

The Virgin And The Priest The Making Of The Messiah

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7 Dead Sea Scrolls

By now the particulars of how, when, and where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered have become the stuff of legend. In 1947, ancient scrolls and fragments written on animal skins were found hidden in desert caves off the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. The original scrolls were discovered accidentally by a Bedouin shepherd boy in search of a lost goat, and over the following years local tribesmen found more of them in the surrounding area. In total, over eight hundred manuscripts were found in eleven caves. They fall into two distinct categories. The greater part are copies of Hebrew Scriptures; canonical, apocryphal, and pseudigraphical. The rest of the literature is the sectarian writing of a hitherto unknown religious cult. This collection includes sectarian rule books, commentaries on Scripture, poetry, prayers, liturgies, calendars, and even a book on military strategy.

Once it was determined that the scrolls were the handiwork of ancient Jewish scribes, members of a sect which co-existed with Jesus and the earliest Christians, the Dead Sea Scrolls attracted the attention of powerful religious and political interests. Many suspect it was the machinations of these parties that delayed full publication of the scrolls for over forty years. According to cynics, restrictions on the scrolls were lifted in 1991, only when it was believed nothing in them threatened those interests. Now, apparently everything is in print, save a few obscure or unimportant fragments.

Archeological excavations in Qumran, the nearest point on the map to where the scrolls were found, unearthed a complex of several buildings, generally believed to be an Essene monastery or compound of some kind. Chiefly because its location agrees with specifications mentioned by the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, who described a secluded Essene community sometime before his death in 79 C.E:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners.¹

The archeological evidence, which includes Roman arrowheads and over 450 bronze coins, suggests the settlement was destroyed or evacuated during in the Roman-Jewish war of 66-73 C.E. At some stage of the conflict, members of the commune climbed nearby cliffs, and hid their precious library of manuscripts to prevent them falling into enemy hands. No one ever returned to retrieve them.

It is not conclusively proven that the ruins at Qumran belong to the sect responsible for the scrolls. Several credible alternatives have been offered in recent years, but the community's physical location is secondary to the undisputed fact of its existence. The general desert region around the Dead Sea was traditionally the place where ascetics and holy men gathered. And even if the sect's core membership did not reside in Qumran,

they would probably not have lived far away. In the absence of an agreed name, they are referred to as the 'Qumran sect' or the 'Qumranians.'

ESSENES

Most of our information about the Essenes comes from the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37 C.E. -- 100 C.E). Son of a priest, he gained the favor of the Romans at the end of the Jewish wars, and immigrated to Rome. His remaining years were spent writing an apologetic history of the Jews, including an account of the beliefs and practices of the three main sects of Judaism: Essenes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

Josephus claims that between sixteen and nineteen years of age he spent time living with each group. Later, in apparent contradiction, he maintains he spent the same three years in the desert with an ascetic teacher called Bannus who, "used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food other than that what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by day and night in order to preserve his chastity."² The close resemblance of Bannus to the popular image of John the Baptist may partly explain Josephus' glowing portrait of John and his total neglect of Jesus.³ The main features of the Essene movement as described by Josephus are:

Practiced strict discipline to control sexual desires. Some were celibate, but others married. Those who were unmarried preferred to adopt the children of others and raise them in the Essene way.

[War 2:8,2]

Did not keep personal wealth. All their possessions were handed over to the community as a whole.

[War 2:8,3]

Resided in groups in different cities spread throughout the land. Traveled with nothing, no money or possessions, save weapons for self defense, and did no commerce between themselves. Everything was freely given, with payment neither received nor requested.

[War 2:8,4]

Dressed themselves in white loincloths and performed ritual daily ablutions before communal evening meals presided over by the priesthood.

[War 2:8,5]

Studied the sacred texts, and above all the Law of Moses, and had strict prohibitions against blasphemy and swearing.

[War 2:8,2]

New members underwent a probationary period. On acceptance, oaths were taken to preserve the ethical purity of the brotherhood, and to prevent disclosure of the sect's secret teachings to outsiders.

[War 2:8,7]

Members were forbidden to reveal the "names of the angels." Josephus does not articulate further on this point, but the obvious implication is that Essenes had a sophisticated angelology.

[War 2:8,7]

Josephus' description of the Essenes reads as though it had been lifted directly from a Qumran community rule book. *The Community Rule* described the same practices: communal sharing of wealth, ritual bathing, probationary period for new recruits, prohibition against swearing, and strict separation from outsiders. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a tract in which members of the sect are paralleled with a hierarchical angelic priesthood, is one of several that reveal a complex view of angels.

All things considered, the people who secreted away the Dead Sea Scrolls must have been connected in some way to the broader Essene movement. The particular lifestyle of the Qumranians, however, was only for the most committed individuals. Membership required strict observance of numerous rules and regulations designed to purify the self through obedience, self-discipline, and study. This was not asceticism for its own sake. Personal holiness was essential to participate fully in the coming messianic kingdom. Prophecy was being fulfilled in their midst. Josephus refers to a similar faction of Essenes who gleaned prophesy from scriptures and performed purification rites:

There are also those among them, who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets; and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.⁴

The prediction that most characterized the Qumran sect missed badly. Their messianic world order never materialized. Long before the Roman army arrived on their doorstep, the sect was torn asunder by an internal disagreement between its leader, the "Teacher of Righteousness," and his former ally, the "Wicked Priest." This led to an acrimonious parting of the ways from which the sect never recovered. Many scrolls were written in the aftermath of the breakup to provide a theological explanation for what had happened.

In the final analysis, the Qumranians appear to be just another sad redundancy of history. The best spin one could put on them was that they had badly miscalculated. The worst, they were deluded fanatics. About one forecast, however, they were half right. The scrolls successfully predicted a war against the Romans or "Kittim" as they were known. But they got the wrong result; the Romans won.

According to the *War Scroll*, members regarded themselves as an elite corps of fighting men, who would form the vanguard of future battles. The confrontation was described in theological language, but "war" was not used as a metaphor for a spiritual struggle. The group was prepared for both physical as well as spiritual combat. The complete battle plan and even its duration were meticulously detailed and fixed in advance.

Qumranians were the 'sons of light.' The Romans and their Jewish collaborators were the 'sons of darkness.' All the 'sons of light' were to participate and register in the army. The encounter would be the great grandmother of all battles; the final showdown between the forces of 'light' and 'darkness.'

Despite the barrenness of its setting today, Qumran was not the popularly imagined secluded "wilderness" of biblical lore. Excavations of the ruins have shown the site was originally an ancient Israelite fortress, so unlikely to have been chosen at random. Its location was strategically significant; fifteen miles due east of Jerusalem, situated near a major crossroads that linked the west coast Dead Sea sites to Jericho in the north, and Jerusalem to the west. Qumran's coastal position also meant that travel and trade to

Jerusalem from the east coast Dead Sea sites would pass in close proximity to it.

Although irrefutable evidence that the settlement was a military installation is lacking, a fortified watchtower overlooked the entrance. Obviously, the relatively small number who lived at Qumran did not constitute an army. The compilers of the scrolls represented the dedicated elite; trained to provide leadership for the common Israelites, who it was believed, would rise up and follow them when the time was right.

Pliny thought that a lack of better options in life forced people to join the cult; but members believed they had the highest calling of all -- handpicked by God to serve the Messiah. Pliny thought that they were 'tired of life,' but the members could hardly have been more enthusiastic. Pliny described them as "refugees;" but the members considered themselves the saviors of society. Pliny was a Roman historian. He was on the winning side. It was his prerogative to describe them as a bunch of crackpots and deadbeats -- ancient equivalents of Jonestown or the Branch Davidians.

ZEALOTS

Not widely known outside professional circles, text fragments identical to those found at Qumran, were discovered at Masada during excavations in the 1960s. Masada was a site for ancient palaces located on a high plateau on the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea, thirty miles due south of Qumran. According to Josephus, it was fortified during the reign of Herod the Great as a refuge in the event of a revolt. In 66 C.E., during the initial stages of the Jewish rebellion, it was captured by Zealots from the Roman garrison stationed there, and used as a base for operations against Rome and her Jewish supporters, until put under siege by the Roman army in 72 C.E.

