1QpHab Habakkuk Pesher

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1QpHab Habakkuk Pesher was among the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran Cave 1 in 1947. This particular scroll is rather small, about five feet in length and seven inches in height. A full-scale replica was on display in the Qumran exhibit.

Dating to the Herodian period (30–1 B.C.) or perhaps earlier, the manuscript consists of thirteen columns of text written in early Herodian Hebrew script. It is a verse-by-verse commentary (pesher in Hebrew) on the first two chapters of Habakkuk, one of the smaller prophetic books of the Old Testament.

The author of this work likens Habakkuk’s words and prophecies to the people of the Qumran community, believing as they did that they were living in the last days. For example, the commentator interprets Habakkuk 1:1–5 as dealing with the religious situation of his day, the role of the Teacher of Righteousness (one of the founders or leaders of the Qumran community), the role of the Wicked Priest (the Teacher’s opponent), and God’s covenant with those belonging to the Qumran community. His commentary on verses 6–17 deals with the Kittim (thought to be the Romans) and their rule over the Holy Land. The author views 2:1–4 as dealing with the Teacher of Righteousness’s work with righteous people and verses 5–17 as dealing with the greed and wickedness of the Wicked Priest. Verses 18–20 are said to deal with the day of judgment that will befall idolatrous nations.

Following is an example of how the writer of the Habakkuk Pesher dealt with a passage from the book of Habakkuk. He first quotes a line or verse from scripture and then adds the interpretation.

_Hab 1:16a_ For this he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his seine [large fishing net]. Blank its interpretation: they offer sacrifices to their standards and their weapons are the object of their worship.

_Hab 1:16b_ Since by them his portion is fat and his food rich. Its interpretation: they have shared out their yoke and their burden, which is their food, among all the peoples, year after year, ravaging many countries.¹

The Habakkuk Pesher is distinctively related to the Qumran community. As such it provides valuable insights into the religious, social, and political circumstances prevailing among this group of religious believers in the late Second Temple period.

Latter-day Saints familiar with the Book of Mormon will find this commentary interesting as an example of how this particular ancient religious community “did liken the scriptures unto [themselves]” (1 Nephi 19:23).

Note