The Gospel of Matthew and the *Pesher* Interpretation

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ABSTRACT. This study explores the *pesher* interpretation, a method of biblical exegesis used by the Qumran community, and whether early Christians like the author of Matthew's Gospel employed similar techniques. Since the 1950s, scholars have analysed the so-called "formula quotations" in Matthew, finding parallels with the *pesharim* commentaries found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Krister Stendahl argued Matthew comes from a "school" using pesher to radically reinterpret Old Testament passages as fulfilled in Jesus. Others like Richard Longenecker also find Matthew employing this Second Temple Jewish method, especially in texts with "fulfilment formulae". However, objections have been raised. Joseph Fitzmyer notes the differences between Qumran *pesharim* and Matthew's use of scripture. Norman Hillyer wonders if the fulfilment formula indicates a distinct hermeneutic, not pesher. Ulrich Luz stresses Matthew proclaims fulfilment, not hidden meanings like *pesharim*. In conclusion, applying the ideas of *pesher* from Qumran to the New Testament raises problems. Similarities between pesher and Patristic exegesis are noted, but determining dependence requires examining the original historical meaning versus the contemporary application of prophecies. More analysis of whether early Christian use of scripture mirrors Qumran pesher or develops its fulfilment hermeneutic is needed.

Keywords: pesher, fulfilment, formula quotations, Midrash, exegesis, Qumran, Eschatology, Second Temple, Matthew's Gospel, hermeneutics

Since the 1950s, but especially since the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts, Western biblical scholars have been engaged in a new approach to the study of quotations and allusions from the Gospel of Matthew and the

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Pauline literature, namely the *pesher* interpretation. It seems that the *pesharim* genre was directly applied as an exegetical tool to several parts of the New Testament. One of the pioneers of this approach is Krister Stendahl, who in 1954 published *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* and discusses the so-called "formula quotations" (from the German *Reflexionszitate*) of about twenty Old Testament quotations from the Gospel of Matthew. What they have in common is the introductory formula "that it may be fulfilled...". Stendahl argued that these quotations contain *pesher* material that was intended for the teaching and theology of the early Christian community[1]. To understand this method of interpretation and whether or how it was applied to passages in Matthew's Gospel, we need to see what other Jewish methods of interpretation were used in the New Testament period.

Jewish exegesis of the first century can be roughly divided into four categories: literal (*peshat*), *midrashic*, allegorical and *pesher* interpretation[2].

Literal interpretation (*peshat*)

This is the one most familiar to modern exegetes of Scripture. It involves explaining the biblical text straightforwardly so that the text's clear, simple and natural meaning is applied to the community's situation. However, this often leads to inflexible, "wooden" interpretations. This method is frequently used when the authors of the New Testament refer to the Old Testament law, in which the commandments of the Law are interpreted literally[3]. Rabbinic literature contains several examples in which Scripture is understood directly, resulting in the clear, simple and natural meaning of the text being applied to people's lives – particularly in the application of the Deuteronomic law. Often the interpretation is even quite literal.

For example, regarding the recitation of the Shema prayer, the teaching of the School of Shammai states that "when it is recited in the evening, all should stand bent to one side, and in the morning they should rise, for it is written,

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[1] Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, coll. *Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis*, vol. 20 (Uppsala: Almqist and Wiksells, 1954), 195-6 (I only had limited access to his work); Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 1.

[2] Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [2]1999), 14.

[3] Jonathan Lunde, "An Introduction to Central Questions in the New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde (eds.), *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, coll. *Zondervan Counterpoints Collection* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 25.

«when you lie down and when you wake up» (Deut. 6:7) (commentary on the text in 6:6, «and let these words (those of the Shema), which I command you today, shall be in your heart, and you shall repeat them to your sons, and speak them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you're awake»). In contrast, the school of Hillel contradicts this view and says that „everyone may recite it in his way, for it is written: «and when you go by the way» (Deut. 6:7)" (*Mishnah, Berakhot* 1:3). The Hillelian interpretation seems closer to the truth in this case, but even here it still relies on an almost rigid use of the biblical text as the school of Shammai.