Two years later, Masada finally collapsed, but when the Romans entered the fortress they discovered that the approximately one thousand inhabitants had committed mass suicide rather than face capture. When describing Roman sieges, Josephus usually gave anecdotes of counterattacks or brave resistance by the Jewish defenders, but he failed to do so in the story of Masada. These were clearly not regular Zealots.

No complete scrolls were found there because they were destroyed to keep them from the Romans. Pieces of manuscripts show that its defenders used the same solar calendar as used at Qumran, and not the lunar calendar of official Judaism. The largest fragment unearthed was part of *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a text of Qumranian liturgical worship. Mass suicides often coincide with extremist religious fervor, and Qumranians, not Zealots, were distinguished by their religious passion. Historians regard Jewish Zealots as either freedom fighters or terrorists, but they do not have a reputation for piety.

Should the Romans have captured the inhabitants of Masada, the men would have been crucified, and the women and children enslaved. For the Qumran sect, crucifixion was the most shameful and dishonorable form of death. *The Temple Scroll* explained the following circumstances where crucifixion was justified:

If a man slanders his people and delivers his people up to a foreign nation and does evil to his people you shall hang him on a tree and he shall die...If a man is guilty of a capital crime and flees abroad to the nations, and curses his people, the children of Israel, you shall hang him on a tree, and he shall die. But his body shall not stay overnight on the tree. Indeed you shall bury him on the same day.

For he who is hanged on a tree is accursed of God and men.⁵

Zealots were frequently crucified throughout the Roman occupation, and considered it a badge of honor to be martyred by the enemy in this way. It was not a shameful death. Christians, of course, held a similar point of view. If Josephus was correct in saying that Zealots captured Masada, then at one point they must have joined forces with Qumranians who subsequently formed the majority in the coalition.

In 1952, a scroll made of copper sheets was discovered in a partly collapsed cave just north of Qumran. *The Copper Scroll*, eight feet long and engraved in Hebrew, is an inventory listing of buried treasure, containing detailed references on where gold and jewels were hidden in secret locations in Jerusalem and around the country. The text of the scroll is not composed in the poetic or didactic styles of the sectarian literature, but in the dry manner of accounting. That it has been painstakingly engraved into copper sheets suggests that its content demanded something more permanent than leather or papyrus, and it was not the result of a whimsical fantasy or an elaborate hoax.

Some scholars assumed that the Copper Scroll represented the pooled resources of the Qumran community, but another explanation came from the late John Allegro, a controversial figure in the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls and one of the original team of translators. He suggested that the Zealots took control of the Jerusalem Temple before the Romans arrived, and they siphoned away considerable amounts of gold and silver. The treasure was hidden at various locations and the copper scroll record made accordingly.⁶ As it was deposited in a cave at Qumran, the Zealots must have had sympathizers in the area.

As yet no consensus has emerged on the origins of the copper scroll, and the precise nature of the connection between Qumran and Masada remains unclear. Even though the demise of the Teacher of Righteousness and the division caused by the Wicked Priest had devastated the sect, apparently it remained strong in the Dead Sea area. With the Romans on the warpath, and no messianic deliverance on the horizon, some chose to stay and throw in their lot with the Zealots. Others headed in opposite directions. But to understand what really happened at Qumran we need to identify the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. First, we need to know when they lived.

DATING THE SCROLLS

No one disputes that the Qumran sect existed during the lifetimes of Jesus and John the Baptist. And it has not gone unnoticed, even among the general public, that the intense level of messianic expectation expressed in the gospels is matched, even surpassed, in the Dead Sea Scrolls. But hopes that they might provide a breakthrough in understanding the origins of Christianity have so far been in vain. Both the Church and professional scholarship consistently downplay this possibility. An agreement has been reached that the writings at Qumran have significance primarily because they track Jewish literary development during the inter-testamental period. They help fill the two hundred years gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and demonstrate possible stylistic influences on the gospel writers.

The aura of mystique that has always surrounded the Dead Sea Scrolls has been reinforced in recent times by the publication of books by dissenting scholars that attempt to link Jesus to them.⁷ But the majority view, including most of the original team of translators, is that all the historical personalities and events mentioned, or alluded to, in

the sectarian literature belong to the Maccabean period of Jewish history, between the mid-second-century and mid-first-century B.C.E. Nothing in the texts, therefore, constitutes a direct or indirect reference to either Jesus or John the Baptist.

If the conventional interpretation of the scrolls is correct, then for the last hundred years of the sect’s existence (30 B.C.E-70 C.E.) the following premises must also be correct:

No contemporary events were considered worthy of interpretation or comment. If commentaries were made, then they were destroyed without trace.

Members were fixated only on events of the distant past. They maintained a deliriously high level of messianic expectation over several generations.

The Qumran sect was either unaware of the existence of Jesus and John the Baptist, or deemed them irrelevant.

None of these hypotheses are justified by the internal evidence of the written texts. They are defended by dating the scrolls through a combination of radioactive carbon testing and paleography, neither of which are exact sciences. The test results are then interpreted in accordance with the above suppositions.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were subjected to radioactive carbon tests at laboratories in Zurich, and at the University of Arizona during the 1990s. The results were far from conclusive [Table 7]. The margin of error is so wide that the results essentially proved nothing, and can be used to justify a variety of different arguments. Only one sectarian scroll, *The Habakkuk Commentary* 30 C.E., ... when Jesus and John the Baptist were publicly active. The rest of the sectarian literature could have been composed during their lifetimes or after their deaths.

Table 7. DATING OF SECTARIAN SCROLLS

Carbon Dating		
Damascus Document*	45 BCE -- 120 CE	100 -- 50 BCE
Damascus Doc Manuscript*	194 -- 45 BCE	50 BCE -- 0 CE
Habakkuk Commentary*	120 -- 5 BCE	30 -- 1 BCE
The Messianic Rule*	206 BCE -- 111 CE	100 -- 75 BCE
The Community Rule*	95 BC -- 122 CE	100 BCE
Commentary on Psalms*	5 -- 111 CE	N/A
Messianic Apocalypse*	93 BCE -- 80 CE	100 -- 80 BCE
Thanksgiving Hymns**	25 BCE -- 60 CE	50 BCE -- 70 CE
Temple Scroll**	100 BCE -- 0 CE	25 BCE -- 25 CE

* Tested at Arizona AMS Laboratory, University of Arizona, 1994

** Tested at Institut für Mittelenergiephysik, Zurich, 1991

Carbon dating only produces a date for the age of the tiny sample of animal skin tested, and not for the date on which it was written. And results may be influenced by a variety of other factors. For example, for many years the translators exposed the scrolls in cigarettesmoke-filled rooms, and cleaned them with oils to enhance the lettering. This kind of treatment can speed the aging process. Commenting on the complex and problematic nature of accurate radiocarbon dating, a leading scientist in the field stated that, “little reliance should be placed on an individual 14C date to provide an estimate of

age for a given object, structure, feature, or stratigraphic unit.”⁸ This statement was validated by the results of carbon dating for *The Testament of Qahat*, a lesser known Qumran manuscript. A sample was carbon dated between 300 and 400 B.C.E., which nobody accepts is an even remotely possible date. The laboratory admitted its findings were questionable, and explained that ‘chemical contamination’ had affected the result, although they were unwilling to provide further details of what that meant.⁹

The principle behind paleography is that from a careful study of the shape and formulation of letters in a manuscript, paleographers are able to calculate the date of its composition. This method assumes an historical linear progression of writing techniques, which is the sole basis upon which its results are founded. The logic is sound enough when dealing with documents of an official nature such as inventories, oaths, registers, etc but cannot be applied with the same rigor to religious scripts. Scribes used traditional styles of writing which were not always the same as contemporary ones. In this way they could appeal to a heritage of inspired literature to give legitimacy to their own work. This was standard practice everywhere, and is the reason today why publishers of sacred texts use traditional type fonts and not contemporary ones. The results of paleographical testing, therefore, tend to be dated too early.

