Eschatology in Qumran

Intertestamental Literature

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Introduction

Most scholars who devoted to the study of the lives of the Qumran community agree that the idea of eschatology is the binding force behind the existence of the community. While eschatology is a characteristic description of the Jewish mindset of the intertestamental period at large, it seems that the Qumran Community thinks of themselves as the means through which the people of God realizes God's eschatological plan. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how eschatological ideas and beliefs are expressed in Qumran writings such as the Damascus Document (DC), the war Scroll (1QM) and the Habakkuk Commentary (1QpHab) and why these eschatological ideas and believes are increasingly important for the producers of these texts.

I. Eschatological Ideas and Beliefs in Damascus Document (CD)

These documents which are also called the Zadokite Document were first found by Solomon Schechter in Cairo Geniza (from which we have the Cairo Damascus or CD is driven) before the discovery of the Dead Sea in 1896 and published in 1910 as manuscript A and manuscript B. Then they were found in cave 4, 5 and 6 of the Dead Sea which are dated to around 150 B.C. E. The Documents are important for revealing the founding of the community and eschatological ideology behind their foundations. In this documents which is also true of all the documents we will look at, the idea of the remnants related with eschatology, eschatological war and messianic expectation and a future retribution are reflections of eschatological idea and beliefs of the community.

In the first column of CD are mentioned numbers which are key to understanding how the community understood times. The first number mentioned is 390 years which is reference of the time from the Babylonian exile to probably the emergence of the sect. Following the 390 years is 20 years of the sect wandering in the desert without the Teacher of righteousness (CD 1:9–10) which is followed by the arrival and probably ministry of the righteous teacher for 40

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Forty years from his death is the end (CD 20:14–15). This would give us a total of the 490 years a figure familiar from eschatological predictions in Daniel (Daniel 9). As a result of this John J. Collins conclusion, “[the] sect expected the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about 40 years after the death of the Teacher,” is shared by many scholars.

In the last 40 period of their time schedule, generally it is believed that God would destroy the wicked which is under the leadership of the “Liar,” (CD 20:15–16). Manuscript B’or in manuscript A 7.9-8.10 express after the destruction the community expects of God's visitation, retribution, avenging their enemies, and keep the faithful in the messianic age.

Beginning from the first column they expresses about themselves as “the remnant of Israel” (CD 1:4–5). They called themselves “the Sons of Light”; all others were “the Sons of Darkness.” They were convinced that they were living “at the end of the era of wickedness” (CD 6:10, 14; 12:23; 14:19), in the “last days” as foretold by the prophets. There are two references of the end of the days in CD. They held that their founder Teacher of Righteousness had been raised up by God “to make known to the later generations what He would do in the last generation” (CD 11:12). Thus, they are a community of the elect or remnants who are in new covenant and who live at the end of the present age.

Messianic expectation is basic to their eschatological idea. The expression of the messiah of Aaron and Israel are found in three places in CD (20:1; 13:21.) According to LaSor while the mentioning of the term in CD 2:12, 6:1 may refer to person of present or past and thus may not


4 From the day of the gathering in of the Teacher of the Community until the end of all the men of war who deserted to the Liar there shall pass about forty years. (CD 20.13–15)

5 Geza Vermes, Scrolls, Scriptures, and Early Christianity: Library of Second Temple Studies 56 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 63


7 VanderKam, The Dead Sea Scrolls Today, 56 informs it is called 19-20 and which over lap with cols. 7-8 in mssA

be eschatological, terms used in CD 19:11, 20:1;12:23,24 and 14:19 is clearly eschatological.9Though, the sect’s idea of the messiah is confusing10, the messiah/s appearance is shown to be in the future. In CD 6:11, for example, the Messiah of Aaron is described as “he who shall teach righteousness at the end of the day.” However, Vermes suggests that this work of the Messiah is similar with what the teacher of righteousness is already doing. Thus, this expression may find the fulfillment through this person which strengthen the idea that they are already at the age of the escaton.11This suggestion is moreover strengthened in CD 1:11, 12: speaking of the teacher of righteousness it says “to lead them in the way of his heart and to make known to the last generation, what he would do to the congregation of the faithless.” On the other hand, arguing for the duality and balance between the concept of kingly and priestly messiah in the community Schniedewind states that “this balance is idealized and the community expected the eschaton to mirror this idealization.”12

What was to follow the messianic age is not clear to imagine? The community rule complement that “the reward of all those who walk in it [the way of truth] will be a healing remedy and abundant well-being in a long life and a fruitfulness of seed, together with all the blessings of eternity and everlasting bliss in life forever, and a crown of glory with a recompense of majesty in light everlasting” (1QS 4:6–8).

II. Eschatological Ideas and Beliefs in the War Scroll (1QM)

This scrolls mainly talk about the idea of eschatological war which will occur during the last forty years of their period between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. The struggle is generally about the struggle between good and evil on which only God’s intervention makes a

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10 Geza Vermes, Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 165, Sometimes there seems to be one kingly Messiah (the Messiah of Aaron and Israel with singular verb in CD), there also seems to be two (kingly and priestly Messiahs) and even three (kingly, priestly and prophetic Messiahs).