Another example that shows us how to apply literal interpretation (hyperliteralism) is the passage about dealing with a stubborn and rebellious son in Deut. 21:18-20: "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father and mother, and if they rebuke him, then his father and mother shall take him, and bring him out to the elders of his city to the gate of that place, and he shall say to the elders of his city: «This son of ours is obstinate and rebellious, he does not obey our voice, he is godless and drunk». The Mishnah interprets this as follows: «If one of his parents was lame, dumb, blind or deaf, their son will not become obstinate and rebellious, for it is written: «Let his father and mother take him» – so they were not lame (in the hand); «and bring him out» – so they were not lame; „and tell them" – so they were not dumb; «this son of ours" – so they were not blind; «they do not listen to our voice» – so they were not deaf" (*Sanhedrin* 8:4).

From the 4th century AD onwards, the Hebrew word *pesher* was bound to literal interpretation, as opposed to more sophisticated interpretations. The word comes from the verb פָּשַׁט, *pashat*, which in the Old Testament means "to strip (a garment)" (Lev. 6:4) or "to pounce" (Judg. 9:33). In the intertestamental period, namely in the War Scroll from Qumran, it is used with its biblical meaning of "stripping" the slain (*1QM* 7:2) and "to prepare for battle" (*1QM* 8:6). In Mishnaic Hebrew it meant "to stretch, to extend, to clarify, to explain" (*Mishnah, Shabbat* 1:1, *Exodus Rabbah* 47:5) and was used as a synonym for the verb דרשׁ, *darash*, "to interpret", being associated with the Aramaic language.

In the Tannaitic writings (10-220 AD), *peshat* sometimes denotes a direct and natural interpretation of Scripture, although this is not always the case (e.g., the interpretation of Deut. 13:6 in the *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin* 80b).

"If your brother, your mother's son, or your son, or your daughter, or the woman of your bosom, or your friend, who is like your soul, secretly incites you (to serve other idols)."

Gemarah points out that a man cannot be alone with two women lest he sin with them, but a woman can be alone with two men.

"Where does it follow that it is forbidden for a man to isolate himself with women? Rabbi Yohanan says in the name of Rabbi Yishmael: Where does the allusion in the written Torah to the prohibition of isolating oneself come from? Because this is what it says about someone who incites others to worship idols: «If your brother, your mother's son... incites you secretly» (Deut. 13:7)"

Even when literal interpretations are offered, it does not always mean that they are *peshat* interpretations[4].

Midrashic interpretation

Another method of interpretation from the Second Temple period is *midrashic* interpretation, which involves a much more in-depth attempt to explain the meaning of a text. Midrash was a fundamental concept in rabbinic exegesis and in the Pharisaic exegesis of the New Testament period[5]. The word comes from the verb דרשׁ, *darash*, „to have recourse to, to search" (Deut. 22:2, Job 3:4), and figuratively, "to read repeatedly", "to study", "to interpret" (*Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot* 1:5) and strictly speaking denotes an interpretative exposition of the text, regardless of how it is arrived at and what type of text is being considered (*haggadah* or *halakhah*).

From the time of the Tannaim until the 4th century AD, *midrashic* interpretation was confused with literal interpretation. From the 4th century AD onwards, in the Babylonian Talmud, *midrashic* exegesis began to be definitively distinguished from literal exegesis. According to S. Horovitz, it refers to the interpretation that goes beyond the simple literal meaning, and attempts to penetrate the spirit of Scripture, to examine the text from all sides and, thus arrive at meanings that are not immediately obvious[6]. To do this, interpreters follow pre-agreed rules of interpretation, or *middot*, which range from obvious principles to those that allow for more novel interpretations. The basic motto of the midrash is „what is relevant here", i.e., what is written in the Holy Scriptures is relevant to our current situation[7].

The Talmud credits the great Hillel, who lived at the time of the New Testament, with establishing the seven basic rules (*middot*) of Jewish biblical exegesis, which are also believed to have been used by the authors of the New Testament:

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[4] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 15-8.
[5] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 18.
[6] S. Horovitz, "Midrash", in Isidore Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, vol. 8 (New York-London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901-1906), 548.
[7] Lunde, "An Introduction", 26.

1) *Qal wa-homer* (קַל וָחוֹמֶר): i.e., "light and heavy". According to this rule, what is true or applicable in a "light" (or less important) case is certainly true or applicable in a "heavier" (or more important) case.