The best means of determining the date of composition and the chronology of ancient writings is by a thorough examination of the internal evidence of the actual written material, together with any associated archeological data. That so many ‘impartial’ experts think otherwise in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls is both ironic and revealing. It strongly suggests they are ruled by desire to preserve and protect the same traditional belief systems held by those who are legitimately suspected of having delayed publication of the scrolls in the first place.

THE HABAKKUK COMMENTARY

Not surprisingly, scholars who prefer to date the sectarian writing in the pre-Christian era jumped on the early dating of the Habakkuk Scroll to justify their position:

Nevertheless, Arizona has scored on one highly significant point: the Habakkuk Commentary, chief source of the history of the Qumran sect, is definitely put in the pre-Christian era between 120 and 5 BCE. In consequence, fringe scholars who see in this writing allusion to events described in the New Testament will find they have a problem on their hands.¹⁰

The Habakkuk Commentary has become prominent because it is judged to be the main source of information on the dispute between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. Other writings, however, provide similar information, and they are all in agreement with each other. *The Habakkuk Commentary* merely echoes what is written in them and includes a few extra details.

Qumran scribes specialized in the ‘peshet’ form of interpreting current events in the life of the community from books of prophecy. A line or verse was isolated, and then reexamined as though it had been written in direct reference to the sect. In other words, they forced meanings onto ancient texts that were never intended by the original authors. A similar form of exegesis was used by early Christians to explain Jesus’ life from the Old Testament. The book of Habakkuk, given the peshet treatment, was construed to be an accurate prediction of the dispute between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. This clash of personalities left deep scars, judging by the vitriolic

hyperbole used against the Wicked Priest. Ultimately, it led to the death of both combatants, though not to the disbandment of their supporters.

The Wicked Priest is usually identified as Jonathan Maccabaeus, who served as the High Priest in Jerusalem from 153 to 143 B.C.E. without having the appropriate hereditary credentials. The name of the High Priest he usurped is unknown, but he is understood to have been the Teacher of Righteousness. Jonathan had been a leader in the guerilla wars against the Seleucid Greek rulers, and received his appointment in line with the terms of a peace treaty. Eventually, Jonathan and one thousand of his men were lulled into a trap by Diodotus Tryphon, who had invaded Judea. Jonathan's men were slain, and he was held hostage before being executed shortly afterward.¹¹

From all the items unearthed at Qumran, the collection of coins has been the most conclusive. Four hundred and seventy six bronze coins were found, spanning the dates 135 B.C.E. to 136 C.E.¹² The bulk of the coinage comes from two specific periods: 143 coins date from 103 -- 76 B.C.E. and 254 coins date from the period 6 -- 67 C.E. This accounts for 397 out of a total of 476 coins -- over eighty percent of the total. Logically, the most occupation and activity at Qumran was during these two periods.

The first significant presence, 103-76 B.C.E., was at least forty years after the rule of Jonathan Maccabaeus. If he were the Wicked Priest, then not only did the sect successfully weather the storm he caused, but forty years after his death it moved to Qumran and ruminated on his battle with the Teacher of Righteousness for another 170 years, moving to an alternative location for eighty years in midstream. Eminently more plausible is the theory that the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest lived during the latter period of occupation at Qumran, 6-67 C.E.

When the Roman army approached, the Qumranians did not destroy the scrolls but carefully concealed them in hillside caves. This means that (1) they did not want the Romans to read them, and (2) they intended to return later to retrieve them. If the writing concerned incidents that took place over two centuries previously and more than a hundred years before the Romans ever set foot in Palestine, why was it so important to keep them from Roman eyes? Logically, it was because the scrolls contained contemporary references. If the Romans read about the Kittim and how they would be utterly destroyed -- it would have been a catastrophe. The Romans might even have sympathized with the Wicked Priest.

The word "Kittim" appears repeatedly throughout the sectarian literature. Originally it referred to the inhabitants of Kition, a Phoenician colony in Cyprus, but Jewish scribes used "Kittim" to signify the great world power of the day. In the book of Daniel, "Kittim" was already used to symbolize the Romans.¹³ But Daniel was written during the Maccabean era, mid-second-century B.C.E., and at that time Rome was not considered a hostile power to Israel.

The inescapable fact of history is that there was no direct Roman military involvement in Palestine until the invasion of Pompey in 63 B.C.E. After that time, Judea was incorporated into the Roman sphere of control as a client state. Taxes and tributes had to be paid of course, and no doubt Romans were resented by the bulk of the populace, but their rule was through Jewish proxies. The Roman army was only involved when civil disturbances could not be handled effectively by the local authorities. Roman-Jewish cooperation peaked during the reign of Herod the Great, 37- 6 B.C.E., when the Romans supported Herod's rebuilding of the Temple. After Herod's death, his kingdom was

divided among three sons, but from 6 C.E. onward, Judea was ruled by a succession of Roman governors (including Pontius Pilate 26-36 C.E.), until the Jewish Roman war of 66-70 C.E.¹⁴ *The Habakkuk Commentary* described the Kittim in the following ways:¹⁵

“quick and valiant in war, causing many to perish. All the world shall fall under the dominion of the Kittim.”

“The Kittim who inspire all the nations with fear and dread.”

“The Kittim who trample the earth with their horses and beasts. They come from afar...and devour all the peoples like an eagle which cannot be satisfied, and they address all the peoples with anger and wrath and fury and indignation.”

“The commanders of the Kittim who...pass one in front of the other; one after another their commanders come to lay waste the earth.”

“They sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war...they divide their yoke and their tribute over all the peoples year by year, ravaging many lands.”

These characterizations must have been written during the later period of Qumran occupancy (6 -- 67 C.E.). Mention of “Kittim” is unlikely to have been a reference to the Roman army of Pompey. Use of phrases such as “all the world,” “all the nations,” and “all the peoples,” point to an area of Roman control that covered much more territory than during the republican era. “Commanders of the Kittim who pass in front...one after another” implies that Roman leadership was by a succession of individuals -- Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Caligula, Nero, etc -- and not by decree of the senate as it was before the Empire. This argument is further strengthened in the *War Scroll*, where the leader of the Kittim is described as a *melekh* which means “king” or “emperor.”

“The king of the Kittim shall enter into Egypt, and in his time he shall set out in great wrath to wage war against the kings of the north, that his fury may destroy and cut the horn of Israel.”

“And all those who are ready for battle shall march out and shall pitch their camp before the king of the Kittim and before all the host of Belial gathered about him...”

That the Romans venerated their standards and weaponry was a well known feature of both Republican and Imperial armies, and is duly noted in *The Habakkuk Commentary*, “they sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war.” Significantly, Josephus recorded that the first occasion this custom was brought to the attention of the Jewish people was at the start of Pontius Pilate’s governorship:

So he introduced Caesar’s effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images... Pilate was the first who brought these images to Jerusalem and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the nighttime; but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Caesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images.¹⁶

Consequently, the most probable date for *The Habakkuk Commentary* is sometime

between 26 C.E., when Pilate took office, and before the Roman army leveled Qumran about 68 C.E. Therefore, the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest must have been active during this time period.

The Habakkuk Commentary shares with other sectarian scrolls an unmistakable sense of immediacy. The writing is emotionally charged. Events are not being described second or third hand. The Christian gospels were written decades after the events they describe, so the narrative tones are measured and lack the same emotional connection with the subject matter. Both the scrolls and the gospels dealt with cosmic issues, but the writer of *The Habakkuk Commentary* differed in that he failed in his attempt at being rational and levelheaded. The sentiment is one of unbridled resentment, which suggests that events described were still fresh in the memory.

