The Dead Sea Scrolls

Sheldon Greaves, Ph.D.

Lecture 3

DISCOVERING THE OLD TESTAMENT

WITH SHELDON GREAVES, PH.D.

www.lafkospress.com

The Bible: Working Assumptions

1. The text was multi-layered. There was a surface interpretation, and another deeper interpretation, often more than one

2. Every word of the text had import; there are no wasted, superfluous words in the Bible, so when there is a repetition, the second instance must have a different or additional meaning apart from the first.

Pesher

- A method of interpretation
- A literary genre
- Works by paraphrasing to uncover a hidden meaning or "*raz*" meaning "mystery".
- Used more frequently on works of biblical prophets
- Seldom appeals to an external authority apart from the biblical text, but in the DSS Pesherim, when there is such an appeal, it is to the Teacher of Righteousness
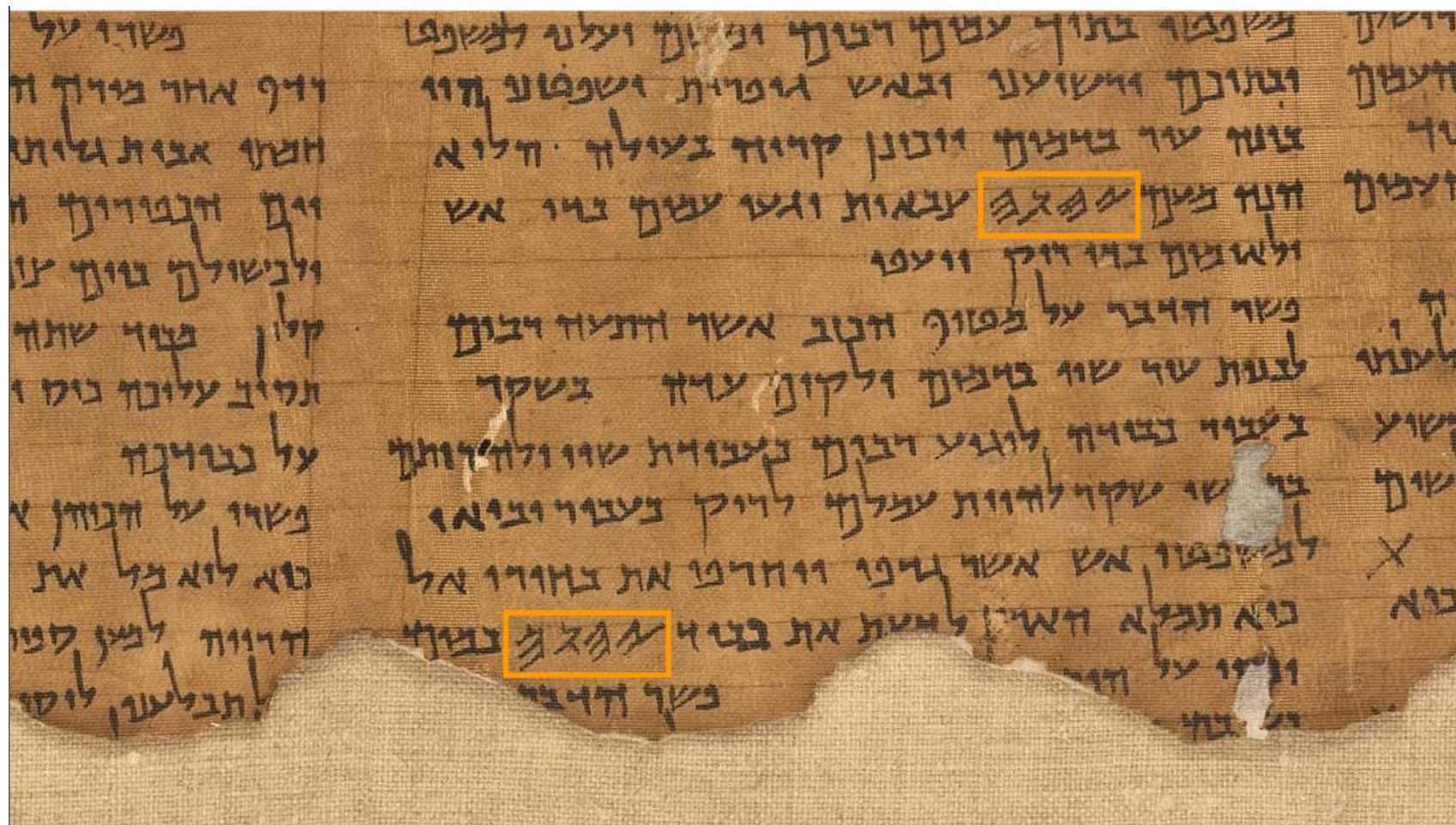- Makes allusions to historical events, most of them contemporary

Purpose of Pesher

- "Contemporize" the biblical text or prophetic message; the prophet was speaking specifically to the day of the interpreter
- To validate or justify unique of idiosyncratic theological positions taken by an interpreter or his community

Categories of Pesherim

- "Continuous": formed a running commentary integrated as part of the text
- "Thematic": various biblical texts were assembled around a topic.

The Habakkuk Pesher

Biblical Book of Habakkuk:

- Eighth of the so-called "Minor Prophets"
- Composed late 7th Century BCE
- Period of political instability in Judah, while facing an ascendant neo-Babylonian Empire
- Major theme: "The just shall live by faith; trust in God"
- Chapter 2 describes pending divine judgments against Babylon

The "*raz*" of 1QpHab

- The Babylonians are really the Romans (Kittim)
- Institutional corruption is the corrupt takeover of the 2nd Temple priesthood by the Hasmoneans
- Cites the authority of the Teacher of Righteousness
- Habakkuk is speaking to the "final generation"

The Genesis Apocryphon

Features of Genesis Apocryphon

- Written in first person
- Switches back to third person
- Ties the supernatural beings more closely to biblical figures, likely a result of inter-testamental innovations and borrowing
- Includes an attempt to soften an otherwise disturbing story concerning Abraham

Abraham, Sarah, and the King

- Two biblical version, basically the same story (Gen. 12, 19-20)

- Abraham moves to Gerar/Egypt

- Abraham is living as a resident alien

- Fears that local rulers won't respect laws of hospitality

Sarah in the King's Court

Abraham's Mistakes

- He lies about the status of Sarah, at best hiding behind a technicality
- He puts Sarah is an awkward position
- He mischaracterizes the local people, and King
- The King only does what kings do, but is sufficiently righteous that he enjoys God's protection
- The King's relationship with God is such that God will communicate with him directly
- God tells the King in as many words that they are innocent

Essene Spin Control

- God warns Abraham in a dream that his life is in danger, apparently because of Sarah.
- Abraham tries to hide Sarah from Pharaoh
- Harkenosh would have killed Abraham had not Sarah told them that he was her brother.
- Abraham asks God to help him get Sarah back
- Pharaoh turns to soothsayers to identify the problem (Two years??) and only learns the true nature of the problem indirectly from Lot, almost by accident.
- Around Col. XX:17 Pharaoh tells Abraham, "You told me…"
- Compensation regarding Sarah is paid to Sarah, not to Abraham.