

## *Some Implications of the Dead Sea Scrolls*

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The man who undertakes to write a report on the present state of research into the Dead Sea Scrolls must bear in mind the possibility that something may be discovered between the time when he writes his report and the time when it appears in print that may modify his statements considerably, if it does not render them completely out of date.

With that proviso, an attempt may be made to say something about the conclusions to which the excavation of Khirbet Qumran and the study of the documents found in the neighbouring caves seem to point.

Not long before 100 B.C. a group of pious Jews withdrew from the centres of national life to the wilderness of Judaea, and took up their headquarters in the Wadi Qumran, north-west of the Dead Sea, in order that they might devote their energy to the study and practice of the sacred law, and by so doing attain a degree of merit in the sight of God which would not only procure their own acceptance but also suffice for the propitiation of their erring fellow-countrymen. This move was undertaken by them under the direction of an able and original interpreter of Scripture whom they designated the Teacher of Righteousness. He and his followers disapproved of the dynasty of priest-kings that ruled in Jerusalem in those days, and suffered persecution at their hands—especially at the hands of one member of the dynasty whom they called the Wicked Priest, and who is probably to be identified with Alexander Jannæus (103-76 B.C.).

They believed that they were living in the last days, and that the time would soon come when (as Daniel had foretold) the present world-order would be replaced by the eternal kingdom of God. They believed they had a part to play in the preparation for this new order, and they studied the prophetic books diligently to ascertain more accurately where the path of their duty lay. The coming of the Romans in 63 B.C. was taken as a signal that the time of the end must be very near, when the dominion of the impious would be overthrown, and they themselves, as the saints of the Most High, would possess the kingdom (Dn. vii. 22). But the overthrow of the dominion of the impious would require military force, and they studied the art of war in preparation for the day when they would go forth to the help of the Lord against the mighty, confident that Michael would stand up as their champion (Dn. xii. 1). It would fall to them to judge the enemies of God and restore a pure worship in Jerusalem under a worthy priesthood, in the new age to which Ezekiel had pointed forward. In that age, Ezekiel had said. God would sprinkle clean water upon His people and purify them; but these men anticipated that coming age by regular ritual purification in water, just as they anticipated the banquet of the Messianic Age by regular community meals. Very probably they constituted one branch of the people known as the Essenes.

They regarded themselves as the corporate fulfillers of the twofold portrait of Isaiah's Servant of the Lord and Daniel's Son of man. But as regards their Messianic expectation, this was directed towards the appearance of three figures at the end of the age—a priestly Messiah (descended from Aaron and Zadok), a military Messiah (descended from David), and the

prophet foretold by Moses in Dt. xviii. 15 ff. This is one among several features which distinguishes their Messianic doctrine from that of Christ-

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ianity, in which Prophet, Priest and king are integrated in the single Person of Christ.

It has been freely stated of late that the community of Qumran regarded the Teacher of Righteousness as a Messianic figure; some have gone so far as to find in his career a remarkable anticipation of the career of Jesus, not excluding His death by crucifixion. But in fact there is no warrant for supposing that the Teacher of Righteousness claimed to be a Messiah, or that his followers believed him to be one. They held, rather, that he was specially raised up to interpret the Scriptures for the last generations and to show how God was going to act in the last generation of all. He was a forerunner of the Messianic Age rather than a Messianic figure himself. There is no evidence to show the manner of his death—or his 'gathering in', as his followers expressed it. But when he died before the arrival of the events which he foretold, the belief grew up that he would rise from the dead to resume and complete his ministry on the very eve of the age to come. There is no evidence, however, that he did rise from the dead or that anyone ever believed he had done so.

His followers waited patiently for the sign that the time for action had come. But it was continually delayed, until that day in A.D. 68 when the approach of Vespasian's troops forced them hastily to abandon their headquarters at Qumran and store their library in the adjoining caves, where their fragmentary remains have been found in our day.

The study of these documents has greatly increased our knowledge of the religious situation in Israel on the eve of Christ's coming, when so many, in various ways, were looking for the kingdom of God.

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