TWIN MESSIAHS

The Qumran sect expected two Messiahs; a priestly Messiah from the “House of Aaron” and a Davidic Messiah from the “House of Israel.” The Davidic Messiah would be a royal figure, who would rule the secular administration of his kingdom in tandem with the religious instruction of the Aaronic Messiah. The military prowess of the king allied to the spiritual power of the High Priest was the foundation of the new world order. The conventional expectation of Judaism was that a single Messiah would come as a Davidic king together with Elijah as a type of eschatological High Priest to anoint him. The essential difference is that the Qumranians ranked the priestly Messiah higher than his kingly counterpart. Traditions of dual leadership contained in the Hebrew Bible and in non-canonical texts may have influenced Qumran ideology,

“Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he shall grow up in his place and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And he shall be a priest by his throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both.”

Zechariah 6:12-13

From the pseudigraphical *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, believed to have been written about 150-100 B.C.E.,

My children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves about these two tribes because from them will arise the Savior from God. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as a high-priest and from Judah someone as king. He will save all the gentiles and the tribe of Israel.

Testament of Simeon 7.1-2

To me, God has given the kingship, and to him, the priesthood. And He has subjected the kingship to the priesthood. To me He gave earthly matters and to Levi heavenly matters. As heaven is superior to the earth, so is God's priesthood superior to the kingdom on earth.

Testament of Judah 21.2-4a

In the above verse, the priest outranked the king, which was the understanding at Qumran. The hierarchy between the two Messiahs was explained in *The Messianic Rule*:

The Priest shall enter at the head of all the congregation of Israel, then are all the

chiefs of the sons of Aaron, the priests, called to the assembly, men of renown. And they shall sit before him, each according to his rank.

Afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall enter. The chiefs of the tribes of Israel shall sit before him, each according to his rank, according to their position in the camps and during their marches; then all the heads of family of the congregation, together with the wise men of the congregation, shall sit before them, each according to his rank.

And when they gather for the community table, or to drink wine, and arrange the community table and mix the wine to drink, let no man stretch out his hand over the first-fruits of bread and wine before the Priest. For it is he who shall bless the first-fruits of bread and wine, and shall first stretch out his hand over the bread. And afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall stretch out his hands over the bread. And afterwards, all the congregation of the community shall bless each according to his rank.

1Q28a 2.11-21

A fragment known as the *Florilegium* or *Midrash of the Last Days*, which explains verses in 2 Samuel, states that the “Interpreter of the Law,” a title for the Teacher of Righteousness, would rule with the Davidic king.

The Lord declares to you that He will build you a House. I will raise up your seed after you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he shall be my son [2 Sam 8:11-14]. He is the branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law to rule in Zion at the end of time.
[4Q174,10-13]

‘The sons of Zadok’ was another self-designation for the Qumran membership. Zadok was a High Priest during the time of King David. The family line of Zadok occupied the High Priesthood from until the fall of Jerusalem and the exile into Babylon. The Qumran sect took the title “sons of Zadok” from the prophet Ezekiel, who wrote that the sons of Zadok were the most worthy priestly line and the most trusted by God. Zadok is the Hebrew word meaning “righteous.” The Teacher of Righteousness represented Zadok, and the Qumranians were the “sons of righteousness.” A King David was needed to rule with the High Priest Zadok. Everything in the sect’s messianic theology was predicated on the harmonious relationship between them.

THE TEACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

As the priestly Messiah, the Teacher of Righteousness was the principle agent of salvation:

The Teacher of Righteousness who expounded the law to his council and to all who freely pledged themselves to join the elect of God to keep the Law in the Council of the Community, who shall be saved on the Day of Judgment.
1Q14, 4Q168

But the righteous shall live by his faith...the men of truth who keep the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.
IQpHab, VIII, 1

He may have been viewed in messianic terms by his devotees, but in that respect, the Teacher of Righteousness was not unique at this time in history. Popular movements of social unrest often broke out in first-century Palestine, with the leader proclaimed king or Messiah by his followers. What connects the Teacher of Righteousness with Jesus and John the Baptist, and separates them all from other messianic figures of the period, is that their disciples left behind a body of religiously inspired literature.

Even for conservative scholars, the probability that John the Baptist had an association with Qumran is high, if only because he reportedly baptized in close proximity. Jesus had a potential connection to Qumran, through his links with John. It is legitimate, therefore, to question whether one of them might have been the Teacher of Righteousness.

A great deal of confusion exists about exactly who wrote which scroll, but there is general agreement that the Teacher of Righteousness was responsible for some of them, particularly the *Hymns Scroll*, a collection of personal prayers and reflections, similar to the Biblical Psalms. They are not liturgical works intended for use in public worship, but resemble entries in a diary that chronicle the spiritual highs and lows of a deeply religious man. Some give thanks and praise to God for salvation and the gift of knowledge, but other express incredible bitterness and despair over perceived abandonment and betrayal. Fortunately, several details from the author's personal life are revealed, and they provide useful clues to track his identity. Comparing this information with what is known about John the Baptist is enlightening, because the data suggests both men lived the same life. The monikers 'John the Baptist' and 'Teacher of Righteousness' appear to have been aliases for the same man. [see Table 7.2]

As already discussed, Essenes were known to adopt children considered suitably qualified, and to raise them within the confines of the group. Graves of women and children that were excavated in the burial grounds near Qumran, so far unexplained by historians, prove that it was not a strictly all-male commune, and suggest that part of the compound housed families and/or functioned as an orphanage. Being of priestly descent, John the Baptist was precisely the sort of material the Essenes were looking for. Luke wrote that he was raised "in the wilderness," which is a phrase used repeatedly in the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the sect's location.

Qumranians referred to themselves as 'the poor,' but the Teacher of Righteousness made a separate distinction for the sect's orphan population, "the fatherless," which hints that he was among their number:

Blessed are thou O Lord, for thou hast not abandoned the fatherless or despised the poor.¹⁷

Poignantly, he describes the circumstances of his childhood,

For thou hast known me from the time of my father, And hast chosen me from the womb. From the belly of my mother. Thou hast dealt kindly with me... Thy grace was with me in the lap of her who reared me, And from my youth Thou hast illumined me With the wisdom of Thy judgment... Until I am old Thou wilt care for me; For my father knew me not, And my mother abandoned me to Thee. And as a foster father bearing a child in his lap So carest Thou for all Thy creatures.¹⁸

His father never knew him. His mother abandoned him. Plainly, the Teacher of

Righteousness was orphaned and raised by the Essenes of the Qumran community.

In the Mandaean literature, the description of John the Baptist's early life matches that of the Teacher of Righteousness. The infant John is taken to a mythical place called Mount Paruan, "where those being breast fed and small children are nourished with holy water." Similar to Luke's "wilderness," Mount Paruan was an allegorical reference to Qumran. The Teacher of Righteousness received his education at Qumran, "from my youth Thou hast illumined me with the wisdom of Thy judgment." At Mount Paruan, the Mandaean John the Baptist stated that "I learned all my wisdom and I learned all my speech in its entirety," before he was taken to Jerusalem, and Luke described that John "grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel." John describes his time at Mount Paruan:

Until I was 22. There I learned all my wisdom and I learned all my speech in its entirety. They clothed me with clothes of radiance and covered with veils of cloud; they wrapped a waistband around me, a waistband of water that shone and was radiant beyond measure. They placed me in a cloud, a cloud of radiance, and in the seventh hour one Sunday they took me to the place Jerusalem.

Then a voice sounded in Judea, a shout announced in Jerusalem. They shouted, Which woman had a son, that was seized and taken from her? What woman took a vow for him and then took no further interest in him? What woman had a son that was seized and taken away? She should come and seek her son.¹⁹

When John reached the age of maturity, he was fitted with the priestly vestments and taken to Jerusalem. Sons of priests could be ordained by the Sanhedrin from twenty years of age, but only after establishing his legitimacy of descent. The sense of the Mandaean verses is that there was a problem with John's pedigree. The Jerusalem authorities wanted to know about his mother, and the circumstances of his abandonment -- "what woman took a vow for him and then took no further interest in him? What woman had a son that was seized and taken away?" No doubt this was a reference to the scandalous events of the past. John was given away by his mother, just as the infant Teacher of Righteousness was given to the Qumran sect, "And my mother abandoned me to Thee."

