Part VII: Specific Texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls

45. What is the Commentary on Habakkuk?

The Commentary on Habakkuk, found in Cave 1, is a verse-by-verse commentary covering the first two chapters of the book of Habakkuk. This commentary, also known as the Pesher Habakkuk, dates to the Herodian period (30—1 BC), although the composition itself dates to an earlier period. According to the commentary, the mysteries of the Lord’s prophets were revealed to Qumran’s Teacher of Righteousness and Habakkuk’s prophecy was interpreted in relation to the people of Qumran in the last days. For example, we read in the Pesher Habakkuk:

AND God told Habakkuk to write what was going to happen to the last generation, but he did not let him know the end of the age. And as for what he says: [Hab 2:2] So that the one who reads it /may run/. Its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets. [Hab 2:3] 50

46. What is the Genesis Apocryphon?

The Genesis Apocryphon retells and amplifies many of the events recorded in Genesis. The first readable passage of this damaged scroll describes Lamech’s response to the news that his wife, Bitenosh (who is not named in the Bible), is with child. The passage then continues with the story of Noah. The best-preserved sections enlarge upon the story of Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) in Egypt and of Abram’s calling Sarai his sister, found in Genesis 12:10—20.

47. What is the Messianic Apocalypse?

Interest has recently been directed to the so-called Messianic Apocalypse, parts of which may be translated as follows:

…[the hea]vens and earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones. Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourself in His service! All you hopeful in (your) heart, will you not find the Lord in this? For the Lord will consider the pious (hasidim) and call the righteous by name. Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power. And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent] (Ps. cxi, 7—8). And f[or] ever I will clea[ve to the h]opeful and in His mercy … And the fr[uit …] will not be delayed for anyone And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as [He …] For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor (Isa. lix, i).

… He will lead the uprooted and knowledge … and smoke …
This fragment is particularly interesting because it may shed further light on the Qumran community's view of their messiah, a subject that continues to be intensely debated. Some scholars interpret the writings from the Dead Sea as indicating a single messianic figure, while other scholars find evidence for a belief in two messiahs, one priestly and one royal. While the majority of messianic references in the Dead Sea Scrolls are clearly singular in form, there is one example where the word messiah is plural and appears to refer to two separate messianic figures.

48. What is the Damascus Document?

This text has been identified by several names over the years, including the Damascus Covenant, the Damascus Rule, and the Zadokite Fragments. It is unique because a copy was first found in an old synagogue in Cairo, Egypt, in 1896, long before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The manuscripts are known as the Damascus Document because Damascus is prominently mentioned as the place where the group originated. While Damascus could refer to the actual city in Syria, most scholars believe it is a code or symbolic name for a “city” in the wilderness, possibly Qumran. Ten copies of the Damascus Document have been found in the Qumran caves.

A copy of the Damascus Document from Cave 4 shows that the community at Qumran had a version somewhat longer than the manuscripts found in Cairo. The document consists of two parts: an exhortation and a legal section (or body of laws). In the exhortation, the new members of the covenant are encouraged, through the examples of reward and punishment in Israel’s history, to be obedient to the ways of God and the guidelines of the covenant. This section of the document has been very important in deciphering some of the early history of the Qumran community. In the legal section, certain laws are laid out, such as laws for the Sabbath and for ritual purity. This section is divided into five parts: entry into the covenant, code of conduct, ritual, organization, and penal code.

Some differences in the rules and regulations of the Damascus Document and those of the Community Rule initially led scholars to believe that the Damascus Document pertained to a completely different movement than that found at Qumran. However, references in the document to “camps,” “the assembly of the towns of Israel,” and “the assembly of the camps” suggest that the rules contained therein are for regulating different segments of the movement, which was spread throughout the land. Thus, in the Damascus Document, members of the covenant community outside of Qumran are understood to be living among people who are not members of that community; and marriage, which is not even mentioned in the Community Rule (members of the Qumran group are thought to have been celibate), is an assumed part of life within the covenant community.

