. First, the historical people of Qumran will be briefly surveyed. Second, the grammatical indicators of *Pesher* will be introduced. As a third step, both the presuppositions of *Pesher* and the method will be analyzed. Fourthly, the Nahum *Pesher* will be reviewed as a working example. And in conclusion, some reflections towards *Pesher*'s contributions towards understanding the New Testament will be offered.

***Pesher*, Historical Backdrop: Socio-Religious**

The vast amount of the Pēšer (Hebrew: פֶּשֶׁר hereafter *Pesher*) hermeneutical practice is historically and geographically situated in the community of Qumran; this community's contribution, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, is the basis for most *Pesher* studies. Speaking of Qumran should be associated with the Essenes since they are the sect of Judaism which populated the isolated desert society; however, it remains that the community of Qumran is a part of a broader Essenianic¹ movement.² Several names are attributed to this group with 'Essene', Josephus' designation (in Josephus *Antiquities*: 'Essen'), being the most prominent;³ other titles are ὁσιότητος (*hosiotētos*) σεμνοτητα (*semnotētia*) which were also offered by Josephus. These titles mean 'holiness' and 'reverence',⁴ respectively. Philo calls them the θεραπευται θεου

¹ This is the adjectival form of 'Essene'.

2. Glenn Hinson, "Essene influence in Roman Christianity: A look at the second-Century Evidence," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 19, no. 4 (1992), 401.

3. Josephus, "Book XVIII: From the Banishment of Archelaus to the Departure of the Jews from Babylon," in *Josephus Complete Works, Antiquities*, trans. William Whiston, Enlarged and Illustrated ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960), 377.

4. Josephus, "Book II: From the Death of Herod till Vespasian was sent to Subdue the Jews by Nero," in *Josephus Complete Works: Wars of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, Enlarged and Illustrated ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960), 476-77.

(*therapeutai theou*),⁵ and suggestions for etymological origins for ‘Essene’ have been עֵשָׂה (‘*eṣāh*: “council”) or עֵצִים (‘*ēṣîm*: “trees”).⁶ This movement as a whole placed emphasis on isolation and/or separation.⁷ It is difficult to discern if indeed these concepts (that is, isolation and separation) should be separated or even framed in some cognitive sequential process; it is better—especially knowing the fragmented and incomplete history regarding the origins of the Essenes—to consider their separation and isolation as an organic unity. The Essenes had preference for places of the wild for their isolated existence; they carried a keen sense of the natural which was noteworthy even of Philo.⁸ Josephus further supports this conception of the Essenes:

They have a particular interest in plant-life and its effects upon humans: They display an extraordinary interest in the writings of the ancients...with the help of these, and with a view to the treatment of diseases, they make investigations into the medical roots and the properties of stones.⁹

Beyond the relevance of this former quote for supporting the naturalistic isolation of the Essenes is their particular interest in the “writings of the ancients.” This interest is demonstrated both by their interest in Hebrew prophecy and their creative hermeneutics; this subject will be addressed more fully later, but continuing on in the former discussion, it becomes quite apparent that the Essenes isolation is inseparably linked with their religious concerns. Although the origin of the Essenes is incomplete, two major events should be noted in regard to their formation. First, it

5. Philo, “Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit,” in *The Works of Philo*, trans. C.D. Yonge, New Updated ed. (USA: Hendrickson, 1993), 698.

6. John Kampen, “A Reconsideration of the Name “Essene” in Greco-Jewish Literature in Light of Recent Perceptions of the Qumran Sect,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 57 (1986), 62-64.

7. Doron Mendeis, “Hellenistic utopia and the Essenes,” *Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 3-4 (1979), 210.

8. Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa*, secs. 42-48.