Initially, John's public ministry was enormously successful. The gospels recount that "all the people" of Judea and Jerusalem were baptized by him; Herod Antipas protected John;²⁰ and the masses wondered if he were the Christ. Yet somehow it all went wrong. The New Testament claims that John was arrested because he condemned Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias, who was still married to Herod's brother Philip. Josephus wrote, not necessarily in contradiction to the gospels, that Herod killed John because he feared his influence over the people would lead to open rebellion:

Now when many others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late.²¹

John was brought in chains to the fortress at Machaerus, in southern Perea, five miles east of the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, and executed there.

The life of the Teacher of Righteousness followed a similar pattern. A charismatic public speaker, he was adored by the multitudes. Then suddenly, disaster befell him. He was arrested, put in chains, and died while in prison. Prior to his imprisonment, the Teacher regularly heaped praise on God for the gift of inspired speech that allowed him to win the people and confound the sinners. From the his own words:

I give Thee thanks because of the spirits which Thou hast given to me! I will bring forth a reply of the tongue to recount Thy righteous deeds.²²

Blessed art Thou, O my Lord, who hast given to thy servant the knowledge of wisdom that he may comprehend Thy wonders, and recount Thy abundant grace!...Thou hast set hymns of praise within the mouth of Thy servant, and hast established for me a response of the tongue.²³

Evidently, his disciples visited him in prison, and brought writing materials with them. And the Teacher dictated several prayers that revealed his sense of agony and depression. His once wondrous powers of persuasion had deserted him,

As for me, I am dumb...my arm is torn from its shoulder and my foot has sunk into the mire. My eyes are closed by the spectacle of evil, and my ears by the crying of blood.²⁴

The tongue has gone back which Thou didst make marvelously mighty within my mouth; it can no longer give voice. I have no word for my disciples to revive the spirit of those who stumble and to speak words of support to the weary....the throes of death encompass me.²⁵

Incarceration had left him tormented, weak and sick.

My arm is torn from its socket. And I can lift my hand no more. My foot is held by fetters And my knees slide like water. I can no longer walk. I cannot step forward lightly. For my legs and arms are bound by shackles. Which cause me to stumble.²⁶

I am forsaken in my sorrow...My heart laments within me As in those who go down to Hell. My spirit is imprisoned with the dead. For my life has reached the Pit. My soul languishes within me day and night without rest.²⁷

Truly I am bound with untearable ropes and with unbreakable chains, A thick wall fences me in, iron bars and gates of bronze; my prison is counted with the Abyss as being without any escape...The torrents of Belial (Satan) have encompassed my soul leaving me without deliverance.²⁸

His formerly absolute conviction gave way to serious misgivings,

For my salvation is far from me. And my life is apart from me.²⁹

In the gospels, John the Baptist expressed doubts while in prison. The Christian interpretation that John originally believed in Jesus, but his faith wavered because he was, after all, only human, is not supported by the evidence of the texts. If John had understood Jesus as his savior, then he, and not Peter, would have been the leading disciple. Any reservations John experienced were concerned with his own position in the

scheme of things. Chained in irons, with no hope of liberation, he questioned his infallibility. He wondered if he had lost his privileged connection to God. It must have felt so when he considered his pathetic situation and heard the stories about Jesus.

As the Teacher of Righteousness/John the Baptist wallowed in despair and self pity, there is no hint or admission in his writings that *he* might be the one responsible for his plight.

The popular image of John the Baptist as a cave-dwelling, fire and brimstone preacher does not gel with the notion of him as a devotional poet and man of letters. Yet during his lifetime, John earned a reputation for the potency of his prayers, so much so, that Jesus' own disciples preferred them.

One of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."

Luke 11:1-3

Millions of Christians take for granted that the Lord's Prayer was Jesus' unique instruction of how his followers should pray. Not so. The creator of history's most famous communication with God was John the Baptist. He was also the author or main contributor of several texts at Qumran, especially those pertaining to the rules and regulations of the community, *The Temple Scroll*, *The Messianic Rule*, and *The Community Rule*. No precedent exists in any ancient Jewish writings for this type of instructional literature. Similar rule books, however, such as the *Didache*, the *Didascalía*, and *The Apostolic Constitution* were widely used by early Christians, which is further evidence that Qumran/Baptist traditions were incorporated into the Christian movement.

THE WICKED PRIEST

It was crucial to the Qumran sect that details of its internal affairs were never revealed to outsiders. The main protagonists in the scrolls are given titles or nicknames, and are never directly identified. If the Teacher of Righteousness was John the Baptist, then logically Jesus was his nemesis, the Wicked Priest.

Table 7.2 IDENTITY OF THE TEACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Teacher of Righteousness	John the Baptist
Location	
Qumran desert settlement in Judea. Northwest shore of the Dead Sea.	River Jordan area, Judean desert. Northern shore of the Dead Sea.
Vocation	
Leader of a religious community, who practiced ritual baptism and strict discipline.	Lived as an ascetic preacher. Maintained own group of disciples who also baptized.
Message	
"The thickets of the forest will be cut with an axe and Lebanon by a majestic one will fall. And there shall come forth a stump of Jesse."	"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight....even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees." Luke 3:4-9

4Q285,fr 7	
Composed Prayers	
The Thanksgiving Hymns. He was praying in a certain place, Collection of Qumran community prayers authored by the Teacher of Righteousness. 1QH, 1Q36, 4Q427-3	and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." Luke 11:1
Childhood Imprisonment	
Until I am old Thou will care for me; for my father knew me not and my mother abandoned me to Thee. Hymn 18, XVII, 35	The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation. Luke 1:80
My foot is held by fetters and my knees slide like water; I can no longer walk. I cannot step forward lightly; my legs and arms are bound by shackle. Hymn 18, XVI, 35	But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him... and for all the evil things that Herod had done... that he shut up John in prison. Luke 3:19
Despair/ Self Doubt	
My couch utters a lamentation And my pallet the sound of a complaint. My eyes are like the fire in the furnace. And my tears grow dim with waiting. For my salvation is far from me. And my life is apart from me. Hymn 18,XVII, 1-5	And John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Luke 7:18-19

Public-enemy number one at Qumran went by several names, "Liar," "Man of a Lie," "Scoffer," "Spouter of Lies," and similar pejoratives. These different titles mean essentially the same thing, so belong to the same man, and not to multiple personalities -- as a prosecutor might describe an individual accused of stealing as a "robber," "thief," and "burglar." The Qumran sect did not split into several competing groups, but into a distinct polarity caused by two radically opposed factions.

Prior to his defection, the Wicked Priest was a leading member of the inner circle and a respected confidante of the Teacher of Righteousness. When he dissented, a number of others supported him, and this developed into open rebellion. There is no way to gauge what percentage of the community mutinied, but it must have been a minority because it led to the banishment of both the Wicked Priest and his followers.

Though he broke some of the sect's rules and encouraged others to do the same, the level of hostility toward the Wicked Priest, consistently maintained throughout the scrolls, could not have derived simply from a difference of opinion regarding the Law. He was accused of plotting to murder the Teacher of Righteousness and destroy the Qumran society. The Wicked Priest's own demise was seen as divine retribution. For his evil-doing, God condemned him to be arrested by the authorities and sentenced to death:

Because of the blood of men and violence done to the land, to the city, and to all its inhabitants. Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest whom God delivered into the hands of his enemies because of the iniquity committed against the Teacher of Righteousness and the men of his Council, that he might be humbled by means of a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul, because he had done wickedly to His elect.³⁰

...The Wicked Priest, inasmuch as he shall be paid the reward which he himself tendered to the Poor... As he himself plotted the destruction of the Poor, so will God condemn him to destruction³¹

On what grounds did the Qumran sect believe that the Wicked Priest planned to kill the Teacher of Righteousness? The scrolls are hazy on this point. Paranoia permeates the list of indictments against him, but the principal motive seems to have been the pursuit of wealth, "he betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches." He was accused of stealing from the membership: "he robbed the Poor of their possessions." He was also charged with stealing from his own followers as well as the general population: "he robbed and amassed the riches of men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself."