"Look at the birds of the sky, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into litters, and your heavenly Father feeds them (lightly). Are you not far more than they? (hard)" (Matt. 6:26//Luke 12:24)

2) *Gezerah shawah* (גְּזֵרָה שָׁוָה), i.e., "similar category". According to this rule, one verse/passage can be explained by another if similar words or expressions occur in both (verbal analogy). Christ justifies his apparent violation of the Sabbath by comparing himself to David, who once broke the Law by eating holy bread (1 Sam. 21:6).

"And Jesus answered them: Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those who were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the High Priest, and ate the shewbread, which only the priests were to eat, and gave it to those who were with him? And he said to them: The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man also is Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:23-28).

3) *Binyan 'av mikkathuv 'ekhad* (בִּנְיָן אָב מִכָּתוּב אֶחָד), i.e., "building a main rule/family (*av*) from a single passage". If the same phrase occurs in more than one passage, then the idea found in one passage can be applied to all other passages that share the same phrase.

"I am the God of Abraham... This is my name forever; this is my memorial from generation to generation" (Exod. 3:14-15), implies that Abraham will be raised up by the God of the living!

4) *Binyan 'av mişene kethuvim* (בִּנְיָן אָב מִשְּׁנֵי כְתוּבִים), i.e., „building a main rule/family (*av*) from two passages". If a rule is formulated by joining two texts together, then it can be applied to other passages, or a principle can be applied to other passages if it has been formulated by joining two texts together.

From "thou shalt not bind the mouth of the threshing ox" (Deut. 25:4) and Deut. 18:1-8, where it says that priests may feed on the Lord's sacrifices, it follows that "the labourer (preacher) is worthy of his food" (Matt. 10:10; *cf.* 1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18). Preachers and priests are compared to oxen that must feed on the fruit of the field.

5) *Kelal uferat uferat ukhelal* (כְּלָל וּפְרָט וּפְרָט וּכְלָל), i.e., "general and particular, particular and general". A general rule can be restricted by a particularization in another verse, or conversely, a particular rule can be extended to a general principle. Thus, a rule can be restricted or expanded if it has been restricted or expanded in another verse.

Christ says that the greatest commandment ("expanded rule") is "to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 6:4-5) and "your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). This is how he summarizes all the "special" commandments (Mark 12:28-34).

6) *Kayoṭe bo mimaqom ʾakher* (כַּיוֹצֵא בּוֹ מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר), i.e., "as it appears in another (similar) place". Difficulties in a text can be solved by comparing it with another text that is similar in general, not necessarily in the words.

If the Son of Man/Messiah sits on one of the thrones set before "the Ancient of Days" (Dan. 7) and in another passage it is said that He sits at the right hand of God (Ps. 109:1, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies sit at Your feet"), then it can be concluded that when the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13-14), He will sit at the right hand of God and judge His enemies. The meaning is evident from what Christ implied in his answer to Caiaphas (Mark 14:62, "And Jesus said: I am and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of heaven").

7). *Davar hallamed meʿinyano* (דָּבָר הַלָּמֵד מֵעִנְיָנוֹ), i.e., "teaching word from the context/meaning given by the context". This rule is exemplified by Christ's teaching on divorce (Matt. 19:4-8).

"Answering, He said: Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning created them male and female (Gen. 1:27)? And he said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:4). So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. So, what God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses' command to give her a book of separation and to leave her? (Deut. 24:1-4). He said to them: Because of the hardening of your hearts Moses permitted you to leave your wives, but from the beginning it was not so".

While it is true that Moses permitted divorce (Deut. 24:1-4), it is equally true that God never intended for the covenant of marriage to be broken (Gen. 1:27 and 2:4).

Some of these rules are common sense, while others have the possibility of deviating from the author's intended meaning. From this *middot*, the exegetical characteristics of Pharisaic Judaism become clear[8].

Allegorical interpretation

The allegorical interpretation attempts to recognize a symbolic meaning in the text. It assumes that the obvious meaning of the text conceals a deeper and more complex meaning. The literal, historical meaning of the text is not denied, it is simply not important. In the New Testament, perhaps the most allegorical text is Gal. 4:21-31, in which St. Paul compares Hagar to Mount Sinai and the slavery of the law, which characterizes the Jews in the earthly Jerusalem, and

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[8]   Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 20-1; Lunde, "An Introduction", 27.