9. Josephus, *Josephus Wars*, II.VIII.6.”

has been suggested that the conceptional grounds for the Essenianic movement was founded during the Hebrews' Babylonian captivity and their subsequent return.¹⁰ The second major event is the Maccabian rebellion; of course, it is more exact to speak of 'events' concerning this 'rebellion'. Nevertheless, the debunked priesthood (because of the illegitimacy of those functioning as priests and also the high priest) and Jewish dissatisfaction therein is a potential founding of the Essenianic movement (though it might be better to speak of the 'rebellion' as the *mobilizer* of the Essenes).¹¹ Historical issues such as these are important, yet outside of the scope of this paper, so simply allowing for a loose date of origin for the Qumran community suffices: 400-160 B.C.E. This socio-religious survey has been brief and admittedly narrow, yet these demographical traits provide an adequate nomenclature from which to engage the Essenes' hermeneutics—and potentially the New Testament writers. To close, the Essenes were formed through a rejection of either nominal or politically-compromised Judaism; and second, this rejection involved separation, naturalistic isolation, and a substantial interest in ancient texts, and from this interest would grow their creative hermeneutic of *Pesher*.

Constituents of *Pesher*

Overview of Pesher

The goal of this section is to identify and demonstrate each individual part of *Pesher*.¹² Before this task is undertaken, it will give direction to note the summary-definitions of *Pesher* from several scholars. *Pesher* may be considered either a commentary on Scripture or biblical exegesis; specifically *Pesher* as found in Qumran and in the Dead Sea Scrolls presents the

10. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Essenes in Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 40, no. 3 (1977), 103.

11. J. Julius Scott Jr., *Jewish backgrounds of the New Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament ; (1961. Reprint; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 195-197, 265-270.

¹² The noun *Pesher* appears one time in Old Testament Scripture. Ecclesiastes 8:1 states, יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דָּבָר, which means literally "Who knows an interpretation of a matter/thing."

Qumranians sectarian view of a biblical passage.¹³ Vermez noted that it is a “biblical excerpt [which] is followed by a formula linking it to a fulfillment interpretation or a theological commentary”; he is careful to distinguish *Pesher*—usually running commentary on a biblical book—from the wide range of proof texting the Qumranians also practiced.¹⁴ Lunde broadens the definition a bit by reaffirming what Vermez and Deasley have already said, but adding significant emphasis to the eschatological situation which must exist for *Pesher* to be used.¹⁵ *Pesher* seems to move from contemporary life into the sacred text relying mainly on current issues to interpret the text.¹⁶ These definitions give a basis for this study; the following sections will identify and analyze the specifics which are foundational to these definitions.

Significant Grammatical and Syntactical Indicators of *Pesher*

The main syntactical structure of *Pesher* has three parts. *Pesher* will usually present 1) a quotation from the Old Testament 2) followed by an interpretation, 3) which will be presented with a technical formula.¹⁷ If a sporadic occurrence of *Pesher* appears in a broader work it is not to be identified as *Pesher* unless it appears in a continuous *Pesher*.¹⁸ The structure of presenting an Old Testament pericope does *direct* the meaning of the ‘new’ interpretation but the Old

13. Alex Deasley, *The Shape of Qumran Theology* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000), 70.

14. Geza Vermez, “Biblical Prooftexts in Qumran Literature,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34 (1989), 493, 495.

15. Jonathan Lunde, “An Introduction to Central Questions in the New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” in *Three Views on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 27-28.

16. Bruce Corely, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 64.

17. George Brooke, “The Genre of 4Q252: From Poetry to *Pesher*,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1, no. 2 (August 1994), 173.

18. Ibid. The concept of continuous *Pesher* will be addressed below.

Testament quote certainly does not *demand* a certain meaning;¹⁹ this is a considerable difference from historical-grammatical hermeneutics which affirms a certain meaning based on the originally context. In addition, it may be affirmed that *Pesher* also differs from Midrash which primarily deals with the application of the meaning of a biblical text, not the reinterpretation of the biblical text based on current events, which is indicative of *Pesher*. Admittedly, there is some overlap between *Pesher* and Midrash, but these issues cannot be handled here. Horgan gives an impressive list of introductory formulae. Still the vast majority of introductory formulae are a variation of one of the four major groups²⁰: אֲשֶׁר פִּשְׂרוֹ, פִּשְׂרוֹ הֵמָּה, פִּשְׂרוֹ עַל, and פִּשְׁרֵי הַדְּבָר עַל (pshro 'l, pshro hmh, ashro pshro, and pshr hdvr 'l, meaning “the interpretation of it concerns,” “the interpretation of it...,” “which interpretation of it,” and “the interpretation of the word concerns”).²¹ In sum, it may be listed simply as:

Lemma, or lemmata (OT quote: usually Psalms or Prophets)

Introductory formula (פִּשְׂרוֹ עַל: the interpretation concerns...)

