

## “Messianic” Texts at Qumran

by Paul Sumner

One of the main values of the Dead Sea Scrolls is their pristine nature. They are a theological time capsule, sealed for nineteen centuries, untouched by later Jewish or Christian scribes.

In the Scrolls we are able to listen directly to the interpretations of Scripture by Jewish teachers who were active during the centuries immediately before and during the time of Jesus of Nazareth. This gives us an invaluable entry into the thought-world in which he and his disciples were teaching.

### Diversity in Judaism and Qumran Messianism

The era of the Qumran Community at the Dead Sea (approx. 150 BC/E–AD/CE 68) was one of theological diversity. There was no one “Judaism” which everyone uniformly practiced by all Jews or a singular Jewish creed they all affirmed. Instead, history shows there were “Judaisms” (plural) that ran a broad spectrum of beliefs, hopes, and Torah observation. The common view that Pharisaic Judaism—as later represented in the Talmud and “Orthodox Judaism”—was the norm for all Jews is historically inaccurate and wishful idealism.

This diversity of Jewish opinion about how to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures allows the teaching of Jesus and his followers to enter the arena of legitimate doctrinal debate within Israel.

Specialists on the Dead Sea Scrolls no longer believe all the scrolls originated from the Qumran Community. Based on epigraphical evidence, many of the documents were actually written prior to the founding of the village, and several manuscript fragments contain views differing from those in documents believed to be products of the Essenes who lived there.

This means that mixed ideas were coming into Qumran from around Israel. Many of them apparently came with members of the Jerusalem priesthood who went to the desert enclave to set up a “Community of the New Covenant.”

Concepts of the “Messiah” at Qumran are also mixed. There is no cohesive theme spread across the scrolls that can be neatly summarized into *The Qumran Doctrine of the Messiah*. But there are themes that are strikingly similar to many of those found in the New Testament.

### How Many Messiahs?

In documents from Qumran published so far, the term “messiah” (Hebrew, *mashiach*) refers to:

- an anointed one who lived at Qumran (probably the Righteous Teacher/Priest)
- a future anointed one from the priestly line of Aaron
- a future anointed one from the royal line of King David
- a heavenly or divine messiah

Some documents refer to more than one messiah. Two messiahs will share leadership over the nation as a King-and-Priest duo, parallel to the duo of Zerubbabel and Joshua described in Zechariah 3–4. (Although in Zech 6:12–13 and Psalm 110, the King-Priest office is held by one man, whose titles are *Tzemach*/the Branch, and *Adon*/Lord.)

In other documents, only one messiah is expected. Among his titles are Prince of the Congregation, Ruler, Elect One, Branch of David, Rod, and Scepter.

In the future, the Messiah–Prince of the Congregation will preside over a “pure Meal” of bread and wine with his people (Reading #3 below). One day God’s Messiah (or perhaps God himself) will raise the dead and announce Glad Tidings (#5). Messiah will atone for the sins of Israel (#14), and eventually will rule the whole earth (#4).

### Heavenly Messiah?

In one text, the Messiah is called “Son of God . . . Son of the Most High” (#4). This may be metaphorical or symbolic language, similar to calling David God’s son (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:26–27). Yet in other places the Messiah seems to have a supernatural birth (#13). In the Septuagint version of Psalm 110:3, the Jewish translators clearly believed in the preexistent, heavenly birth of God’s “Lord.”<sup>1</sup> This too may be symbolical, not literal.

Another text is believed by some modern translators to read “God **begets** the Messiah” (#3). In 11QMelchizedek, the mysterious king-priest of Shalem (who met Abraham, Gen 14) stands in for God in the last days and may also be called “the Messiah of the Spirit” (*mashiach ha’ruach*) and the “Messenger” (*malakh*, angel) of YHVH (#9). (See my article “[Melchizedek: Angel, Man, or Messiah?](#)”)

### Messianic Allusions in Hebrew Bible

The educated Qumran scribes interpreted several passages from the Hebrew Bible as prophecies of the future Messiah. These include: Genesis 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:18–19; Numbers 24:15–17; 2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 9:5–6; 11:1–4; 52:7; Jeremiah 23:5; Psalm 2:1; Daniel 7:13–14; 9:25.