Sarah to the people of the promise, who belong to the heavenly Jerusalem. The apostle Paul does not seem to be dealing with historical reality here, apart from its ephemeral existence, but seems to be using them symbolically[9].

The most important allegorist of the first century was Philo of Alexandria, whose commentaries on Scripture were written during the lifetime of Christ and in the early days of the early Christian Church. Although he was a Jew, he was a follower of Stoic and Platonic ideas, and although he was a harsh critic of the content of these philosophies, he consciously or unconsciously used their philosophical categories to represent what he believed to be the truth of the Torah.

Philo's attitude towards allegorical and literal exegesis is evident in several passages in his writings. He completely rejects any literal interpretation that speaks of a divine anthropomorphism and insists, for example, that Num. 23:19 clearly states that "God is not man" (*οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὁ θεός*). In doing so, he attempts to protect the transcendence of God from anthropopathism which, in his view, would inevitably arise in a literal treatment of anthropomorphisms. He also interpreted allegorically anything that might compromise the sanctity of God's inspired words: anything that seems absurd in the creation narratives, anything that is condemnable in legalistic texts, or anything trivial in the historical accounts of the Pentateuch. He also believed that the Old Testament is full of symbols given by God for the spiritual and moral growth of man and that it must be understood in a sense other than a literal and historical one. The *prima facie*/literal meaning must be set aside, even found offensive, to make room for the intended, hidden, spiritual meaning[10].

Pesher interpretation

The last type of interpretation, which is not necessarily in chronological order and is particularly evident in the writings discovered on the western shore of the Dead Sea, is the *pesher* interpretation. The term פֵּשֶׁר, *pesher*, is *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament Scriptures, as it only appears in Eccles. 8:1, "who is like the wise and who knows the interpretation (*pesher*) of things (lit. word)?" *Pesher* is a borrowing word from Aramaic, which in turn derives it from the Akkadian *pišru*, "interpretation, hidden meaning"[11], which is used there primarily in magical-astrological contexts. *Pesher* would therefore also have a hue of hidden, secret interpretation.

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[9] Lunde, "An Introduction", 29.
[10] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 30-1.
[11] Robert D. Biggs et al. (eds.), *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 12 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2005), 429.

So-called commentaries of the Qumran community are usually introduced with the word *pesher*. The Essenes considered themselves to be the last chosen community of this age, living on the threshold of the eschatological era. Therefore, all their zeal was directed towards preparing for the coming age. This led the entire community to attribute to themselves the fulfilment of several messianic prophecies that they believed related to their present situation and condition. They also believed that they were reliving in another age the experiences of their ancestors from the days of Moses and that although those prophecies, had probably been fulfilled in the past, they were being fulfilled or re-fulfilled accordingly in their own time. Moreover, some of the prophecies said that they referred exclusively to them, for the eschatological meaning hidden in the prophetic words was explained by the Teacher of Righteousness and even applied himself to him. In this sense, the Essenes follow the two-stage model of divine revelation, which is also illustrated by the book of Daniel, in which the dream revelation given to one community (in the past) is explained and understood through the interpretation given to another community (in the future):

"And God told Habakkuk to write down what should happen to the last generation, but He did not let him know the end of the world. And as for what it says: "That he who reads it may run (ebr. *qore*) with it" (Hab. 2:2). The interpretation (פִּשְׁרוֹ עַל, *pișro 'al*) refers to the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God revealed all the secrets of the words of his servants, the prophets" (*1QpHab* 7:1).

In this context, Habakkuk speaks of a vision, i.e., a prophecy, with the content of which the one who reads it must run to proclaim it (see also Jer. 23:21, "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied").

According to the Essenes, the herald (ebr. *qore*) in Habakkuk's prophecy was the Teacher of Righteousness, and not someone else in history, and they regarded such passages as referring exclusively to them! These passages are introduced with the formula *pișro 'al*, which could be translated as "the interpretation of this text is…, this refers to…, this text means that…".

The *pesher* starts from a contemporary event or person and traces it through history until it discovers it hidden in the Old Testament prophecies. Therefore, the full meaning of the text can only be understood in a revelatory context when prophecy and interpretation are seen together.