Interpretation (typically directed by the current events of the Pesherist)

The terms *Pesher* and Pesheric need to be differentiated. Also there are two recognized categories of *Pesher*. There is continuous *Pesher* and thematic *Pesher*. In the former a running commentary interprets a specific biblical book and in the latter there is a general theme (usually theological in nature) around which the commentator develops by using Scripture which supports

19. Michael Fishbane, “Use, Authority and Interpretation of Mikra at Qumran,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Mulder, and Harry Sysling (Philadelphia: Van Gorcum Fortress Press, 1988), 248.

20. Mauray Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books*, ed. Bruce Vawter, The Catholic biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 8 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), 239-43.

21. Maurya Horgan, “Pesharim: Introduction,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, ed. Mohr Siebeck, James Charlesworth, Henry Rietz, Casey Elledge, and Lidija Novakovic, vol. 6B. *Pesharim, other Commentaries, and related Documents* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2.

the theme.²² However, Vermez strongly asserted that *Pesher* “as a rule follows a biblical book verse-by-verse.”²³ In view of this, continuous *Pesher* will be the primary concern of this paper.

Clarifying Terms Concerning the Study of *Pesher*

By way of denotative language, an interpretive practice may be *Pesheric* without being *Pesher*;²⁴ the cumulative presuppositions, ‘running commentary’ literary practice, and the other often notable literary practices—I.e. emendation, atomization, apocalyptic literature preference, usage of textual variants²⁵—are *all necessary* constituents (with the allowance of some flexibility in regard to the ‘notable literary practices’ just mentioned) in order for an interpretive practice to be true continuous *Pesher*.²⁶ Any passage that has one or several of the presuppositions and/or literary practice(s) may be designated as *Pesheric* but not continuous *Pesher*. In regard to thematic *Pesher* the above listed constituents of *Pesher* remain the same without the need of a ‘running commentary’. The controller in this type of *Pesher* is the theme, which then makes it more difficult to assess. One caution is worthy of consideration. The usefulness of discussing the New Testament pericopae as having or being *Pesheric* is of little help if ‘*Pesheric*’ is not narrowly defined. In lue of this and for the purposes of this paper, if a New Testament pericope

22. Deasley, *The Shape of Qumran Theology*, 103.

23. Vermez, “Biblical Prooftexts in Qumran Literature, 504.

24. Kister Stendahl, *The School of Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Sigler Press, 1968), 200. Here Stendahl develops the terminology “*Pesher*-like quotations” in reference to some New Testament quotes of the Old Testament. Later scholarship such as Fitzmyer noted this but it does not accept this loose categorization as helpful.

25. Joseph Fitzmyer, “The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament,” in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, Sources for Biblical Study 5 (Missoula Montana: Scholars' Press, 1974), 54. He rightly notes that these practices belong to other genres and interpretive methods other than merely *Pesher*. These are not definitive indicators alone; they must be conjoined with the other elements described above. Horgan further states that some indicative things indicative of *Pesher* are following: identification with similar situation in the *Pesherist*’s context to that of an Old Testament situation, key words or roots may be used, and/or contemporary figures being metaphorically identified within Old Testament Scripture. Horgan, *Pesharim*, 244-45.