### When Messiah Will Come

The Qumran caves held several copies of the biblical book of Daniel and the book of *Jubilees* from the Pseudepigrapha collection.<sup>2</sup> This signals a deep interest in the future

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 110:3 LXX/Septuagint: “With you is the preeminent dominion in the day of your power. **Among the splendor of the holy ones**, from the womb, **before the dawn, I have begotten you.**”

<sup>2</sup> Documents from the Pseudepigrapha are found in various editions: R. H. Charles, editor, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (vol. 2; Oxford: Clarendon Press, rpt. 1964); James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols., Garden City, N.Y.:

and in deciphering prophetic texts. *Jubilees* emphasizes that God does great things during a “jubilee” year—every 49 years (see 11QMelch, #15). By using these markers to predict historical events and by computing the time frame of the appearance of the coming “anointed one” in Daniel 9:24-25, the Qumran Essenes came to a significant conclusion. According to one Qumran specialist, they expected the Messiah to arrive sometime **between 3 BC and AD 2**.<sup>3</sup>

### Key Passages

Following is a list of several “messianic” passages. Their document names and scroll are shown.

- 1) Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH)
- 2) Rule of the Community (1QS)
- 3) The Messianic Rule (1QSa or 1Q28a)
- 4) Aramaic [or Daniel] Apocalypse (4Q246)
- 5) Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521)
- 6) 4QWar Scroll (4Q285)
- 7) Prayer of Enosh (4Q369)
- 8) Rule of the Blessings (1QSb or 1QS28b)
- 9) Isaiah Peshar (4Q161)
- 10) Messianic Florilegium (4Q174)
- 11) Messianic Anthology (4Q175)
- 12) Genesis Peshar (4Q252)
- 13) Elect of God (4Q534 or 4QMess ar)
- 14) Aaron Text (or Testament of Levi) (4Q541)
- 15) 11QMelchizedek (11Q13)
- 16) Damascus Document (CD; 4Q265-73; 5Q12; 6Q15)

---

Doubleday, 1983, 1985); H. F. D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Beckwith, “The Significance of the Calendar for Interpreting Essene Chronology and Eschatology,” *Revue de Qumran* 10 (no. 38, 1980): 179-80; and “Daniel & the Date of Messiah’s Coming,” *Revue de Qumran* 10 (no. 40, 1981): 523-25.

## Highlights of Passages

Ellipses points [. . .] indicate missing words in the original scroll documents. Words within brackets and Bible references in parentheses are supplied by modern editors. Abbreviations of English translations of each passage are in brackets.<sup>4</sup>

- 1) **Thanksgiving Hymns** – 1QH 11:7-10 [older Scrolls editions number this 3:7-10]  
[V5/259, GM/331, WAC/94]

She labors in her pains who bears a man.  
For amid the throes of Death  
**She shall bring forth a man-child,**  
and amid the pains of Hell  
there shall spring from her child-bearing crucible  
a **Marvelous Mighty Counselor** [Isaiah 9:5-6];  
and a **Man** shall be delivered from out of the throes.

- 2) **Rule of the Community** – 1QS 9:11  
[V5/100, GM/13-14, WAC/139]

They shall . . . be ruled by the primitive precepts in which the men of the Community were first instructed until there shall come **the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.**

- 3) **The Messianic Rule (of the Congregation)** – 1QSa (or 1Q28a) 2:11-12, 17, 21-22  
[V5/159-60, GM/127-28, WAC/147]

. . . **when God begets the Messiah.** . . . And [when] they shall gather for the common table, to eat and to drink new wine. . . Hereafter shall **the Messiah of Israel** extend his hand over the bread and all the congregation of the Community [shall utter a] blessing. . .

[Note: Because the first line of this fragment is damaged, some specialists read: “when God **leads** [not begets] the Messiah”; the difference in Hebrew is the last letter: יוליד *yolid* – begets; יוליך *yolikh* – leads.]

- 8) **Aramaic Apocalypse or Daniel Apocalypse** – 4Q246  
[V5/577, GM/138, WAC/269]

. . . he will be a great [king] over the [whole] earth . . . [all mankind] will serve [him].  
[The Holy One of the Great God] he shall be called. . . **Son of God he shall be called,** and **Son of the Most High he shall be surnamed.**

[Note: Some specialists (e.g., David Flusser) believe this passage refers to the Antichrist, who proclaims himself to be “son of God.” But the document’s

---

<sup>4</sup> English versions cited:

V5 – G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1997)

GM – F. García-Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Translation* (2d ed., 1996)

WAC – M. Wise, M. Abegg, E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (1996)

connections with Daniel 7:13-14 strongly suggest this is the Davidic Messiah, not his impostor nemesis.]