Luke mentioned that among Jesus' followers was a certain "Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward," who was one of a number of women who "provided for them out of their means."³² In other words, several well-connected women with close ties to Herod Antipas bankrolled Jesus' campaign. The timing of John's arrest by Herod added fuel to suspicions of Jesus. John's disciples had already noticed that John's support base had weakened following the split with Jesus.

And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him."
John 3:24-26

When Herod seized the moment to move against John, it appeared to Qumranians that Jesus had collaborated with Herod in return for payment. The historicity of the gospel version of John's death is questionable, but if one accepts it, then John's decapitation was the result of a conspiracy by women close to Herod. The story probably originated from Baptist sources that disparaged Jesus' female followers. Herod's "step-daughter" Salome's lascivious dancing so mesmerized him that he offered her "half his kingdom."³³ Salome was the name of one of Jesus' female followers who brought spices to his tomb.³³ Strangely, the gospel writers did not explain who she was.

In *The Habakkuk Commentary*, the Wicked Priest went to Jerusalem and "committed abominable deeds and defiled the Temple of God," the same charge leveled by Pharisees after Jesus performed healings on Temple grounds. Jesus' unorthodox attitude toward the Law is well documented, as was his denunciation by the authorities in Jerusalem. And as the Wicked Priest was "brought to judgment...in the midst of them," so Jesus was dragged in front of the Sanhedrin. As God condemned the Wicked Priest to "destruction," so Jesus was found guilty and sent to Pilate with a recommendation for the death sentence.

A gospel slur against Jesus was repeated in *The Habakkuk Commentary*: "He walked in the ways of drunkenness that he might quench his thirst." Jesus, like the Wicked Priest, was a drunk.

Modern scholars, who think that Jonathan Maccabeus was the Wicked Priest, must admit that we have far more information on Jesus than Jonathan Maccabeus. And if the Wicked Priest of the Dead Sea Scrolls resembles Jesus of the New Testament, then that is reason enough to admit the strong possibility that they are the same person.

FROM JOHN TO JESUS

Six fragments of the same manuscript were found at Qumran, and despite some mutilation, they were successfully reassembled and translated. Collectively known as the MMT (Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah) or 'Some Observances of the Law,' they consist of three distinct parts -- a sectarian calendar, a list of special rules regarding separation, animal sacrifice, and sexual conduct, and a letter or notification addressed to an unnamed individual.

This letter is exceptional. The content and tone of the author fit perfectly with what one would expect from the Teacher of Righteousness. And most scholars now agree that the MMT letter *was* written by the Teacher of Righteousness, and addressed to the Wicked Priest as plea for him to return to the fold.

And you know that we have separated from the mass of the people and from mingling with them in these matters and from being in contact with them in these matters. And you know that no treachery or lie or evil is found in our hands...And furthermore we have written to you that you should understand the Book of Moses and the Book of the Prophets and David and all the events of every age. And furthermore it is written that you will depart from the way and that evil will befall you.

And we recognize that some of the blessings and curses which are written in the Book of Moses have come. And this is at the end of days when they will come back to Israel forever...remember the kings of Israel and understand their works that each of them who feared Torah was saved from troubles, and to those who were seekers of the Law, their iniquities were pardoned.

Remember David, that he was a man of piety, and that he was also saved from many troubles and pardoned.

We have also written to you concerning some of the observances of the Law, which we think are beneficial to you and your people. For we have noticed that prudence and knowledge of the Law are with you. Understand these matters and ask Him to straighten your counsel and put you far away from thoughts of evil and the counsel of Belial. Consequently you will rejoice at the end of a time when you discover that some of our sayings are true. And it will be reckoned for you as righteousness when you perform what is right and good before Him, for your own good and for that of Israel.

The author appealed to Moses, the Law, and the Prophets because this was his area of acknowledged expertise, and he expected the Wicked Priest to appreciate these credentials. In the gospels, Jesus stated that John "was more than a prophet" because past prophets could only predict the Messiah; John's privilege was to work with him directly. He insisted that "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John,"³⁴ which implied that the advent of John was the signal that the Mosaic Law had run its course. The cultic ritualism associated with Temple-based religion had overstayed its welcome. It was only a preliminary or temporary phase in Jewish history, "think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them." The Law had served its purpose, but it was time to move to the next level. Those who accused Jesus of destroying the religion of Moses were correct in the sense that the kingdom of God rendered the Law meaningless.

These opinions were not shared by the Teacher of Righteousness. In the MMT letter, he petitioned the Wicked Priest to “remember the kings of Israel,” and “remember King David.” He understood the Wicked Priest/Jesus as the kingly Messiah. In explaining his status, Jesus often alluded to David, and on eight separate occasions Matthew put the phrase “Son of David” into the mouth of onlookers. As Jesus’ teaching revolved around the “kingdom of God,” he believed himself to be the king. But the MMT letter was intended to prod the Wicked Priest into accepting that his status as secular Messiah required him to follow the priestly Messiah in spiritual matters. Jesus did not regard his relationship with John in the same light. Besides, his own status was far superior to that of David,

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet'? If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?" Matt 22:41-46

Davidic ancestry could not be proven. Any leader who was victorious in battle would be considered Davidic. And if the task of the Davidic Messiah was to lead the fight against the Goliath of Rome, then he needed a battle plan that anticipated a military response.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.
Matt 10:34, Luke 12:51

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!
Luke 12:49

Men think, perhaps, that it is peace which I have come to cast upon the world. They do not know that it is dissension which I have come to cast upon the earth: fire, sword, and war.
Thomas 16

The MMT made plain to the Wicked Priest that by listening to “the counsel of Belial” (the name the sect used for Satan), he had crossed over to the side of darkness. That Jesus was in league with Satan was a familiar charge. But there was still hope for him because previous lapsed kings had been “pardoned” once they “feared Torah.” Should he continue his wayward path, the Wicked Priest would suffer the consequences: “And furthermore it is written that you will depart from the way and that evil will befall you.” In a clear reference to the MMT letter, the *Commentary on Psalms* accused the Wicked Priest that “he watched the Teacher of Righteousness that he might put him to death because of the ordinance and law which he sent to him.”³⁵

Details of the Teacher of Righteousness’ death were not elaborated, but his impending demise was a subject in the *Hymns Scroll* and elsewhere. Blaming his fate on the “seekers of smooth things,” “traitors,” and “interpreters of error,” he directed numerous tirades against the Wicked Priest and his followers. He knew the meaning of Jesus’ words, “he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Teachers of lies have smoothed Thy people with words and false prophets have

led them astray; they perish without understanding for their works are in folly. I am despised by them and they have no esteem for me.³⁶

A common accusation against the Teacher’s enemies was that they justified a comfortable lifestyle by deliberately misinterpreting the Law:

And they, teachers of lies and seers of falsehood, have schemed against me a devilish scheme, to exchange the Law engraved on my heart by Thee for the smooth things which they speak to Thy people. And they withhold from the thirsty the drink of Knowledge, and assuage their thirst with vinegar, that they may gaze on their straying, on their folly concerning their feast-days.³⁷

The charge of loose living was repeated by John the Baptist’s followers:

And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink."
Luke 5:33

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"
Matt 9:14, Mark 2:18

Obviously, the “seekers of smooth things” were Jesus and his disciples. They had hatched a diabolic scheme to destroy John the Baptist and pervert the Law of God, by appealing to people’s baser nature.

Supporting evidence in the Mandaean texts supports the view that the ‘Wicked Priest’ was a pejorative title given to Jesus by followers of John the Baptist. There are clear parallels between the figures of Yeshua Messiah and the Wicked Priest [see Table 7.3]. Mandaean texts labeled Jesus the ‘Roman Christ’ because he betrayed secret doctrines to Gentiles that he had learned from John. In the same vein, the Dead Sea Scrolls describe how the Wicked Priest and his followers “violated the Precept” and “transgressed the Covenant” because they chose “the fair neck” -- an obvious reference to pale-skinned Romans. Yeshua and the Wicked Priest were both accused of deceit, blaspheming against the Sabbath, committing atrocities in Jerusalem, and of stealing money to buy popular support.