11 Vermes, Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea, 166.

difference. That is to say the powers of both sides are presented as equal until God intervenes 1QM 1:14-15.\textsuperscript{13} The war idea is obviously eschatological in its nature.

The time description of the war is difficult to picture. However what is clear is from the forty years of war there will not be war on the five sabbatical years. And from the remaining thirty five years, the first six years is war against the ungodly of the covenant and their allies (war against the Hasmonians is clearly in view). The six year war is concluded with the rededication of the temple worship on the sabbatical year. Still the remaining twenty nine years is war against sons of Shem, sons of Ham and sons of Japhet (the last two takes ten years each and the first takes nine years)\textsuperscript{1} QM 1-2. The final war is with Kittim\textsuperscript{14} and Satan the spiritual power behind it 1QM 19:2-8. The calculation of the end time is a trained following Daniel’s eschatological writing.\textsuperscript{15} While the earthly aspect of the war is important aspect of the war description, the spiritual struggle is also parallely depicted. Accordingly, the sons of light lead by the prince of light, their leader, is helped by the archangel Michael as the gentile nations are aided by Satan. There is also a picture of a last judgment where Melkizedek judges for the holy one of God over against Satan and his company. The final state of the war is prophetically seen as:

\begin{quote}
This shall be a time of salvation for the people of God, an age of dominion for all members of his company, and of everlasting destruction for all the company of Satan. The dominion of the kittim shall come to an end and iniquity shall be vanquished, leaving no remnant [for the sons] of darkness there shall be no escape. [The sons of the righteousness] shall shine over all the ends of the earth ; they shall go on shining until all the seasons of darkness are consumed and at the season appointed by God, his exalted greatness shall shine eternally to the peace, blessing, glory, joy, and long life of all the sons of light. (1QM 1.5-9)\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

The eschatological picture we have here is a combination of the Spiritual and the earthly. The salvation includes both ‘political dominance of its members and spiritual deliverance from Kitim and its earthly company, Satan. The idea of the remnant is also found here. The sons of light, the remnant, leave no remnant from the sons of darkness. And finally peace, blessing, glory, joy,

\textsuperscript{13}Vermes The Dead Sea Scrolls, 105
\textsuperscript{14} Reference to Rome
\textsuperscript{15}Craig A. Evans & Peter W. Flint eds. Eschatology, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 76-77.
\textsuperscript{16}Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls, 106.
and long life of all the sons of light are to be achieved. The rule of Michael among the angels and the kingdom of Israel on earth (1QM 17:7-8), is also a post war description.

III. Eschatological Ideas and Beliefs in the Habakkuk Commentary (1QpHab)

The community’s eschatological speculations are further articulated in the commentaries on prophetic books known as Pesharim. Pesher exegesis assumes that the ancient words of the biblical prophets refer not to their own times, but rather contain hidden allusions to the origins, development, and eschatological history of the Qumran community. These hidden messages are identified through the inspired exegesis of the community’s leaders, the Teacher of Righteousness 1QpHab 2:8-9. This model is fully articulated in Pesher Habakkuk 1QpHab. Generally speaking Habakkuk and the righteous is equated with the quest of the new covenant members and the Righteous Teacher. Chaldeans and the wicked are equated with kitim, the wicked priest (the liar) and his followers. The eschatological nature of the interpretation is evident for example concerning the interpretation Habakkuk of “Behold the nations see, marvel and be astonished; for I accomplish a deed in your days, but you will not believe it when” in1:17-2:10.

[Interpreted this concerns] those who were unfaithful together with the liar in that day[did] not [listen to the word received] by the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God. And it concerns the unfaithful of the New Covenant in that they have not believed in the New [Covenant] of God and have profaned his holy name. And likewise, this saying is to be interpreted [as concerning those who] will be unfaithful at the end of the days. They the men of violence and the breakers of the covenant, will not believe when they hear all that is to happen to the final generation from the priest [in whose heart] God set [understanding] that he might interpret all the words of his servant and the prophet through whom he foretold all that would happen to his people and [his hand].

The phrase the end of the days in this text according to J. Collins “appears already in the Pentateuch in Gen 49:1 (the blessing of Jacob) and Num 24:14. Both of these passages contain archaic prophetic texts, which originally referred to the future, in an unspecific but limited sense, but they were reinterpreted and given an eschatological sense in the postexilic period, so


18Jassen, Alex P., Religion, 12.

19Vermes The Dead Sea Scrolls, 284.
that they were now understood to refer to a final, definitive phase of history.”\textsuperscript{20} The phrase further signifies the sects believed that the end is eminent. What would happen in the last day is God would mobilize the Kittim against the last priest of Jerusalem, because the wicked priest acted against the God’s elect and the plundered the poor.