26. Horgan, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*.

contains a constituent or presupposition of *Pesher*, it will be called Pesheric, when Pesheric means and only means that the New Testament shares the presupposition or constituent with *Pesher*. And negatively defined, identifying a New Testament pericope as Pesheric does not mean that it belongs in either a category of *Pesher* or in any variation of *Pesher*. Being Pesheric, then, means that the New Testament pericope has one of the necessary elements which moves it closer to being *Pesher*, yet it remains that without all aforementioned constituents it cannot rightly be called *Pesher*. What becomes painfully obvious is the broad scope of the Pesheric category. For instance, the Qumranians considered the Scroll of Isaiah the Word of God just as the New Testament writers considered it the Word of God. Thus, this is a presupposition which both the Qumranians held and the New Testament writers. And this view of Isaiah is presupposed in *Pesher*. It then follows that the New Testament has a Pesheric presupposition. In this way the New Testament has one of the necessary constituents for *Pesher*, but this alone is not sufficient to accuse the New Testament of *Pesher*. The Pesheric category may seem unhelpful by way of its large scope, but it must be remembered that there were nonreligious people and even sects of Judaism (I.e. Sadducees) which would not hold the example presupposition above ('Isaiah as the Word of God').

Presuppositions of *Pesher*

In this section commonly held presuppositions²⁷ of *Pesher* will be designated. After each individual presupposition is developed, each one's existence in the Qumran literature and then in the New Testament will be discussed. In reference to this process it is necessary to distinguish between the Qumran community and the New Testament writers because holding the same presuppositions does not entail that they would be expressed identically—function does not

²⁷ Precondition could also be offered here instead of presupposition, yet presupposition highlights the human element (because typically discussing presuppositions also involves discussing those who hold whatever presupposition) in *Pesher*, and thus have been preferred over precondition.

necessitate a particular form. This comment does not deny that the New Testament writers may very well have written in the common communicative methods of their age (that is, by using intertestamental interpretive practices). Rather, it gives a considerable caution against finding intertestamental interpretive practices in the New Testament where these practices do not in truth exist. First, the following sections will identify the presuppositions of the Qumran community; second, they will identify the *Pesher* methodological signifiers; and lastly, in the closing sections, the cumulative constituents of *Pesher* will be applied to the Nahum Dead Sea Scroll (4QpNah).

The Unique People of Pesher

Pesher presumes that there exist a unique people of God. This particular presupposition in *Pesher* covers the vast space of time contained in testamental dialogue (that is, the Old Testament, intertestamental, and the New Testament). From at least the time of Abraham, Yahweh has been calling-out a people for Himself. This is obvious from the Old Testament; Israel is God's special people throughout the Tôrāh, the N^ovî'im, and *ch³tûvîm* (חֲתֻמֵּי חֵן Exo 6:7, Deut 7:6, פְּתוּבִים Ps 14:7, נְבִיאִים Jer 2:13-14). Now the Qumran community (hereafter, Qumranians) made this broad category of Israel specified to such a degree that those practicing Essenianism were the only true Israel, and further paid noticeable attention to those preparing "the way of the Lord" in the wilderness.²⁸ There were the truly devout; they were Israel *par excellent*, even as the *Pesher* on Psalm 37 shows: "And in the days of famine, they will be sa[tisfied], for the wicked will perish."²⁹ Its interpretation is th[at] he will keep them alive in famine, in the appointed time of [affl]iction, but many will perish on account of famine and

28. Horgan, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*.

29 Psalm 37:19b-20a

plague, all who do not go out [from here] to be [wi]th the congregation of his chosen ones.”³⁰ It is difficult to discern if the broader Essenanitic movement was considered as renowned as Qumran. It is likely the Qumran was considered to contain the upper echelon of Essenanism; they are the ones who “do the Torah” unlike those in the “House of Judah.”³¹ There is the cryptic phrase, “Congregation of the Community,” in Psalm *Pesher* 1 (4QpPs^a). It seems reasonable to assume the Pesherist has the Qumran community in mind, yet this phrase is a *hapax legomenon* in Qumran literature. If he does not have Qumran in mind, then perhaps he has other Essenes in mind. Nevertheless, earlier in the Psalm *Pesher* 1 scroll the Teacher of Righteousness is mentioned and his special role as a builder of a new community.³² One of the most prominent comments regarding the unique people of Qumran from within the Pesharim is from Isaiah *Pesher* 4 (4Q164 = 4QpIsa^d): “they established the Council of the Community [among] the priests and the peo[ple]...the Congregation of his chosen ones, like a stone of lapis lazuli in the midst of stones.”³³