William H. Brownlee, one of the pioneers who researched the interpretative methods of Qumran, summarized their hermeneutical principles in 13 points – *pesharim*, or what he understood to be their principles of interpretation:

1). Everything a prophet wrote in antiquity has a veiled, eschatological meaning (which he calls "fulfilled eschatology").

2). Since the prophet wrote in a codified form, the meaning of the prophecy must often be determined by a forced or different construction of the biblical text, such as *1QpHab*, which contains more than 50 different significant words, most of which also differ from the LXX or Targums.

3). The meaning conveyed by the prophet can be discovered by studying textual or orthographic peculiarities in the received text. The interpretation is therefore often based on readings of the quoted text.

4). A textual variant, i.e., a different reading from the one quoted, can also contribute to the interpretation.

5). The application of a Bible verse can be determined by an analogous circumstance or by

6). Allegorical adaptation.

7) The *sensus plenior* of the prophet's words includes several meanings.

8). In some cases, the prophet has hidden the meaning of his words so much that it can only be understood by applying an equation of synonyms, attaching to the original word a secondary meaning of one of its synonyms.

9). Sometimes the prophet has hidden his message by writing one word in place of another, and the interpreter can recover the meaning of the prophecy by rearranging the letters of a word (equivalent to the biblical *atbash*, Jer. 25:26, 51:1) or by

10). Replacing one or more letters in the word of the biblical text with similar letters.

11). Sometimes the meaning of a prophecy can be restored by dividing a word into two or more parts and commenting on them.

12). Sometimes the prophet has hidden his original message in abbreviations so that the cryptic meaning of a word must be inferred by interpreting words or parts of words as abbreviations.

13). Other passages of Scripture can shed light on the meaning of the prophecy[12].

These conclusions are like what we find in rabbinic exegesis, the *midrash*. For this reason, many scholars have labelled the major interpretive convention of the Qumran commentaries the *midrash pesher* and consider it comparable to the *midrash halakhah* and the *midrash haggadah*, from which it differs only in literary form and content[13].

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[12] William H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation Among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Biblical Archaeologist* 14 (1951): 60-2.

[13] Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation," 76.

Did the authors of the New Testament use these exegetical methods in their writings?

This question has triggered numerous discussions for and against. Among those who emphatically answer this question in the affirmative is Richard Longenecker, who is quoted in this article. He argues that both Christ and the authors of the New Testament naturally and unconsciously appropriated the Old Testament in a way that emphasizes these methods. Furthermore, he believes that the *pesher* is the primary method by which the New Testament authors appropriated the Old Testament text. Any tensions that arise regarding the preservation of the meanings intended by the Old Testament authors must be resolved by recognizing the freedom that the Jews of that time had in interpreting Scripture[14].

Other scholars agree that the New Testament authors used these methods, but in a way that distanced them from the approaches used in Second Temple literature. Conversely, some who are concerned about the implications of recognizing these methods seek to deny them altogether. What influences the positions of these groups are their assumptions about what the use of these methods means. This is easy to prove if by pesher we mean any direct application of an Old Testament text to a particular New Testament situation based on a revelatory statement[15]. They do not believe that the authors of the New Testament use the exegetical methods of Qumran to bring out the hidden eschatological meaning of the text (Gärtner, Marshall, Lindars)[16].

Stendahl and the Matthean school of interpretation

Krister Stendahl, a former Swedish New Testament scholar, received his doctorate from the University of Uppsala in 1954 and subsequently became professor and dean of Harvard Divinity School, then Bishop of Stockholm. In his doctoral dissertation, later published under the title *The School of St. Matthew*, Stendahl sought to explore the creative "Sitz im Leben" milieu of Matthew's Gospel, to discover the school of thought that wrote it and used it as a kind of manual for "study and instruction" in his Church. Stendahl cites the work of earlier scholars who claimed that the evangelist Matthew, a former rabbi who later became a Christian teacher, founded a school equivalent to that of the rabbis.

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[14] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 28-78.

[15] Lunde, „An Introduction," 31.

[16] Bertil Gärtner, "The Habakkuk commentary (DSH) and the Gospel of Matthew," *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 8/1 (1954): 23; Lunde, "An Introduction," 31.