Yet while the Damascus Document provides regulations for adherents living outside of Qumran, it seems to acknowledge Qumran as the center of the community. For example, the Teacher of Righteousness is looked upon as the leader of the group, and the community is repeatedly referred to as being from the land of Damascus (a possible code name for Qumran, as explained earlier). Also, the rules found in the Damascus Document do not seem to be as strict as those in the Community Rule, leading to the belief that the group at Qumran followed a stricter order of living within the group.

49. What is the Community Rule, or Manual of Discipline?
The central organizational document found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and one unique to the Qumran community, is the Community Rule (or Manual of Discipline, as it is still popularly known). It was designed for a faithful “remnant” of Israel engaged in preparing the “way in the desert” for the kingdom of God and for God’s triumph over the forces of evil. The document contains a preamble explaining the purpose of the group and sets forth its basic constitution, including the requirements for entrance into the community, the procedures for admission, the various classes or ranks within the community, the regulations governing the relations of community members, the conduct of communal meals, and items concerning military service, education, and eligibility for office.

The Community Rule also provides a list of penalties (ranging from loss of rations to expulsion from the community) for various types of infractions, suggesting some thing of the strictness of the group. For example, the list of penalties instructs that

- Whoever has deliberately lied shall do penance for six months.
- Whoever has deliberately insulted his companion unjustly shall do penance for one year and shall be excluded.
- Whoever has deliberately deceived his companion by word or by deed shall do penance for six months . . .
- Whoever has borne malice against his companion unjustly shall do penance for six months/one year; and likewise, whoever has taken revenge in any matter whatever.
- Whoever has spoken foolishly: three months.
- Whoever has interrupted his companion whilst speaking: ten days.
- Whoever has lain down to sleep during an Assembly of the Congregation: thirty days. And likewise, whoever has left, without reason, an Assembly of the Congregation as many as three times during one Assembly, shall do penance for ten days. But if he has departed whilst they were standing he shall do penance for thirty days. (Community Rule 7:4—14)

In many respects the Community Rule displays parallels to community regulations for later Christian groups, whose documents include the Didache, the Apostolic Constitutions, the Didascalia, and the Rule of Benedict. All products of the early Christian centuries, these documents, like the Community Rule, reflect a concern with providing a constitution for the communities as well as a pattern for daily living.

50. Is the Community Rule a kind of initiation text?

The Community Rule contains the following basic steps of initiation into the Qumran community: an expression of willingness to enter the covenant, a collective confession of wrongdoing and an acknowledgment of God’s mercy, and the blessing of those who enter into the covenant. Moshe Weinfeld identifies six characteristics of this entrance process that are similar to the practices of other societies in the Hellenistic world: oath of admission, registration, examination, decision by lot, probationary period, and submission of personal property. He points out
many similarities between the Qumran community and "guilds and religious associations of the Hellenistic-Roman Period."

51. What is the Rule of the Congregation?

Appended to the Community Rule scroll is the Rule of the Congregation (or Messianic Rule). Whereas the Community Rule seems more devoted to the real-life organization and management of the affairs of the community, the Rule of the Congregation served a different purpose. According to Geza Vermes, "(1) it was intended for 'all the congregation in the last days'; (2) it is a Rule for a Community adapted to the requirements of the messianic war against the nations; (3) it refers to the presence of the Priest and the Messiah of Israel at the Council, and at the Meal."

52. What is the Copper Scroll?

Among the most puzzling of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the Copper Scroll, first published by Josef T. Milik in 1962 in the third volume of the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series. The Copper Scroll is extraordinary for several reasons: its unique orthography (method of spelling), its use of a Hebrew script and dialect that are unlike that of any other scrolls, its use of metal as a means of textual transmission, and its contents regarding deposits of treasures. It is not known who created or owned this scroll.