The Eschatological Focus of Pesher

A second presupposition of *Pesher* is eschatology. It expresses itself in at least two forms. First, the Essenes were thoroughly preoccupied with prophetic, and often, apocalyptic selections from the Tanakh. This belongs in the following section that deals with *Pesher* methodology so little will be said concerning this here. The second expression is the Qumranians self-understanding of their eschatological temporal position. Isaiah *Pesher* 3 confirms saying that interpretations involve, or concern, things of the ‘latter days’: “The

30. Horgan, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 15.

31. Ibid., 11-13.

32. Ibid., 18, 20.

33. Ibid., 111.

interpretation of the passage (with regard) to the latter days concerns the congregation of the S[eekers-After] Smooth Things.” In what remains of Isaiah *Pesher* 3 (4Q163 = 4QpIsa^c) alone, the ‘latter days’ are mentioned two other times.³⁴ Horgan, who has been a translator of many of the Pesharim, including some of those used in this work, comments, “The Qumran [community’s] interpretation of prophetic texts deal with history: the past history of their community and the events of the last days, in which the Qumran authors believed that their congregation was living.”³⁵

The Word of God of Pesher

A third presupposition is that the Tanah, excluding Esther, is considered the Word/Oracle of God.³⁶ This work is not primarily concerned with the standards by which a biblical book was considered part of the Qumranian canon, but it is clear that the Prophets and the Psalms—the books with which the Qumranians mainly concerned themselves—were designated as a divinely revealed word.³⁷ The narrow focus, then, of this study is the status of the Psalms and Prophets as divinely inspired. Isaiah *Pesher* 3 attributes the book of Zechariah as coming from the mouth of God: “as it is written in the book of Zechariah from the mouth of God.”³⁸ The Qumranians affirm inspiration of a whole section of Scripture—the Prophets—by saying that “they forgot God, who had f[ed them...], his ordinances they cast behind them, which he had sent to them [by the hand of] his servants the prophets.”³⁹ A direct quote about the inspiration of the Psalms is

34. Ibid., 71.

35. Horgan, *Pesharim*, 248.

³⁶ This is based on the assumption that the inclusion of the biblical book warrants this conclusion, namely, that the testimony and importance of copying and recopying Old Testament books marks them as divinely inspired for the Qumranians.

37. Horgan, *Pesharim*, 248.

38. Horgan, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 59.

39. Ibid., 117.

not attainable from the Pesharim—although if other Qumran literature were searched such a statement may be found. Nevertheless, the Psalms are used just like the Prophets by the Qumranians. So by way of extension it may also be affirmed as inspired as well. The Psalms are considered an authoritative source upon which *Pesher* occurs; the events of Qumran are equally found in the words of the Psalms even as they are found in the words of the Prophets.

The Old Testament Mysteries of Pesher

A final, but important, presupposition is the mystery intrinsic in the Prophets and Psalms. This presupposition allows for the fuller meaning to be discovered later. It is neither enough to know the historical situation of the original text nor is investigating the grammar sufficient to know the full meaning. It is allowed by *Pesher* that there is an original meaning of the text but it is of little to no importance for the Qumranians. Consequently, the original grammatical-historical context is ignored and silenced. Fishbane contends that “Mikra is presented as the authoritative prophetic word of God; and the commentaries on it (*Pesher*) are authorized as the true meaning or application of that word for the times at hand.”⁴⁰ It is the fuller meaning for the times at hand that is important. Thus, the presupposition of mysteries (מִסְתָּרִים: *rāzê*, literally, *mysteries of*) must exist for *Pesher*: “God made know all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets [to the Teacher of Righteousness] (Habakkuk *Pesher* = 1QpHab).”⁴¹

Method of *Pesher*

Text Selection of Pesher

The selection of a text from the prophets or psalms is the first step. There are a few unidentified Pesharim fragments, but other than these all examples of continuous *Pesher* come

