

“UNTIL GOD SHALL VISIT THE EARTH”:  
THE ROLE OF COVENANT THEOLOGY  
IN THE QUMRAN MOVEMENT

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by  
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“UNTIL GOD SHALL VISIT THE EARTH”:

THE ROLE OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

IN THE QUMRAN MOVEMENT

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Since the initial excavations by Roland De Vaux in the 1950s, the study of Qumran has been oriented primarily around questions of variation – specifically, attempts to explain why the inhabitants of Qumran lived so differently than contemporary Jews. The community was active during a crucible period for early Judaism, in which various groups within the Jewish world were competing to define “orthodox” identity and practice. The historical circumstances of the era preclude easy definitions and lines of influence. Pharisees and Sadducees, groups with drastically different beliefs that often competed violently for royal favor, were nonetheless in agreement about the essential necessity of the Temple cycle. In later years, pious zealots would publicly assassinate members of the priestly party who they believed were collaborating with foreign powers against Jewish interests and religious tenets, while Paul of Tarsus, a Pharisee, was one of the strongest proponents of a new strain of Judaism, Christianity, which would grow to disregard the Temple system entirely.

This world, while complex and often misread, was also well-documented and familiar to historians and religious scholars. Its contours have been engrained into the mind of academics since the events themselves were in living memory. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s introduced a chaotic new element into this world that had to be explained. Jewish practice outside Qumran, even in Judaea, featured no lack of diversity, a fact that has been increasingly appreciated in recent decades. But Qumran, with its unusual rules, seemingly-obsessive focus on purity, strictly dualistic view of the

world, and unyielding sense of imminent apocalypse, was something else entirely, and it needed to be explained, categorized, and understood.

The scholarly response has generally been an attempt to explain Qumran in terms of its relation to contemporary religious phenomena. From an early date, interpretations of Qumran have often relied on external projections to explain the nature of the community; usually, this manifests in describing Qumran either as a settlement ‘highly observant’ of the Torah law, or utilizing terms more appropriate to later Christianity (in other words, as a kind of Second Temple-era ‘monastery’).

Both of these interpretations, if inaccurate to varying degrees, are understandable given the history of Qumran research. The former interpretation – that Qumran was a settlement dedicated to strict adherence to the Torah law – is technically correct; contemporary historical sources such as Philo, the Scrolls library, and even the physical layout of the site demonstrates that adherence to the community’s particular interpretation of the Torah was a dominant motivating factor in the behavior of the its membership. However, while not inaccurate, this explanation is incomplete. To truly reconstruct Qumran and its attendant community, it is necessary not only to describe the community’s behavior but to explain it, and in order to explain behavior it is necessary to gain a proper understanding of the actor’s motivations and their own view of their place in the world.

The latter interpretation – of Qumran as a kind of monastery – has fallen somewhat into disfavor in recent decades. In the early years of Qumran’s rediscovery and the publication of the scroll material, some scholars went so far as to state that Qumran was, in fact, a Christian site, linking figures in the scrolls such as the Teacher of



Righteousness to New Testament figures such as Jesus, and drawing parallels between documents like the Temple Scroll to Pauline conceptions of the Temple<sup>1</sup>. Because of the plurality of evidence demonstrates that Qumran was active as a site in the early Hasmonean period, making an origin in Christianity chronologically infeasible, these views have fallen into general disfavor<sup>2</sup>. However, Qumran is still occasionally described in ‘monastic’ terms even by such prominent scholars as Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman<sup>3</sup>, even as they clearly recognize the potential problems with such terminology<sup>4</sup>.