The Copper Scroll apparently was formed from a single plaque of copper-based metal. Inscribed thereon is a list of sixty-four deposits of gold, silver, aromatic spices, and manuscripts. Because of the enormous amount of treasure involved—perhaps as much as several dozen tons buried in locations in and around Jerusalem—many people are convinced that the treasures described in the document are fictional. Others, however, have argued that the list records the deposit of the treasures of the Jerusalem temple, perhaps tithes collected during the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66—74) that could not be taken to Jerusalem during the siege.

The Copper Scroll begins with these words:

At Horebbah which is in the Vale of Achor under the stairs which go eastwards forty cubits: a box (filled with) silver weighing in all seventeen talents. In the tomb of . . . the third: 100 gold bars. In the great cistern which is in the courtyard of the little colonnade, at its very bottom, closed with sediment towards the upper opening: nine hundred talents. At the hill of Kohlit, containers, sandalwood and ephods (priestly garments). The total of the offering and of the treasure: seven (talents?) and second tithe rendered unclean. At the exit of the canal on the northern side, six cubits towards the cavity of immersion. In the hole of the waterproofed refuge, in going down towards the left, three cubits above the bottom: forty talents of silver.

The scroll continues with similar descriptions of hidden treasures. A few treasure seekers have exerted great efforts to discover the treasures described in this scroll, but with no success.
53. **What are the New Jerusalem texts?**

Several fragmented Hebrew and Aramaic documents provide details regarding the New Jerusalem (i.e., the holy city that will be rebuilt in the last days to replace the old city of Jerusalem, distinct from its counterpart to be built by the Latter-day Saints in Jackson County, Missouri). Because the documents were discovered in Caves 1, 2, 4, 5, and 11, they likely once formed a significant part of the Qumran library.

The texts describe a visionary or prophet who is led by a heavenly minister who shows him the dimensions and various parts of the New Jerusalem, including the gates, streets, houses, doors, thresholds, lintels, and stairs. One of the fragments reads in part, "And he measured from this gate to the eastern corner 25 stadia. vacat [empty space in the manuscript] And he led me into the city, and he measured each block of houses for its length and width, fifty-one reeds by fifty-one, in a square" (New Jerusalem 2:10—12). At times the minister describes various parts of the New Jerusalem, for example, "all [the streets of the city] are paved with white stone . . . marble and jasper" (1:7—9).

The literary form of the New Jerusalem texts recalls Ezekiel 40—46, in which Ezekiel was hosted by an angel who revealed to him the future Jerusalem temple and its dimensions.

54. **What is the document called Some Observances of the Law?**

Cave 4 yielded six tattered copies of a legal document called Some Observances of the Law (4QMMT). It was written by a leader of the Qumran community, possibly the Teacher of Righteousness, and perhaps was addressed to that leader’s opponents. The document sets forth many religious laws and precepts belonging to the Qumran community, including items regarding the religious calendar, practices relating to the temple and its sacrifices, laws about marriage and in marriage, and rules pertaining to entry into the community.

Other topics addressed in the document include a discussion or mention of the offering of sacrifices from the Gentiles, bringing certain animal skins to the temple, purity laws regarding making vessels from the bones or skins of unclean animals, Jerusalem as the chosen place, sacrificing pregnant animals, eating unborn animals, items concerning the blind and the deaf, a prohibition against bringing dogs into Jerusalem, tithes and fruits given to the priests, and items concerning lepers.

The document concludes with the admonition "Understand all these (matters) and ask Him (God) to straighten your counsel and put you far away from thoughts of evil and the counsel of Belial" (Some Observances of the Law 3:5—6).

55. **What is the War Scroll?**

The War Scroll describes a war in the final age of the earth’s history. In this war between the forces of good and evil, the wicked will be completely destroyed, ushering in an era of peace. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls, who believed that they were the true, restored Israel, compose the righteous army. The War Scroll begins by designating the righteous as "the sons of light," who are also described as "the children of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin." They are
posed by the “sons of darkness,” identified as Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, the Kittim (the meaning of Kittim is unknown), and the “transgressors of the covenant.” In the Old Testament the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and the Philistines are enemies of Israel. The “transgressors of the covenant” are most likely mainstream Jews of the period who would not accept the views of the Dead Sea Scrolls writers, who believed that other Jews were living in a state of apostasy or were violating the law of Moses.