This school wrote the Gospel of Matthew, which was a theological textbook[17]. Stendahl also believes that the discoveries at Qumran reveal an alternative form of Jewish education and compares it to the so-called Matthean school, which used a type of interpretation like the exegetical method called *midrash pesher* found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. According to him, the *pesher* interpretation was a particularly imaginative type of exegesis that radically reinterpreted passages of Scripture by recontextualizing them and then applying them to the situation of the community at his time. This reinterpretation was seen as the esoteric or secret meaning of the text. Could the early Christian community have reinterpreted the same Old Testament texts as if they had been fulfilled in the person of Christ? If so, did they do so in a systematic way? The thesis of Stendahl's work is that the Gospel of Matthew is just that, a theological textbook and the literary creation of a school of interpretation, a school for future teachers and leaders of the Church[18]. To prove this, Stendahl attempts to show the close connection between the type of Old Testament interpretation found in a particular group of quotations from Matthew and the way the Qumran group treats the book of Habakkuk. So, as he analyses each quotation, he shows how he thinks Matthew, or his school exemplifies this interpretation[19].

A foundational text that Stendahl thoroughly researches and analyses is Mic. 5:1, quoted in Matt. 2:6: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you will come forth the Ruler who will shepherd my people Israel".

He notes that the Qumran text differs significantly from the Hebrew version of the MT and the Greek version of LXX. Compared to the LXX, Matthew shares only six words[20]. This "manipulation" by Matthew is a *pesher*, basically an eisegesis that freely intervenes in the text to be interpreted, even beyond what could be a gloss or paraphrase, if it corresponds to the meaning that the interpreter means. So, if the Gospel of Matthew departs from the biblical text of the Old Testament in this as well as in other quotations to support the claim that Christ is the Messiah, we have strong evidence that the Matthean school used an interpretation like the midrash of the Qumran community[21]. This exegesis applies it first to several groups of Matthean quotations, some of which Matthew inherits from Mark, then to Matthew's quotations that contain the fulfilment

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[17] Potter Cain McKinney, *To Fulfill What is Written: Reconsidering the Fulfillment-Formula Quotations of the Gospel of Matthew* (BA Thesis) (Williamsburg: William & Mary, 2021), 7; Gärtner, "The Habakkuk commentary," 1; Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament*, 155.

[18] McKinney, *To Fulfill*, 8-10.

[19] McKinney, *To Fulfill*, 9.

[20] McKinney, *To Fulfill*, 10.

[21] McKinney, *To Fulfill*, 10.

formula, and finally to Matthew's quotations that are not accompanied by any fulfilment formula[22]. The fulfilment formula, according to the author, could be a kind of technical artifice used by Matthew to indicate the nature of the *pesher* quotation. He concludes that if his observations about the interpretation and how the quotations entered the Gospel are correct, they constitute an almost irrefutable argument for the existence of a Matthean school[23].

Richard Longenecker and the *pesher* interpretation

Similarly, Longenecker notes that although there are several instances in the Gospels where Christ uses literal and *midrashic* interpretations, as we have seen above, the most used method is *pesher* because the motif of fulfilment that is characteristic of it appears again and again in His words[24]. According to Longenecker, the *pesharim* material is not necessarily accompanied by the formula „that it may be fulfilled".

He counts the following Matthean texts in the category of the *pesharim*:
1). Matt. 21:42 (//Mark 12:10-11//)

"Jesus said to them: You have never read in the Scriptures, «The stone which the builders neglected has become the cornerstone. Was this from the Lord, and is it a wonderful thing in our eyes?»"

Christ concludes his allusion to the well-known parable of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7) and His not-so-veiled rebuke of the people's rejection of the son by quoting Ps. 118:22-23. The text accurately reflects the LXX, and Christ is referring to the fulfilment of the psalmist's words in his rejection and glorification.