The ‘monastic’ interpretation is tempting, given what we know about the community’s internal behavior. At least on-site at Qumran, community members lived highly-regimented lives marked by isolation, poverty, labor, apparent celibacy and submission to an ecclesiastical authority structure<sup>5</sup>. It is difficult, after more than 1700 years of Christian monastic tradition, not to draw parallels between the Qumran community and early Christian monastics. Another reason that this view has likely been so pervasive, even after outright comparisons have ceased to have been drawn, has to do with early publication of the Qumran material, most of which was published by Christian archaeologists and scholars. The document now most frequently referred to as *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Geza Vermes describes this briefly in his introductory chapter on the nature of the community

<sup>2</sup> Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources*, (Published on Behalf of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies by JSOT, 1989), 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, when Vermes uses the word “monastic” to describe Qumran, he invariably sets it off with quotation marks as a concession to the problematic nature of the term.

<sup>5</sup> Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes According to the Classical Sources* (Published on Behalf of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies by JSOT, 1989), 7-10.

*Community Rule* was originally published, in 1951, as the *Manual of Discipline*<sup>6</sup>, a title with Christian connotations. Likewise, the description of various rooms and structures at Qumran using such terms as *scriptorium* and *refectory* dates to Roland De Vaux's publications in the 1950s<sup>7</sup>. This "Christianization" of a Jewish settlement is pervasive, even among scholars who are not themselves Christian<sup>8</sup>. The field seems to struggle to describe Qumran outside of a monastic paradigm.

The use of such terminology to describe Qumran cannot be laid entirely on early scholars such as De Vaux. Although De Vaux was undoubtedly influenced by his background as a Dominican priest, his archaeological interpretations about activity on-site at Qumran have mostly held up to later scrutiny<sup>9</sup>, and the monastic terminology is instead a symptom of a larger problem – the difficulty of describing Qumran on its own terms without the use of external referents. With the possible exception of the *Therapeutae* – who have themselves been suggested to have been somehow tied to the Qumran community<sup>10</sup> – no known precedent for a community like Qumran exists within Jewish tradition prior to the community's establishment. In this thesis, I hope to answer

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<sup>6</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y., USA: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1997), 97.

<sup>7</sup> James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Schiffman states in *Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism* that the first generation of Qumran scholars actually sought to find such connections, partially because of their own training as well as an intention to interpret new data to reaffirm their own biases (69).

<sup>9</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 70-71.

<sup>10</sup> Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources*, (Published on Behalf of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies by JSOT, 1989), 16-17.

this problem by describing a new way of interpreting Qumran, based on the community's own beliefs, goals and ideas.

### **Research Goals**

This project is an attempt to describe and explain the community's actions during the years in which they were an active cultural presence, and to explain why the community's behavior was often so noticeably different from other Jews – why the community was celibate, why its members practiced a lifestyle of ascetic poverty, why they developed their elaborate system of hierarchical authority and why they separated from the Temple system in the first place. These are all questions that Scrolls scholars have attempted to answer since the discovery of the Scrolls over sixty years ago, and the community has very often been described in terms of its relations with contemporary, well-known Jewish groups – the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, *Therapeutae* and Christians, as well as Greco-Roman philosophical schools such as the Neo-Platonists<sup>11</sup>.

I do not disregard the possibility that the Qumran community was influenced by contemporary sources. The community displayed notable similarities in some of their textual interpretations with the Sadducees – unsurprising, given that the Sadducees were associated with the priesthood, an association they are believed to have shared with the community's founders. No group, religious or otherwise, develops in a vacuum. Parallels between the group's actions, texts and beliefs exist within the extant historical record; were the Scroll library not so fragmentary, or were outside sources not so sparse, there would undoubtedly be more visible connections to be made. However, I believe the

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<sup>11</sup> “Contemporary” being a relative term; Christianity, for instance, did not develop into well after the Qumran community had been established.

most valuable way to interpret Qumran is to focus specifically on the *objective* of the community, and the ways in which their particular lifestyle was constructed so as to assist the community's members in the pursuit of that objective.