The War Scroll describes the organization of the army of Israel in detail and prescribes prayers, hymns, and exhortations to be spoken by the priests and Levites in the course of war. Angelic beings, both good and evil, will also take part in the conflict. Ultimately it is God who will give victory to the righteous and who will usher in a golden age of light for the faithful. Interestingly, the War Scroll appears to be modeled on Roman military manuals, and the deployment of the army of God follows in some measure Roman patterns of warfare.

56. What is the Temple Scroll?

At over twenty-eight feet in length, the Temple Scroll is the longest of the scrolls discovered in the eleven Qumran caves. Scholars cannot agree on a more precise date for the scroll’s composition than sometime between 150 BC and AD 1., nor are they certain of its author. Israeli scholar Yigael Yadin published an English translation of the scroll in 1977, along with photographs and commentary.

The Temple Scroll examines various aspects of the temple complex, construction, and functions; it describes and provides the measurements of the sanctuary and its holy of holies, chambers and colonnades, mercy seat, cherubim, veil, table, golden lamp, altar, and courtyards. The architecture and structure of this temple is very different from Solomon’s temple and the temple described in Ezekiel 40—46, for the Temple Scroll describes three concentric courts, each square in shape. The four gates of the inner court represent the four groups of the tribe of Levi. The middle court encompasses the inner court and features three gates on each of the four sides, twelve gates total, each one representing one of the tribes of Israel. The outer court encompasses the other courts and also has twelve gates.

The three courts were designed to inform temple officiators, workers, and worshippers of hierarchical sanctity—the innermost zone of the temple was the most sacred, and as one moved outward from that area the zones (and the respective ordinances or rituals performed therein) decreased in relative sanctity. Thus the temple building itself was the most holy place, the inner courtyard was next in holiness, and so on.

The Temple Scroll goes beyond the physical features of the temple to describe the ideal temple society and its covenant with God. The scroll describes sacrifices, purity regulations, and judges and officers affiliated with the temple. It outlines laws relating to idolatry and apostasy, vows and oaths, priests, Levites, priestly dues, witnesses, sacrificial animals, conduct during war, rebellious sons, and crimes punishable by hanging. Many of the laws in this text pertain to the ritual purity or defilement of women. The temple was to serve as a reminder of the awesome presence of God and the purity necessary to approach him. The future temple was to preserve a stricter ritual purity among the people, for the laws governing its sanctity were more restrictive than those pertaining to other Israelite temples, thereby lifting the level of the entire community to a higher state of purity.

57. What are the Thanksgiving Hymns?
The Thanksgiving Hymns scroll, discovered in Cave 1, was copied originally on two scrolls that were eventually sewn together into one scroll containing at least twenty-five hymns. The hymnbook-like collection of hymns is called Thanksgiving Hymns because of the frequent repetition of the phrase “I thank thee, O Lord.” The hymns, which contain phraseology similar to the biblical psalms, include praises of God’s judgments, his works of creation, and his acts of salvation. They describe the human condition and the tendency to sin. Like many of the biblical psalms, these hymns emphasize God's righteousness, mercy, and truth. The following selection from the Thanksgiving Hymns is representative sample.

Hymn 5

[I thank] Thee, O Lord, as befits the greatness of Thy power and the multitude of Thy marvels for ever and ever. [Thou art a merciful God] and rich in [favours], pardoning those who repent of their sin and visiting the iniquity of the wicked. [Thou delightest in] the free-will offering [of the righteous] but iniquity Thou hastest always. Thou hast favoured me, Thy servant, with a spirit of knowledge, [that I may choose] truth [and goodness] and loathe all the ways of iniquity. And I have loved Thee freely and with all my heart; [contemplating the mysteries of] Thy wisdom [I have sought Thee]. For this is from Thy hand and [nothing is] without [Thy will].

Notes


53. Vermes, Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English, 100.