40. Fishbane, *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, 351.

41. Horgan, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, 173.

from the Psalms or the Prophets (*Psalms Pesher* 1, 2, 3; *Isaiah Pesher* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; *Hosea Pesher* 1 & 2; *Micah Pesher* 1 & 2; *Nahum Pesher*, *Habakkuk Pesher*, *Zephaniah Pesher* 1 & 2).⁴²

The Explication of Fuller Meaning of Pesher

There is reliance upon the notion that the full meaning of an Old Testament anecdote was not given to the Prophet/Psalmist. Therefore, meaning remains to be discovered. It is here that the particular mastery of the Qumranians is most evident. It is not a trainable skill that is necessary to make the meaning known. The meaning is only knowable by the conjunction of two elements: 1) it must be revealed by God and 2) God only reveals it to specific individuals in the eschatological community, that is, the community poised on the brink of a new age. Thus, the condition of being ‘in the eschatological time’ is a necessary condition for God to reveal something; it must be emphasized that this is not a humanly created limitation, but rather is in line with such passages as Daniel 12:8-9. God’s formerly spoken word is the thing which keeps him from revealing it prior to the eschatological time. Horgan indeed contributes the same saying, “*Pesher* Texts...purport to be interpretations made known by God to selected Qumran commentators of mysteries revealed by God to the biblical writers.”⁴³ Really, there are two parts to number two just listed above. First, there is a specific explicator of the mysteries. Second, the eschatological situation interprets the Old Testament Pericope. The end-time events provide the necessary information to understand the Old Testament anecdote and the explicator has the God-given ability to apply the events correctly into the anecdote. The Old Testament consecutive

42. Ibid., VII.

43. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books*, 248.

lemmata (i.e. the Old Testament passage under consideration) is “elucidate[ed] with references to the present and future life of the community.”⁴⁴

Summary of Constituents of *Pesher*

The grammatical-syntactical structure of *Pesher* is three-fold: Old Testament passage (Lemma, lemmata), introductory formula, and the following interpretation. *Pesher* presupposes a unique people of God, an eschatological/last-days situation, an inspired view of the Prophets and Psalms, and unknown mysteries within the Psalms and Prophets. The *Pesher* method chooses a text from the Psalms or Prophets, uses the eschatological situation/events to reveal the full (or hidden) meaning of the Old Testament pericope, and relies on a divinely inspired interpreter to reveal those meanings in the correct (or proper) Old Testament texts. Now that the pieces of *Pesher* are nicely assorted they may be reviewed in an actual *Pesher* scroll, that is, the Nahum *Pesher* (4Q169 = 4QpNah). Beside this text will be a discussion of the various *Pesher* constituents. Thereafter, a section commenting on the relevance of *Pesher* towards understanding the New Testament will close this study. At first, demonstrating a potential case of *Pesher* from the New Testament seemed attractive, but it became conspicuous that any such attempt would be forced. This owes mainly to the strict definition of continuous *Pesher* that has been adopted for this study. Beyond this, the prominent Semitic scholar Fitzmyer flatly states that there is no counterpart in the New Testament of Qumranian *Pesher*.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, both the presuppositions and method of *Pesher* surely have significant relevance for New Testament hermeneutics. Thus, comments identifying *Pesheric* elements in the New Testament will highlight the shared cognitive worldview of the New Testament writers and the Qumranians. After this, final suggestions will illuminate the usefulness of *Pesher* towards more deeply understanding the New Testament.

44. Fishbane, *Mikra*, 351.

45. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, 6.

Nahum *Pesher*

The following is Fragments 3-4, Column 1, of 4QpNah. Scripture is bolded and introductory formulas underlined.