The idea of eschatological war is also here. The tension begins in 1 QpHab 1:1-5 where the last generation and those who have despised the law and the wicked priest and the Righteous Teacher are presented in opposition. It developed in 1 QpHab 5:8-12, and then in 1 QpHab 11:6-8 the wicked priest pursuing the Teacher of Righteousness to the House of his exile that he might confused him.

The idea of remnant is tied up with eschatological imminence. For example Hab. 2:3 “If (the end) tarries, wait for it, for it shall surely come and shall not be late and interpreted, this concerns the men of truth who keep the law, whose hands shall slacken in the service of truth when the final age is prolonged. For all the age of God reach their appointed end as He determines for them in the mysteries of His wisdom.( IQpHab 7:9-14)\textsuperscript{21} John J. Collins infers from this statement that that “the ‘end’ was expected shortly before the pesher was written.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{IV. The Reasons for the Increasing Importance of the Texts}

For number of reasons the Qumran Community are essences.\textsuperscript{23} Their documents further reveal that they are also Zadokites, a priestly family from the family of Phineas. They have been the legitimate priest for the temple service in Israel for history. But following the Maccabees revolt their leader, the righteous Teacher, was chased away by the Hasmonians, robed of all possible influence he has been entitled.\textsuperscript{24} 1QpHab 11:4-8 suggests that the wicked priest pursued the Teacher of righteousness to his place of exile and tried to swallow up him and his followers on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Evans & Flint, \textit{Eschatology}, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Vermes The Dead Sea Scrolls, 286-287.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Evans & Flint, \textit{Eschatology}, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{23} James C. VanderKam, \textit{An Introduction of Early Judaism}, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Punishing Company 2001), 161-162, presents two arguments: one Pliny the Elder and the other Josephus.
\item \textsuperscript{24} If the 390 years (the year of the rise of the righteous teacher) after exile in the CD are taken literary.
\end{itemize}
their day of Atonment. Many scholars agree that the antagonistic force are Hasmonians and pro harmoniums, represented by the “weaked priest” probably refereeing to Jonathan or Simon,26 who probably wage physical and ideaological war26 on the Zadokites to maintain power. On the other hand the Zadokiets, represented by the Righteous Teacher who is raised by God to give a correct interpretation of the prophetic prediction, wage an eschatological war on the Hasmonians and their allies. Thus, they come to believe that even if they were betrayed,27 God in near feature will execute the judgement on the sons of darkness and the nations at large by the hand of His elect 1 QpHab 5. They hope that God will intervene in near future and revenge the wicked priest in 1 QpHab 9:8-12. Their hope is in the immanent eschatological era. Vermes is correct in saying that, “People living in circumstances of peace and prosperity look forward optimistically to a predictable and safe future. Uncertainty, danger and continuous political and social unrest generate the eschatological atmosphere and the consequent eschatological outlook.”28 The first reason for the importance of these eschatological texts, therefore, is probably the group has been a victim of injustice and hence the CD for instance as vermis puts it, “aims to reassure Jews in the midst of their trials and sufferings by providing them with a new timetable of the events of the final age.”29

But their hope in the imminent eschatology is also a motivation for them to keep their purity because if God is going to avenge them in the near future, they should keep themselves pure and faithful. This seems to be the reason for CD to begin with exhortation to the “sons of Zadok” and it also seems to give a reason for the organized and ascetic rules of the communities’ life through an exact observance of the various rules of the Torah, particularly those concerning ritual purity, so that this would hasten the coming the eschatological age and, at the same time, make the members of the community ready to stand at God’s judgment on that day.

25VanderKam, An introduction, 164.

26 See for example how Alchimus the Zadokiet is described in 1 Maccabees, which most agrees as pro Hasmonian Book.

27 1 QpHab 5:8-12 talks about “the House of Absalom and the members of the council who were silent at the time of the chastisement of the Teacher of Righteousness and gave him no help against the Liar who flouted the Law in the midst of their congregation.”

28Vermes, Geza, Scrolls, Scriptures, 62.

29Vermes, Geza, Scrolls, Scriptures, 64.
With the issue of keeping purity to hasten the coming eschatological age texts such as “If (the end) tarries, wait for it, for it shall surely come and shall not be late and interpreted, this concerns the men of truth who keep the law, whose hands shall slacken in the service of truth when the final age is prolonged. For all the age of God reach their appointed end as He determines for them in the mysteries of His wisdom. (IQpHab 7:9-14) may also signify that community expectation of the dawning of the eschatological age is prolonged that they needed the admonitions to continue to keep the law and the service required of them.

Conclusions
The eschatological ideas and beliefs observed in all the documents can be mainly summarized as the idea of the eminence of the end along with eschatological time table, the idea of the remnants, eschatological war and messianic expectation and a future retribution.

The importance of this eschatological ideas and believes are three. The first is to reassure Jews of God eschatological vindicating act although they are now the midst of their trials and sufferings. The second is to encourage them to keep purity to hasten the coming of the final age. The third is to admonish not to slacken in the service of truth thinking the final age is prolonged.

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