

SUMMARY AND REVIEW OF THE ARTICLE:

PESHER HABAKKUK AND ITS TIME

by

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*Pesher Habakkuk* is one of the typological commentaries of the Dead Sea Sect, which were found in Qumran. The interpretation of these sectarian commentaries is not easy, because the persons and groups mentioned are not given their historical names. So the sectarian commentary on *Habakkuk* speaks of the "Wicked Priest", the "Man of Lies", the "Teacher of Righteousness" and a mighty nation which is given the biblical name "Kittim".

It has been commonly accepted that Kittim are Romans, and this assumption is also accepted by Baer. He rightly thinks that there is an anti-Roman polemic, describing the rapacity and wickedness of this expansionist empire in the second and first centuries B. C. E., and brings forward new material which strengthens this supposition. He pays attention to the strange fact that in all these polemics in *Pesher Habakkuk* nothing is said about the Romans in connection with their intervention in Judaea. These and other causes lead Baer to his statement that the anti-Roman polemics in *Pesher Habakkuk* originate in Latin sources speaking about Roman expansion in the East in the second century B. C. E., to which the author had access, and that he was a Christian of Jewish origin, with Jewish learning, and lived in the second half of the fourth century C. E.

Baer tries to show that the "wicked priest" of the Scroll was the Emperor Julian the Apostate. Is it not written in the *Habakkuk* commentary that at the beginning the wicked priest was a good man, but that as he ruled over Israel, he abandoned God? And we know that the Emperor Julian was educated as a Christian and later abandoned this faith and became a pagan high priest. "Israel" in this connection means, according to Baer, the Christian Roman Empire. The persecutions of the Community, described in the Scroll, are the persecutions, also by persuasion, of the Christians. And if it is written that the wicked priest stole the wealth of the elect of God, this hints at the confiscation of Church property by the Emperor. When the author speaks about the building of the city by the wicked priest, it means the building of Jerusalem by the Emperor. We know that in fact Julian began to build the Temple of Jerusalem for the Jews; the Jewish

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Christian who wrote *Pesher Habakkuk* opposes this act of the pagan Emperor. And, according to Baer, there are even hints in the Scroll to the tragical end of Julian and his helpers.

The "Teacher of Righteousness" of the Scroll is evidently, according to Baer, Christ, and sometimes one of the leading Christians at the time of the persecution. The old anti-Roman material taken from Latin sources was embedded in this Scroll in a similar way as we find it revised in the Patristic literature of the fourth century.

Baer comes to the conclusion that the sectarian Scrolls from Qumran were written in the second half of the fourth century C. E. by a sect of Christians of Jewish origin. The time of Julian the Apostate is, according to Baer, also reflected in the description of persecutions of the saints in the Thanksgiving Scroll, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem for the Jews by Julian is also opposed in the so-called *Testimonium* from Qumran. This small document quotes, at its beginning, biblical verses which in the Church were testimonies about Jesus, and then the curse taken from Joshua 6:26 against the rebuilding of Jericho; it functions in this document as a curse against Julian, the rebuildler of Jerusalem (the name "Jericho" is lacking in the sectarian text).

The supposed Christian community which according to Baer wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls and lived in the fourth century C. E. on the shores of the Dead Sea was, if it existed, not a Jewish Christian group, properly speaking, but Hebrew (and Aramaic) speaking Jews with good rabbinic training, who were won to Christianity by Gentile Christian missionaries. According to what Baer supposes to be the position of this hypothetic group, their opinions fit the position of the Church of the Roman Empire, which it calls "Israel". Even their violent opposition to Julian's plan to return Jerusalem to the Jews and to build the Temple there is that of the Patristic literature. It seems to me that further evidence could be brought that such a group of converted Jews could really exist – but do the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm such an identity for their writers? I personally am not convinced about Baer's identification. I think the easiest refutation of Baer's assumptions is simply to read the Dead Sea Scrolls, and especially *Pesher Habakkuk*. And can archaeological and palaeographical evidences always be neglected when an uncommon and improbable theory about the identity of the Dead Sea Sect arises? But our case is a special one: Baer supposes that the Latin source about the Romans which the sectarian author used originates from the same period in which the Scroll itself was written, according to the archaeological and palaeological evidence! This would really be a strange coincidence.

And last but not least: according to a simple understanding, the wicked priest is a Jewish High Priest, who persecuted another Jew, the Teacher of Righteousness. But if one does not want to accept this simple

meaning, one thing is clear: there is no unequivocal statement that the wicked priest was, or became, pagan, as Julian was. And it seems to me that it is even less easy than in other Scrolls to show in this Scroll any trace of Christianity.

Review by Prof. David Flusser

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