...a dwelling for the wicked ones of the nations. **Where the lion went to enter, the lion's cub...and no one to disturb.** Its interpretation concerns Demetrius King of Greece, who sought to enter Jerusalem on the advice of the Seekers-After-Smooth-Things,...into the hand of the kings of Greece from Antiochus until the rise of the rulers of the Kittim; but afterwards...will be trampled...**The lion tears enough for his cubs and strangles prey for his lionesses**...against the Lion of Wrath, who would strike with his great ones and the men of his counsel,...**and it fills up its case [with prey], and its den with torn flesh.** Its interpretation concerns the Lion of Wrath,...in the Seekers-After-Smooth-Things; he would hand men up alive...in Israel before, for regarding one hanged alive upon the tree [it] reads: **Behold I am against [you] says Yahweh of Hosts. And I shall burn up your abundance in smoke, and the sword will devour your lions. And [I] shall cut off its [p]rey [from the land], and the voice of your messengers will no longer be heard.** Its interpretation: “your abundance”—they are the detachments of his army that (are) in Jerusalem; and “his lion”—they are his great ones...⁴⁶

First, this is a continuous *Pesher*. The Scripture being commented on is Nahum 2:12-14. The literary structure is exactly as noted in this paper: lemma, introductory formula, and interpretation. Two different introductory formulae appear, the first two being פִּשְׁרוֹ עַל and the last פִּשְׁרוֹ. The passage of course comes from the Prophets and it is assumed as authoritative (as the Word of God). This particular *Pesher* is dated 100 B.C.-63 B.C., which may have been after the time of the Teacher of Righteousness. There are specific contemporary figures which could only be known by the eschatological situation, i.e. Demetrius, Lion of Wrath, Kittim, Seekers. The composer of this *Pesher* is discerning the proper interpretation of the current events in Nahum. Notice that the current events inform the understanding of Scripture, as well as Scripture informing about the current events. There is some level of linguistic and physical interplay that results in a meaning beyond both: call it meta-linguistic and metaphysical meaning. All the presuppositions exist: a unique people who live in the end of days have the Word of God and are—by virtue of their eschatological position—able to know the fuller meaning of Scripture.

46. Horgan, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic*.
The information, such as date of text, is also from this source

Relevance of *Pesher* for the New Testament

One of the most powerful reflections to arise through this survey of *Pesher* is the interplay between current events and Scripture. This brings out an element of meta-linguistics (as coined above) and metaphysics. This is so because the meaning of Scripture alone apart from the interplay with current events is not as full; likewise the meaning of reality without Scripture is not as full. Thus, when reality interprets Scripture, or Scripture interprets reality, there is a meaning beyond what either would have alone. Also, the meaning is more than the sum of the parts. Although this is amazingly attractive it is also tremendously dangerous. Scripture is interpreting reality but reality is also interpreting Scripture, albeit through the hand (or voice) of a personal being. But does any word exist except by a personal being first existing to utter the word? The real question is whether interpreting the text by current events is appropriate. This is much like reader-response theory, yet it is also different. *Pesher* is primarily involved with eschatological realities interpreting Scripture, and these eschatological conceptions come from Scripture itself. *Pesher* is not involved with individual-personal-experiences interpreting Scripture. Nevertheless, the dangers of eschatological interpretations have been tried, tested, and found wanting: Jim Jones, Solar Temple, and even the Essenes. The Essenes banked on the fact that the end battle was at hand and as such joined the Jews in their struggle against the Romans; this act sealed their doom (indeed, an Essene general led a Zealot army). This powerful dynamic (the meta-linguistic/physical interplay) of *Pesher* has been addressed first because of its great power; but also so that it can be suggested that this meta-linguistic/physical interplay belongs to the cognitive realm of imaginative reflection and not to the realm of volitional action. Any believer may well grow and learn more about God by employing this interplay in their imaginative reflective sphere of their mind, but it seems to be the case that when this interplay

does not remain in the cognitive realm—but enters the actual world—the consequences are terrible. Therefore, practically, any saint may explore this interplay as a means to learn more about God, but propagating such reflections as doctrine or acting upon them in the actual world is to be shunned. And thus, hermeneutically, this interplay should be the last word in any hermeneutical method if mentioned at all. This interplay may be best left to each individual. For instance, the horror of the holocaust may be imaginatively conceived and even used to interpret some passages which deal with the Jewish suffering as described in Romans. But this is where it must remain; no doctrine is to be found and no actions to be taken based on this. It is little more than a son speaking to his father asking, “Father, does this relate to what you have spoken before?” To which, perhaps, the Father states, “In some ways son, but listen more closely to what you know I have spoken plainly.” There is some value here, some potentiality to know God more fully.