12) **Messianic Apocalypse (Resurrection Text)** – 4Q521

[V5/391-92, GM/394, WAC/421]

The heavens and the earth will obey His Messiah. . . .

The Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been . . .

For **He [God or Messiah] will heal the wounded,**

and **revive the dead and bring good news to the poor** (Isa 61:1).

10) **4QWar Scroll** – 4Q285 Frag 5, 3-4

[V5/189, GM/124, WAC/293]

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [. . .] the Branch of David and they will enter into judgment with [. . .] the Prince of the Congregation, **the Br[anch of David] will kill him.**

[Note: Some editors translate the last phrase as: “the Branch of David they will kill.” Hence some call this “The Pierced Messiah” passage. But the Hebrew verb *המיתו hamito*, does not mean “pierce” but “kill,” and most authorities believe the word order requires that the Branch of David (the Messiah) does the killing: in this case of the unrepentant wicked in the final judgment.]

11) **Prayer of Enosh** – 4Q369<sup>5</sup>

[V5/511, WAC-329]

You have made clear to him your good judgments . . . in eternal light.

And you made him a **First-born Son** to you . . .

like him for a **Prince and Ruler** in your earthly land.

. . . the crown of the heavens and the glory of the clouds [you] have set on him . . .

4) **Rule of the Blessings** – 1QSb (or 1Q28b) 4:24-26; 5:20-29

[V5/376, GM/433, WAC/149-50]

**You shall be like the Angel of the Presence** in the holy residence for the glory of the God of the Hosts . . . sharing the lot with the angels of the Presence and the Council of the Community.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Master shall bless **the Prince of the Congregation** . . . and shall renew for him the Covenant of the Community, that he establish the kingdom of His people for ever . . .

May the Lord raise you up to everlasting heights, and as a fortified tower upon a high wall!

[May you smite the peoples] with might of your hand and ravage the earth with your scepter; may you bring death to the ungodly with the breath of your lips!

<sup>5</sup> This translation of 4Q369 is by Craig Evans, “A Note on the ‘First-Born Son’ of 4Q369,” in the journal *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 2 (1995): 194. See also John J. Collins, *The Scepter & the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1995), 165.

[May He shed upon you the spirit of counsel] and everlasting might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of God; may righteousness be the girdle [of your loins] and may your reins be girdled [with faithfulness]!

For God has established you as **the Scepter**. The rulers . . . [and all the kings of the] nations shall serve you. He shall strength you with His holy Name and you shall be as a li[on]. . . .

- 5) **Isaiah Peshar** [commentary] – 4Q161 Frag 8, Col 3, 18-21  
[V5/467, GM-186, WAC-211]

The interpretation of the word [in Isaiah 11:1-5] concerns **the Shoot of David** which **will sprout in the final days**, since with the breath of his lips he will execute his enemies, and God will support him with the spirit of courage . . . . He will rule over all the peoples and Magog.

- 6) **Messianic Florilegium** – 4Q174, 11-13  
[V5/494, GM/136, WAC/227-28]

He is **the Branch of David** who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law [to rule] in Zion [at the end] of time. As it is written, I will raise up the tent of David that is fallen [Amos 9:11]. That is to say, **the Fallen Tent of David** is he who shall arise to save Israel.

- 7) **Messianic Anthology** – 4Q175  
[V5/495-96, GM/137-38, WAC/230]

[This text interprets Deut 18:18-19, Num 24:15-17, and Deut 33:8-11 as prophetic of three coming “messianic” leaders: prophet, king, priest]

[Deut 18:18] – “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren. I will put my words in his mouth and he shall tell them all that I command him.”

[Num 24:17] – “A Star shall come out of Jacob and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.”

[Note: the Star is the Teacher/Prophet; the Scepter is the King Messiah.]

- 9) **Genesis Peshar** [commentary] – 4Q252 5:1-4  
[V5/462-63, GM/215, WAC/277]

[On Genesis 49:10]

A sovereign shall not be removed from the tribe of Judah.