Table 7.3 CHARACTERIZATIONS OF JESUS

Wicked Priest	Mandaean Yeshu	New Testament
This was the time when the Scoffer arose who shed over Israel the water of lies. 4Q265, I, 15	And after John the world will continue in lies and messiah...will divide the peoples and the twelve deceivers roam the world. Right Ginza 2:154	The Pharisees then said to him, "You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true." John 8:13
He appeared before them to confuse them, and to cause them to stumble on the Day of Fasting, their Sabbath of repose. 1QHab 11:5-6	The Sabbath, which Moses made binding, hast thou relaxed in Jerusalem. Book of John 1: 30	And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath." Mark 2:27

He walked in the ways of drunkenness that he might quench his thirst. 1QpHab 9:14		The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard' Matt 11:19
The city is Jerusalem where the wicked priest committed abominable acts and defiled the Temple of God. 1QpHab12:5	He behaves with humility and goes to Jerusalem. He captures some among the Jews with sorcery and deceit, showing them miracles and magical apparitions. Right Ginza 1:149	And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did.... they were indignant. Matt 21:14-15
He robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence...and he took the wealth of the peoples. 1QpHab 8:11-12	When I showed you bolts and keys to enter heaven, I beguiled you....I gave you gold and silver so that you would keep me company. Left Ginza 1:4	And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. Mark 12:41

HERODIANS

Because some of his sayings correspond with known Essene teachings, Jesus is often linked with the Essenes. Since the New Testament never used the word "Essene," it is assumed that many early Christians must have been Essenes. The two other main religious factions of that time -- Sadducees and Pharisees -- were depicted negatively in the gospels because they opposed Jesus. However, Jesus' attitude to the Law contradicted mainstream Essene philosophy, especially in regard to Sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions. So if Jesus was an Essene, then he was a rebel Essene. In the New Testament, references are made to a certain group of Jews, known collectively as "Herodians:"

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.
Mark 3:16

And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax." And they brought him a coin.
Matt 22:16-19

The identity of the Herodians, who are not mentioned by Josephus or any other Jewish

writer of this period, is a mystery. Fourth-century Christian writers, such as Jerome and Epiphanius, described them as Jews who believed that Herod the Great was the Messiah. Church fathers felt it was helpful to their cause to show that not all Jews believed the Messiah would defeat the Romans in battle. Herod the Great was not a popular ruler by any stretch of the imagination. Loathed and feared by the population for his brutality, not only was he considered a Roman puppet, he was without any Jewish blood. No Jew would ever have believed that Herod was the Jewish Messiah.

Most modern commentators assume Herodians were simply people who supported the Herodian dynasty, and who benefited from Herod's policy of appeasement toward Rome. During Jesus' time, their number would have included advisors and important staff of Herod Antipas. Therefore, if Herodians plotted to "destroy" Jesus, then it was either on the orders of, or to gain the favor of, Herod Antipas. But according to Mark and Matthew, Antipas had not even heard of Jesus at this time. When informed of Jesus' miracles, he was quoted as saying that they were the work of John the Baptist, "raised from the dead."

Luke did not mention Herodians by name, but he did record that the wife of Herod's steward was one of Jesus' financial backers. Logically, if Luke knew Herodians from Mark, then he did not understand them as members of Herod's personal staff.

Palestinian Pharisees loathed the Herodian dynasty, so their close association with the Pharisees suggests that Herodians were primarily a religious group. The name 'Herodian,' though obviously linked to Herod, was in all likelihood an uncomplimentary nickname used by detractors. As the New Testament is the only source for the word "Herodian," it was most probably coined by Jewish Christians.

By tradition, the Essenes were known as the privileged party of Herod the Great. Considering the mixed feelings many had toward Herod the Great and his dynasty, "Herodian" would have made a suitable title to pour scorn on those Jews whom Herod favored -- the Essenes. More specifically, the faction of Menahem that was responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Mark's statement that Pharisees, who witnessed Jesus' Sabbath transgressions, "held counsel" with Herodians to plot his downfall, makes sense because the *Damascus Document* explains that the Qumran leadership was even stricter than the Law of Moses on Sabbath observances.³⁸ In conversation with his disciples, Jesus provides a further clue as to the identity of the Herodians:

Now they had forgotten to bring bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, "Take heed; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Mark 8:14-15

The miracles of feeding the crowds with loaves and fishes showed that actual "bread" was nothing to worry about. Disciples must guard themselves against the symbolic bread or "leaven" of the Pharisees and of Herod. Pharisees, who included many priests in their number, had earlier rebuked Jesus for walking through a grain field on the Sabbath. Jesus replied by asking them to recall how David had once eaten the bread of the presence, which only priests were permitted to eat, and had shared it with his companions. David was not tied to the minutiae of the Law, and neither was Jesus. The Pharisees perverted Jewish tradition in order to undermine Jesus' credibility. This was the "bread" of the Pharisees.

Similarly, the fundamentalist Essenes emphasized elaborate rituals with ceremonial bread offerings³⁹ that elevated the priestly faction. The Herodian leadership of the Qumran sect, together with the Pharisees, was bent on Jesus' ruin. Their preoccupation with pious ritual masked their true intent.

THE DAMASCUS DOCUMENT

In the late nineteenth century, a large collection of old manuscripts stored in a room adjoining a synagogue in Old Cairo was found by European scholars. Included were two large medieval fragments of the same work, which came to be known as the *Damascus Document* because of the numerous references to Damascus it contains. When the *Damascus Document* was first published in 1910, scholars were in the dark as to its origins. Light eventually came when several smaller fragments of the same scroll were discovered at Qumran, dated approximately one thousand years earlier.

The "New Covenant" that the text describes was made "in the land of Damascus" -- the location of the Qumran community, and not the Gentile city in Syria. The reference to Damascus was taken from 1 Kings 19:15, where God gave Elijah the order to go to Damascus to anoint the kings of Syria and Israel:

And the Lord said to him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel.

The significance of this event was that "Israel" was a name used throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the sect's membership. They represented the 'true' Israel, from whose ranks messianic salvation would come to the rest of Israel. Scripture prophesied that Elijah would return to anoint the king. Naturally, this would take place at 'Damascus.'

The *Damascus Document* consists of two parts, an exhortation to the membership giving them an explanation of history, and a section comprised of community laws and statutes. The latter part contains no references to the Teacher of Righteousness or to the dispute that divided the sect; therefore it was most probably composed before the exhortation, in which the Teacher and the mutiny against him are referred to in the past tense.

According to the historical overview, the sect began 390 years after the victory of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587/6 B.C.E. This would be 196/7 B.C.E., about ninety years before the date of any coins found at Qumran, and 130 years before the Romans came to Palestine. How can this date be explained? Providential time periods were never meant as literal periods of chronological history. In the scriptures, meanings were associated with certain time periods that transcended historical accuracy to reveal the hand of God. Failure to appreciate this led theologians to calculate that the world was created six thousand chronological years ago, the time frame in literal biblical years. The *Damascus Document* specified 390 because that was the number of years decreed for the punishment of Israel by Ezekiel during the captivity in Babylon.⁴⁰ The beginning of the priestly community at Qumran signaled the end of this 390 year punishment, "He visited them, and He caused a plant root to spring from Israel and Aaron to inherit His land and to prosper on the good things of His earth."

The *Damascus Document* states that the sect struggled for twenty years, "like blind men groping for the way, before He raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness." There are

good reasons to accept that ‘twenty years’ was chronological time, (1) there are no prophetic scriptures signifying providential time periods of twenty years, (2) messianic sects do not maintain their high level of expectation over generations, (3) a period of twenty years was measurable by the sect’s own calendar, but there were no archives nor any technology available to them to calculate accurate dates from the distant past, such as the year of exile into Babylon, so it was identified symbolically, and (4) if the period of busy occupancy at Qumran started around 6 C.E. it would mean John the Baptist became the leader around 26 C.E, which fits within the timetable of his public ministry.