2). In Matt. 26:31 (//Mark 14:27) after the Last Supper, He quotes Zech. 13:7 in connection with His approaching death and the disciples' reaction: "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered", the quotation is introduced by Christ with the formula "for it is written" ($\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\rho\alpha\pi\tau\alpha\iota$) and directly invokes a *pesher* motif, „x is y", i.e., the disciples will be scattered because they will strike Him. To attribute the passage to Himself, Christ changes the tenses, number and words in the LXX from "strike down ($\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\alpha\tau\epsilon$) the shepherds (plural) and drive away ($\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\sigma\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\tau\epsilon$) the sheep" to "I will scatter ($\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\omega$) the Shepherd (singular, used as a title, perhaps alluding to the Teacher of Righteousness?) and the sheep will be scattered ($\delta\iota\alpha\sigma\kappa\sigma\rho\pi\iota\sigma\theta\acute{\eta}\sigma\sigma\nu\tau\alpha\iota$).

3) In Matt. 11:10 (//Luke 7:27, *cf.* Mark 1:2-3) Christ ascribes to John the Baptist the ambiguous texts of Mal. 3:1, "Behold, I send my angel before your

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[22] McKinney, *To Fulfill*, 11.
[23] McKinney, *To Fulfill*, 11.
[24] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 54.

face, who will prepare your way before you". In Matthew's Gospel, Christ uses a typical *pesher* formula: "that it is he of whom it is written" (*οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται*). The text form of the quoted passage has also been changed. Mal. 3:1, quoted by Jesus, appears as follows: "I send (*ἀποστέλλω*) My angel before your face, who will prepare (*κατασκευάσει σου*) the way for you (*σου*), but the LXX has "I will send (*ἐξαποστέλλω*) my angel and he will seek (*ἐπιβλέψεται*) the way before my face (*μου*)".

4). In Matt. 13:14-15, Christ quotes Isa. 6: 9-10 to explain to the apostles the reason for using parables for the people and introduces the passage with the words "and it is to them (those who refuse to listen) that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, saying" (*ἀναπληροῦνται αὐτοῖς ἡ προφητεία Ἠσαίου ἡ λέγουσα*) and applies the prophet's words to His ministry, in a *pesher* way.

5) In Matt. 15:7-9, He paraphrases Isa. 29:13 (possibly also Ps. 78:36-37) and rebukes the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem. Here, too, it should be noted that He introduces the quotation with a fulfilment formula: "well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said" (*καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν περὶ ὑμῶν Ἠσαΐας λέγων*) and applies the passage, in a *pesher* way, about His rejection by the Jewish leaders[25].

Joseph Fitzmyer and the *pesher* interpretation

In 1961 Joseph Fitzmyer also wrote a study on the explicit use of the Old Testament quotations of the Qumran literature and the New Testament. Recognizing that the problem of Old Testament usage in the New Testament is a broad one, complicated by secondary issues of existing textual variants and the related question of the relationship or harmony between the two Testaments, the author focuses his attention rather on explicit quotations from the Old Testament as found in both the New Testament and the Qumran literature, and not examining the *pesharim* literature (commentaries such as *1QpHab, 1QpMic, 4QpNah*, etc.) and the *testimonia* texts. He acknowledges that there is no corresponding New Testament counterpart to the *pesher* and defines them as a unique type of *midrash*. There is no book or any fragment of a New Testament book that is a pure *pesher*[26]. After a careful and thorough examination of the explicit quotations, Fitzmyer concludes that there are four generic uses for them: literal or historical, modernized, adapted, and eschatological. These approaches can also be illustrated by the numerous quotations from the Old Testament in the

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[25] Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 54-6.
[26] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, „The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 7/4 (1961): 297-8.

New Testament. Moreover, the introductory formulae in the Qumran texts seem to have no parallel in the Mishnah, despite the common use of the verbs "to say" and "to write", while many Qumran expressions turn out to be the exact Semitic equivalents of New Testament formulae. The exegetical practices of the New Testament authors are thus quite like those of the contemporary Jewish authors, which is best illustrated by the Qumran literature.