The ultimate goal of the community, as stated in their own texts, was to act as the “remnant” of Israel until the eschaton, when those unfaithful to Israel's covenant with God would be destroyed and a united, faithful Israelite nation would be restored. The community's actions in the meantime were developed so as to ensure that they were not corrupted, either materially or ideologically, by contaminating influences and thus lose their status as a working remnant. The community's unorthodox lifestyle was not practiced simply as a sign of piety or as a symbol of their disregard for the material world; it was instead a means of ensuring without question that their status as a remnant would remain uncompromised. In the next chapter, I will explain the full meaning of some of these terms – such as “remnant” and “covenant” – and how they are necessary for interpreting Qumran and its associated texts.

## CHAPTER 2 – TERMINOLOGY, METHODOLOGY AND CLARIFICATIONS

To fully explicate the “remnant”-based interpretation of Qumran, certain terms, definitions and concepts must be properly defined. This is particularly important because some key concepts in my reading of Qumran – like “ritual purity” – carry different meanings in the context of Qumran than they do elsewhere. Also, other terms such as the “covenant worldview” and “remnant” are used within this paper to refer to very specific subjects that might not be immediately known to the reader. In the interest of clarity, the following section will attempt to explain some of these terms and how these definitions can be used as a means of understanding Qumran.

### **The “Covenant Worldview”**

Qumran’s particular forms of behavior and general worldview were derived from the community’s self-perception within a very specific cultural and historical setting. This self-perception was informed by their founder’s own beliefs regarding the proper means of Jewish religious adherence. I refer to this system of beliefs and identities as the “covenant worldview”, and properly utilized it can significantly assist in explaining forms of behavior that scholars have historically found noteworthy at Qumran, such as the community’s dedication to poverty, celibacy, and their separation from the existing Temple system.

The covenant worldview originates in a distinct view toward Israel and the role of the Jewish people in the divine-human relationship. In this view, the primary

responsibility of “Israel”, as a body, was to uphold the rules of the covenant between God and Israel<sup>12</sup>. This covenant placed Israel in a privileged status with regard to the divine, although that status entailed certain responsibilities on the part of Israel – they were required to uphold faithfully the laws of the covenant agreement as handed down by Moses in the Torah.

The Law of the Torah consisted of 613 explicit laws, known individually as *mitzvah* (plural: *mitzvot*), which were detailed in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The subject of these laws varied widely. Many of the laws were simply the civil laws of the Israelite community, and there are thus many laws concerning marriage, legal proceedings, economic transactions, and warfare. Other laws were more explicitly focused on the divine-human relationship. Some laws described how to rid oneself of “ritual contamination”, a complex concept that will be described more fully below. Others describe the proper way to conduct the worship of God through an elaborate system of sacrifice, prayer and ritual action that came to be known as the “Temple cycle” or “Temple cult”.

The covenant stipulated that both parties – God and Israel – were obligated to perform certain actions, in the manner of a sovereign and vassal. The primary duty of Israel was to worship God through keeping the abovementioned laws. In return, God would bless the Israelite people with land, progeny, prosperity, and safety from their enemies. Failure to adhere to, or the insincere practice of, the rules of the covenant

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<sup>12</sup> “Israel”, in this sense, refers not to a state or other political entity, but to a symbolic collective derived from common ancestry and covenant obligation. The concept of “Israel” will be explained in more detail below, and again in chapter 3.

meant that Israel had failed to uphold their end of the covenant agreement, and would be punished with destructive retribution by God.

During the Second Temple period, the importance of covenant adherence was not simply a matter of pious scrupulosity. Far from being an abstract question of religious observance, faithfulness to the covenant was viewed as being a crucial factor to ensuring the perpetuity and prosperity of the Jewish people in the material present and immediate future<sup>13</sup>. This view, associated with the prophets (*nevi'im*) in the Hebrew Bible, existed at least as early as the prophet Amos, who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE<sup>14</sup>. However, it became particularly important as a guiding principle after the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The authors of such books as Jeremiah and Ezekiel viewed the destruction caused by the Babylonians as punishment for their failure to adequately perform their covenant obligations. To adherents of the covenant worldview, foreign domination and military conquest were viewed not by the desire of outside powers for territory or resources, but instead as the direct result of their own collective failure to adequately perform covenant-directed actions and the resulting disfavor of God.