Having taken this position, it follows that the continuous running *Pesher* should not be applied either to the Old Testament or New Testament since it results in reinterpretation and hence different meaning, or at least a different significance. There are two reasons for this. First, the blundering of the misidentification of the ‘last-day’ events is known to all who are not either ignorant or silly. And second, the key to the correct interpretation of Scripture is now known, that is, the God-man Jesus Christ. The need to try to find interpretive keys as the Qumranians did is now unnecessary since God has spoken to Christians in these “last days by His Son.” Bruce rightly notes that the “NT interpretation of the OT is not only eschatological but also Christological.”⁴⁷ Any interpretation of end-time events without the gravity who is Jesus Christ is woefully amiss. Beyond this a comparison between Christ and the Teacher of Righteousness illuminates the superiority of Christ. The meanings/fulfillments of the Old

47. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 68.

Testament texts and God's purposes had been revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness, but Christ is the revelation; He is the One for whom all things exist. Bruce beautifully writes, "[Christ] was the very embodiment and fulfillment of God's purpose."⁴⁸ Qumranian *Pesher* teaches the dire need for an anchor to which to tie the hermeneutical process. Hermeneutics need a director and a scenario; this corresponds to Christ and eschatology, respectively. As Hayes' work has demonstrated the New Testament is written—at least Paul's writings—soundly eschatologically. Moreover, the church is the eschatological community. In this, the Christian Church can learn much from *Pesher*. The New Testament is surely *Pesheric* here. The Qumran community understood their role as eschatological and on the brink of receiving the Kingdom of God. How much more so should the Church have this self-understanding, especially in light of such Eschatologically-focused parables as the ten virgins and the Master who returns to find a wicked lazy servant (Luke 16)? Beyond this, there is also a sense in which the Kingdom is already here, it is being realized continuously as believers live their lives as Christ would have them live (this is sometimes referred to as the Spiritual Kingdom). This concludes my comments on the relevance of *Pesher* for the New Testament. More things are implied in what has been said then may be evident.

The New Testament is starkly *Pesheric* in regard to the presuppositions of being the unique people of God and the eschatological focus. Being the special people of God is entailed in being the people who are receiving the Kingdom. Both the New Testament (writers) and Qumran had a high view of Scripture and likely had a very similar Old Testament canon. Qumran has all the Old Testament books save Esther. Still, the way Scripture is fulfilled in the New Testament is far different from the way *Pesher* explains. The New Testament is often 'filling' out greater significance of Old Testament pericopae whereas *Pesher* often displaces the

48. Ibid.

original meaning; I am speaking generally here because there are some difficulties where it seems to be the case that the New Testament writers change the meaning. One plausible solution is that they may be choosing their passage based on theological correspondence. In this case, they are not changing the meaning but nuances the meaning the desire to pull from the Old Testament text. This is often a challenge for modern readers of the Scripture. The writers of the New Testament were attuned theologically to the themes in Scripture. Moderns' misunderstanding is often owing to the large gap of theological acuteness and maturity that exists between themselves and the apostles. Thus, the New Testament does not follow *Pesher* in regard to the practice of using current events to displace the meaning of the Old Testament. The grammatical syntactical structure of *Pesher* is not followed by any New Testament book. The New Testament certainly has a plentitude of mysteries which are being revealed or are yet to be revealed. And much of this revelation will occur in the future as certain eschatological events transpire. Therefore, concerning mysteries the New Testament is unqualifiedly *Pesheric*. I will forgo any comments comparing the *Pesharim*'s preference of the Prophets or Psalms to the New Testament's usage of Scripture. I do so because the *Pesharim* only represent part of the Qumranians Scriptural library. Finally, and this is where the New Testament soars far over *Pesher*, Christ is both the Explicator of Scripture and the Goal. Saints know the truth by the Holy Spirit (who is also called the Spirit of Christ) and the truth of the Word is to bring them to Christ. He acts both as believers' means to knowing Him and as the goal of the means; "the Author and Finisher of our faith."

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