In some isolated explicit quotations, Fitzmyer also finds some of the specific exegetical mechanisms of the *pesharim* (e.g., the actualization of the text, the atomistic interpretation of the text, i.e., the one that does not consider the context, the use of textual variants, wordplay, and deliberate manipulation of the text to better fit the new context). All this, he claims, was not used exclusively by the *pesher* interpretation. The *pesher* was essentially a kind of concise *midrashic* commentary on a fragment of a prophecy or other Old Testament text. Fulfilment formulas are conspicuously absent from the Qumran texts, which is why Fitzmyer questions whether it is appropriate to continue to speak of *pesher* quotations or *pesher* interpretations unless these are more precisely defined and limited to well-defined cases. Moreover, there is no evidence at Qumran of a systematic and unified exegesis of the Old Testament. The same text is rarely interpreted in the same way (e.g., the different versions of the Damascus Document chap. 7 and 19 and the use of the text of Num. 24:17 and Amos 9:11 in different contexts)[27].

Conclusions

Several biblical scholars of the last century have argued that the evangelist Matthew uses the Old Testament in a similar way to the rabbis of the New Testament period and that Matthew interprets the Old Testament using the *pesher* when, for example, he applies the text of Hosea 11:1 to Christ's sojourn in Egypt. Similarly, the Qumran community updates the Old Testament (through the *pesher* interpretation) by claiming that the scriptures apply to their situation. It must be said, however, that the *pesher* is an eisegesis method that is hostile to the notion of objective interpretation. The *pesher* method, i.e., "exegesis", is an application of Old Testament scripture to other historical circumstances with little or no regard for the context of the passage originally quoted. Interpreters using the *pesher* method assume that the authors of the Old Testament were only addressing a contemporary audience. The interpretations are generally detached from the source context and appear to be *ad-hoc*, with

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[27] Fitzmyer, „The Use of Explicit," 330-1.

no coherent methodology. The *pesher* was an attempt to explain the prophecies and biblical texts in the age of the interpreter, not to understand the original historical meaning of the time in which they were recorded.

In the *pesher* on Habakkuk, the authors simply take ancient references to the Chaldeans and apply them to the Romans without bothering to justify this choice. The historical context of Habakkuk seems to be of little interest to them. In the same commentary, all the bad deeds described by Habakkuk are attributed to the Wicked Priest, while all the good things are attributed to the Teacher of Righteousness[28]. Here, too, the interpreter is not concerned with justifying the fact that he has replaced the characters of the original text with characters from his community.

Norman Hillyer says of the introductory formula of the quotations, "that it may be fulfilled", that it may be a kind of technical phrase used by Matthew to indicate the *pesher* type of quotation, and it is precisely the quotations which differ from all the texts known to us which are preceded by the formula expressing fulfilment[29].

Ulrich Luz raises several other objections and points out the differences between the Qumran *pesher* and the fulfilment formula $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{o}\omega$ in Matthew. He points out that the *pesher* begins with the text, which he then interprets, whereas the $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{o}\omega$ formula begins with the historical event and understands it as a fulfilment of prophecy/foretelling. The evangelist Matthew uses the Old Testament Scriptures as fulfilment, not as a *pesher*. This type of interpretation and Matthew's hermeneutics are therefore distinct not because of an inherent hermeneutical method implicit in each word, but because of the way the Old Testament words are used in their original and interpreted contexts[30].

The abstraction of the *pesher* interpretation from the Qumran manuscripts and its application to the Old Testament interpretation by the New Testament thus raises numerous problems, as we have seen[31]. Some twenty years ago, Matthew Black dismissed the alleged *midrash pesher* genre as an invention of modern biblical scholars "which is better be forgotten"[32]. If we accept the *pesher* interpretation, it appears that the Old Testament prophecy is only fulfilled in the *pesher*, because the *pesher* is not interested in the historical fulfilment of biblical prophecy.

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[28] Gärtner, „The Habakkuk commentary," 13.

[29] Norman Hillyer, "Matthew's Use of the Old Testament," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 36/1 (1964): 16-7.

[30] J. R. Daniel Kirk, "Conceptualising Fulfilment in Matthew," *Tyndale Bulletin* 59/1 (2008): 86-7.

[31] See especially Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament*, 155-9.

[32] Timothy H. Lim, *Pesharim*, coll. *Companion to the Qumran scrolls*, vol. 3 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 82-3.

I would like to conclude with a brief comment and a challenge. There is a danger today that the today meaning of the Old Testament prophecies will be a *pesher* if we do not try to search in history its fulfilment and see on purpose Christ in every text or word without considering the historical context of the prophecy. Based on this observation, I wonder if the Patristic interpretation is also largely just a *pesher*?

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