4Q175 Testimonia

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Description and Background

One of the manuscripts found at Qumran, known as 4Q175 Testimonia, is similar to writings popular in the early Christian church. It consists of a collection of quotations from the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) that early Christians believed were fulfilled in the coming of Christ.\(^1\)

The text is written in a careless but legible Hebrew hand on a single piece of parchment in a single column divided into paragraphs. John M. Allegro notes that Testimonia is in the hand of the same scribe who wrote the Rule of the Community.\(^2\)

Testimonia, named for these early collections of biblical citations, dates from the early first century B.C.\(^3\) and contains five quotations in four groups. The final group includes a quotation and an extended interpretation from a noncanonical source.

The first group contains two quotations from Deuteronomy. The first quotation (from Deuteronomy 5:28–9) is a wish that the people hear and obey the words of the Lord; the second (from Deuteronomy 18:18–9) is a prophecy concerning a prophet “like Moses” whose words the people are expected to heed. The second group contains an extended quotation from Numbers 24:15–7 with prophecies concerning a messianic figure, a “star . . . out of Jacob and a scepter . . . out of Israel” who will “crush the temples of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth.” The third group (from Deuteronomy 33:8–11) consists of a “blessing of the Levites and, implicitly, of the Priest-Messiah.”\(^4\) The final group begins with a quotation from Joshua 6:26 that is interpreted by a passage from another Qumran document, a previously unknown apocryphon known as the “Psalms of Joshua” (4Q379 22 ii 7–14).\(^5\)

The following translation of 4Q175 Testimonia is by Professor Florentino García Martínez.\(^6\) Subscript numbers mark lines of text in the original, asterisks indicate the tetragrammaton (explained below), biblical quotations in the original appear in italic type, parentheses enclose wording required for meaning in English, the word Blank indicates spaces left blank in the original, slash marks enclose text inserted between lines by the copyist, braces with ellipsis points \{\ldots\} indicate illegible text erased by the copyist, and brackets with ellipsis points \[\ldots\] represent lacunae (missing text) of unspecified length.\(^7\)

Translation

1 And **** spoke to Moses saying: Dt 5:28–29 “You have heard the sound of the words 2 of this people, what they said to you: all they have said is right. 3 If (only) it were given to me (that) they had this heart to fear me and keep all 4 my precepts all the days, so that it might go well with them and their sons for ever!” 5 Dt 18:18–19 “I would raise up for them a prophet from among their brothers, like you, and place my words 6 in his mouth, and he would tell them all that I command them. And it will happen that the man 7 who does not listen to my words, that the prophet will speak in my name, I 8 shall require a reckoning from him.” Blank 9 And he uttered his poem and said: Num 24:15–17 “Oracle of Balaam, son of Beor, and oracle of the man 10 of penetrating eye, oracle of him who listens to the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, of one who 11 sees the vision of Shaddai, who falls
and opens the eye. I see him, but not now, 12 I espy him, but not close up. A star has departed from Jacob, /and/ a sceptre /has arisen/ from Israel. He shall crush 13 the temples of Moab, and cut to pieces all the sons of Sheth."

Blank 14 And about Levi he says: Dt 33:8–11 "Give to Levi your Thummim and your Urim, to your pious man, whom you tested at Massah, and with whom you quarrrelled about the waters of Meribah, / he who/ said to his father {...} 16 {...} and to his mother 'I have not known you,' and did not acknowledge his brothers, and his son did not 17 know. For he observed your word and kept your covenant. /They have made/ your judgements /shine/ for Jacob, 18 our law for Israel, they have placed incense before your face and a holocaust upon your altar. 19 Bless. ****, his courage and accept with pleasure the work of his hand! Crush /the loins/ of his adversaries, and those who hate him, 20 may they not rise!" Blank 21 Blank At the moment when Joshua finished praising and giving thanks with his psalms, 22 he said Jos 6:26 "Cursed be the man who rebuilds this city! Upon his firstborn 23 will he found it, and upon his Benjamin will he erect its gates!" And now /an/ accursed /man/, one of Belial, 24 has arisen to be a fowler's trap for his people and ruin for all his neighbours. 25 [...] will arise, to be the two instruments of violence. And they will rebuild 26 [this city and ere]ct for it a rampart and towers, to make it into a fortress of wickedness 27 [a great evil] in Israel, and a horror in Ephraim and Judah. 28 [...] And they will commit a profanation in the land and a great blasphemy among the sons of 29 [...] And they will shed blo]od like water upon the ramparts of the daughter of Sion and in the precincts of 30 Jerusalem.

Commentary

In lines 1 and 19 the document uses four dots (asterisks in the above translation) to represent the tetragrammaton for the divine name YHWH (usually rendered “Jehovah” or “LORD” in English Bibles). The use of this device for the divine name is also found in the Rule of the Community (written by the same scribe). The avoidance of pronouncing the divine name had evidently already come into practice in Judaism by the time this document was written. Usually, the name was not changed in the biblical text, but those reading aloud would substitute the Hebrew word adonai (“lord”) for YHWH, and the vowels for adonai were, in later Hebrew texts, written in for the divine name, giving the contrived “Yehowah” form.

In addition to the curse at the end of Testimonia that cites Joshua 6:26 and the Qumran “Psalms of Joshua,” there appear to be implicit curses at the end of each scriptural passage. According to John M. Allegro: “The real point of contact among all four [passages] is not to be found in the personalities involved so much as in the import of the final words of each. These foretell destruction on those who do not listen to the divinely inspired words of the Prophet (implicitly in Deuteronomy, explicitly in Acts 3:23), the enemies of the Star and Scepter, and the opponents of the Levitical priesthood, and lastly, the city which had been rebuilt under a curse, and whose walls would be covered with blood in the last days.”

Notes


4. Ibid.


7. These devices are explained more fully in ibid., xxv, xxvi.