While Israel has the dominion, there will not lack someone who sits on the throne of David.

For the staff is the covenant of royalty, the thousands of Israel are the feet . . .

Until **the Messiah of Righteousness** comes, **the Branch of David**.

For to him and to his descendants has been given the covenant of royalty over his people for all everlasting generations. . . .

- 13) **Elect of God** – 4Q534 or 4QMess ar)  
[V5/522, GM/263, WAC/428]

He is **the Elect One** of God. **His birth** and the exhalation of his breath  
[are **from God**]. . . . his plans will last for ever.

- 14) **Aaronic Text (or Words or Testament of Levi)** – 4Q541 Frag 9, Col 1, 1-3  
[V5/527, GM/270, WAC/259]

He will atone for all the children of his generation,  
and he will be sent to all the children of his people.  
His word is like the word of the heavens,  
and his teaching, according to the will of God.  
His eternal sun will shine  
and his fire will burn in all the ends of the earth;  
above the darkness his sun will shine.  
Then darkness will vanish from the earth, and gloom from the globe.

- 15) **11QMelchizedek** – 11Q13 2:16-18  
[V5/501, GM/140, WAC/457]

This is the day of [Peace/Salvation]  
concerning which God spoke through Isaiah the prophet, who said,  
How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who proclaims peace,  
who brings good news, who proclaims salvation,  
who says to Zion: Your Elohim reigns [Isa 52:7].

Its interpretation: the mountains are the prophets . . . and **the messenger is the Messiah of the Spirit**, concerning whom Daniel said, [Until an anointed one [Messiah], a prince (Dan 9:25). . . .

- 16) **Damascus Document (CD, Cairo Damascus; 4Q265-73; 5Q12; 6Q15)**

B 19:10-11 – These shall escape in the age of the Visitation; but those that remain shall be delivered up to the sword when there comes **the Messiah of Aaron and Israel**. [GM/45]

B 20:1 – . . . from the day when the Unique Teacher was taken, till the coming of **the Messiah sprung from Aaron and Israel**. [GM/46]

2:1 – . . . from the day of the gathering in of the Teacher of the Community until the coming of **the Messiah out of Aaron and Israel**.  
[V5/134]

2:12 – And He made known to them His Holy Spirit by the hand of **His Messiah** and He showed the truth.  
[V5/128; contrast GM/34: “He taught them by the hand of the anointed ones through his holy spirit and through seers of the truth.”]

7:16-21 – The Books of the Law are the tabernacle of the king; as God said, I will raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen [Amos 9:11]. The king is the congregation; and the bases of the statues are the Books of the Prophets whose sayings Israel despised. The star is the Interpreter of the Law who shall come to Damascus; as it is written *A star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel* [Num 24:17]. The **scepter is the Prince** of the whole congregation, and when he comes he shall smite all the children of Seth [Num 24:17].  
[V5/133, GM/51]

14:18-19 – . . . until there arises **the Messiah of Aaron and Israel**. He **shall atone for their sins**. . . .  
[V5/143, GM/44]

## Reference Sources

### English Translations

- Martin Abegg, Peter Flint, Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999; rev. ed. 2002) [Note: Bible texts only]
- Florentino García-Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Translation* (2d ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996)
- Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York/London: Penguin Books, 1997; rev. ed. 2004)
- Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996; rev. ed. 2005)

### Introductions to the Scrolls

- Joseph Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Mahwah, N.J.: Seabury Press, 1992) [the cover photo is upsidedown]
- David Noel Freedman and Pam Fox Kuhlken, *What Are the Scrolls and Why Do They Matter?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007)
- Timothy Lim, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Logos Research Systems, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Revealed* (CD-ROM)
- Lawrence Schiffman, *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2 vols., Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002)

### Technical Editions (with Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, English, or with photographs)

- James Charlesworth, et al., *The Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994—)
- *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (39 vols. & counting; Oxford University Press)
- Robert Eisenman & James Robinson, *A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archeology Society, 1991)
- Florentino García-Martínez, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000)
- Emanuel Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Microfiche: Companion Volume* (Leiden/New York: E. J. Brill, 1993)

This document:

<http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/qumran/qumranmessiahs.pdf>

February 24, 2009