The exhortation was a diatribe against those who had separated from the sect. In the wake of the Teacher of Righteousness’ passing, the speaker gives hope and reassurance to the remnant, and at the same time makes veiled threats to those who might stray in the future. The general theme was consistent with other scrolls, but the Wicked Priest is known by the name “Scoffer” and “Liar.” He betrayed the Teacher of Righteousness, broke the sacred rules of the Covenant, and persuaded others to do the same. As for the loyal Qumranians,

They shall take care to act according to the exact interpretation of the Law during the age of wickedness. They shall separate from the sons of the Pit, and shall keep away from the unclean riches of wickedness acquired by vow or anathema or from the Temple treasure; they shall not rob the poor of His people, to make of widows their prey and of the fatherless their victim. They shall distinguish between clean and unclean, and shall proclaim the difference between holy and profane. They shall keep the Sabbath day according to its exact interpretation, and the feasts and the Day of Fasting according to the finding of the members of the New Covenant in the land of Damascus. They shall set aside the holy things according to the exact teaching concerning them.⁴¹

This was a litany of familiar accusations made against Jesus/Wicked Priest. He did not keep the Sabbath, his disciples did not keep the fast days of John the Baptist’s disciples, he preached against dietary restrictions, and so on. Also included was the favorite theme that he was motivated by love of money. The tirade continued,

They are all of them rebels, for they have not turned from the ways of traitors but have wallowed in the ways of whoredom and wicked wealth.⁴²

The expression “wallowed in the ways of whoredom” translates into a charge that Jesus’ female followers included prostitutes. This accusation might have been made with Mary Magdalene in mind, and if so, may be the source of the later Church claim that she was a reformed prostitute.

The membership was encouraged to endure, keep the Teacher’s commandments, and salvation would eventually come. The orator appealed to the standard biblical number of forty, a time period used by scribes to signify purification for a new beginning; forty days flood, forty days fast, forty years in the desert, and so forth. A similar meaning was behind the Roman practice of quarantine, the root of which means ‘forty’.

From the day of the gathering in of the Teacher of Righteousness until the end of all men of war who deserted to the Liar there shall pass about forty years.⁴³

Forty years after John’s death, Jesus would have no more followers. This time period must pass before the world could be purified of them. Curiously, the destruction of the

Jerusalem Temple happened approximately forty years after John's death, and signaled the end of Jewish Christianity. The Middle East has remained in sympathy an overwhelmingly anti-Christian zone ever since.

The existence of a medieval script of the *Damascus Document* proves that the caves near the Dead Sea were not the sole repositories of Qumran literature. But more importantly, it proves that the sect's traditions were kept alive in the region for more than a thousand years, and did not end after the Roman wars.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND QUMRAN

Similarities of language, content, and style are noticeable in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament. Several examples follow that highlight Jesus' links with the Qumran sect:

1) Of all the self-appellations of the Qumran sect, the most popular was the "sons of light." This phrase betrays Babylonian influences, and does not occur elsewhere in any other ancient Jewish literature. In fact, the only other place it can be found is the Gospel of Luke, in the closing line of the *Parable of the Unjust Steward*.

The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the **sons of light**.

Luke 16:8

The meaning of this parable has always been subject to debate. A corrupt manager was fired by his employer when his malfeasance was discovered. Worried about his future, he called his master's debtors one by one, and reduced their bills to gain their goodwill. Later, when the employer heard of the steward's strategy, he praised him for it. The moral of the story was to "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations."⁴⁴ Or, use money in this world to buy friends in the next.

Qumranians followed typical Essene economic practices, so individual wealth was given to the group treasury in a religious communist system. Jesus' followers kept the same tradition.

"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Matt 19:21

Contrary to the claims of most commentators, this instruction was not a call to the monastic life, nor was it an affirmation of the intrinsic holiness of poverty, nor even a demand for the redistribution of wealth. The 'poor' or *Ebion* was another title used in the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the membership, but in the context that Jesus used the term a 'poor' was anyone who followed him. And as at Qumran, new recruits were expected to contribute everything to the group's coffers. In the future, the 'poor' would be world leaders; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus knew the dangers of this kind of life. His followers, the new "sons of light" were often naïve and unsophisticated. As they did not take financial responsibility, they struggled to make an impact on the world outside, where knowledge of the power of

money and how to use it were essential to effect change. The corrupt steward made friends because he knew how to manipulate money to his advantage. His employer could appreciate that. Jesus bemoaned his followers' lack of wherewithal, so he sent them into the world with the instruction to be "wise as serpents."

2) John the Baptist's disciples were sent to question Jesus, "are you the one to come, or should we wait for another?"

In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

Luke 7:21-22

The *Resurrection fragment* (4Q521) is a Qumran text that describes the characteristics of the eschatological era. The Messiah "liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind...He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor." Jesus' response to John's question could have been 'Yes, I am the one,' but to convey his disappointment and frustration, he cited these qualifications because they were John's own criteria for recognizing the Messiah.

3) Despite the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy, the ultimate showdown between the forces of light and darkness would be victorious for the Qumranians, because myriads of angelic warriors fought with them.

Thou will muster the hosts of Thine elect, in their Thousands and Myriads, with Thy Holy Ones and with all Thine Angels, that they may be mighty in battle and smite the rebels of the earth by Thy great judgments, and that they may triumph together with the elect of heaven.

1QM, XII, 5

Valiant warriors of the angelic host are among our numbered men, and the Hero of war is with our congregation; the host of His spirits is with our foot soldiers and horsemen.

1QM, XII, 9

When soldiers arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter responded by striking the High Priest's slave. Jesus told Peter to put his sword away, and admonished him in a manner directly drawn from Qumranian sources:

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

Matt 26:53

By this time, the cause was irretrievably lost, and Jesus was resigned to his fate. It had not always been that way. When he first appeared speaking publicly, his message was full of hope for a great future -- the kingdom of God. The notion that Jesus included a military option in his thinking is usually dismissed, but unless he assumed the Romans would simply hand over Judea to him, armed conflict was unavoidable. The public campaigns of both John the Baptist and Jesus were essentially recruitment drives, principally targeted at young males.

The War Scroll described the final conflict as a war fought against Satan and his angels, and when the victory was won, all the nations would be liberated, and the kingly Messiah will rule the world. This theme was echoed in Jesus' Last Judgment speech:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations... Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Matt 25:31-41

Angelic warriors were "clouds," presumably purified water that cleansed the world of its dirtiness;

Warriors of the angelic host, the host of His spirits... They are as clouds, as clouds of dew covering the earth, as a shower of rain shedding judgment on all that grows on the earth.

1QM, XII, 9

Jesus' enigmatic saying about the "clouds of heaven" has been misinterpreted to mean physical skies, when it was a figure of speech to signify a military campaign.

They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matt 24:30-31

Combat strategy was the responsibility of military leaders. Although he was not as prolific as the Teacher of Righteousness, the Davidic Messiah would have contributed to *The War Scroll*. Jesus was a student of military tactics,

Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

Luke 14:31

He knew the inevitability of armed confrontation,

Let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.

Luke 22:36

To explain the welter of inconsistencies, contradictions, and mysteries in the gospels is no easy task. But the Church simply drew from the text interpretative paradigms that do not derive from it. The same thing has happened to the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a result, the roots of Western civilization have stayed grounded in a confused hotchpotch of nonsensical myths and blinkered scholarship. The intensity of feeling evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls reflected their justifiable conviction that the destiny of the world was in their hands. Events at Qumran represented the crossroads of history. Critical mass was reached there, and the fall-out was phenomenal. It happened two thousand years ago, but the

results have reverberated down the ages, and impacted the destiny of untold millions.