As a result, for those who adhered to the covenant worldview, the necessity of upholding the covenant was a binding “motivation” in the Geertzian sense<sup>15</sup>. According to this worldview, failure to perform their ritual obligations would result in immediate

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<sup>13</sup> This was true for the authors and custodians of religious texts, at least. It is more difficult to determine how important such questions were in the minds of less observant segments of society, the uneducated, or those who for other reasons left few written records behind.

<sup>14</sup> Amos 2:4-5: “Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. So I will send a fire on Judah, and it will devour the strongholds of Jerusalem” (NRSV).

<sup>15</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), 90.

and disastrous consequences in the tangible present. In the Second Temple period, debates over legal practice, ritual purity and Torah interpretation were not simple theological disagreements. They were disputes upon which the very lives of their constituents could conceivably depend.

Another aspect of the covenant view of history is the general disfavor to which its pious message was received by the general populace and political and religious elites. The books of the prophets continually depict their authors in an antagonistic relationship with a largely impious society and particularly with social and political elites. The royalty, of course, bore the brunt of much criticism in both the northern and southern kingdoms. Books such as 1 and 2 Kings depict prophets like Elijah and Elisha engaging in spectacular conflicts with the royalty and the practitioners of foreign cult worship. The famous conflict between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, in which God sends down fire from heaven to consume an offered sacrifice, is one such example. Other prophets, such as Hosea and Jeremiah, were more known for acts of social criticism toward the public and elite figures, and their message was poorly received by those elements of society with a vested interest in the status quo. In either case, the general pattern of a small, piously adherent subsection of society being persecuted by an uncaring populace and hostile rulers is clearly present in prophetic literature.

According to their own accounts, the authors of the Scrolls clearly believed themselves to fit into this framework of a faithful minority who were being persecuted by unfaithful leaders, although outside sources paint a slightly different picture. The Qumran community receives scant specific mention in historical texts of the period. Two Jewish writers did mention community identified with Qumran – the Jewish historian



Flavius Josephus, who wrote after the failed revolt in 70 CE, and Philo of Alexandria, who wrote about a generation before Josephus. Pliny the Elder, a Gentile geographer and explorer writing in the mid-first century CE, in his *Natural Histories*, also mentioned Qumran briefly<sup>16</sup>. These depictions were mostly positive, and depict the Qumran community in a light that would have been favorably received by philosophically minded pagans.

It is clear from the community's own writings, however, that their reception by local rulers in Judaea was much more hostile. The early years of the community are described as being marked by violent persecution, in which their leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, was possibly killed<sup>17</sup>. Some of the oldest documents in the scroll library, such as the *Damascus Document* and *MMT*, show an attempt at reconciliation on the part of the community with the Temple authorities<sup>18</sup>. However, these attempts were ultimately fruitless, and the community's sense of persecution for their advocacy of true and proper covenant adherence was strengthened by the ensuing persecution. Later documents, such as the *War Scroll*, seem to show that the community had given up on the outside world until the eschaton.

In short, the "covenant worldview" was the belief that faithful adherence to the laws of the covenant was an extremely pressing obligation on Israel, with great rewards for achievement and dire consequences for failure. Despite this, the prevailing social

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<sup>16</sup> Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources*, (Published on Behalf of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies by JSOT, 1989), 32.

<sup>17</sup> James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 284.

<sup>18</sup> The full significance of the *Damascus Document* will be discussed in more detail below.

opinion of the general populace and especially social elites were often hostile toward proper covenant adherence and those who practiced it. The result of this was a tension between conforming to a society that was perceived as unfaithful, and the divine command to uphold the laws of the covenant in spite of such social obstacles. This covenant worldview was thoroughly grounded in religious texts that were widely studied during the Qumran period both within the Qumran movement and the larger Jewish scholarly community.

### **Non-Jewish Groups and Historical Perceptions**

A crucial element of the covenant worldview was the idea that, in the event that Israel failed to uphold their side of the covenant agreement, they would be punished by God. By the Second Temple period, and especially by the Qumran period, it was widely accepted that this destruction was manifested in the conquest of Israel by foreign, non-Jewish military powers<sup>19</sup>. This was grounded in the belief that the previous conquests of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah – in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, respectively – were both the result of failure to faithfully uphold the tenets of the covenant.

During the years preceding the founding of the Hasmonean state – the years in which the Qumran movement was formed – the covenant worldview would have seemed particularly timely. The late Second Temple period was a time of considerable political instability in which many forms of Jewish religious practice were constantly under attack. Roughly thirty years prior to the founding of Qumran, Judaea erupted in revolt against

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<sup>19</sup> Again, “Israel” in this context is more of a symbolic construct than an actual nation-state, although the latter was more applicable during the pre-Exilic period when Israel and Judah were functioning political entities.

Greek Seleucid leaders who had recently seized control of Judaea from their rivals, the Egyptian Ptolemies. Under the leadership of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucids attempted to outlaw key Jewish religious practices such as circumcision and a monotheistic Temple cult<sup>20</sup>. The leaders of the rebellion against the Greeks, known as the Hasmonean family, would go on to set up an independent Jewish state that reached from Galilee in the north to Idumea in the south. The Hasmonean state, however, was a small regional power forced to navigate a very dangerous political arena involving conflicts between larger powers such as the Seleucids, Ptolemies and Romans<sup>21</sup>. Eventually, the Romans seized power officially, and although local leaders such as the Herods continued to rule the region, they did so as a client state in service to and at the mercy of a colonial power.

Much more could, and has, been written about the historical and political situation of the Qumran community; in the interest of brevity, historical information will only be explored as it specifically informed the community's responsive behaviors. The significance of the covenant history framework in a late Second Temple setting is that, for the entirety of the Qumran community's existence, foreign powers existed that could invade Judaea if they chose to do so. This would bring about the destructive retribution of God that the community believed was the inevitable result of failure to uphold the tenets of the covenant. Significantly, the community did not simply believe that this destruction was a possibility. Their views toward the coming destruction were significantly more developed. As the community became less involved in the world of

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<sup>20</sup> Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

Temple-observant Judaism, it became a tenet of the community's own system of belief that the forthcoming punishment was inevitable and necessary, and that the outcome of the war was preordained by God<sup>22</sup>. The community held that this imminent destruction would be the final such event in Israelite history. Afterwards, they themselves would be placed in their rightful position of authority over greater Israel and ensure that the covenant was scrupulously upheld forever.

Given these eschatological leanings, it is important to consider when studying Qumran that the community would have viewed history in a very different light than a modern historian. A lack of foreknowledge regarding Judaism's survival and development in a post-Temple world drastically changes the framing of events during the Qumran period. The community did not see themselves as living during a period of incubation for later movements, such as Rabbinic Judaism or early Christianity, but as a direct continuation of the older Tanakh narrative<sup>23</sup>.

In the pre-Exilic period, the dual monarchies of Israel and Judah were seen to have been destroyed by foreign powers for their failure to adhere to the covenant law. This period climaxed with the destruction of the first Temple in 586 BCE<sup>24</sup>. After the

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<sup>22</sup> Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness* (London: Oxford UP, 1962), 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Modern scholarship has generally come to disregard the once-credible view that the Second Temple period was a time of "Late Judaism" (which would be soon superseded by Christianity), given that this approach forced the scholar to view one tradition through the lens of a separate, anachronistic tradition. However, it is in my view still important to keep in mind that groups like Qumran very much viewed themselves as existing in a meaning-laden *present* that would be continued, in some sense, even in the eschatological future; when the rebellion the community had long predicted finally came to pass, its effects were drastically different than they had expected. Although it is tempting to regard the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE as the "climax" of the Second Temple period, it is vital to remember that the community saw themselves at the end of history, rather than in an intermediary period.

<sup>24</sup> Moses Shuliyass, *The History of the Jewish People, Volume I: The Antiquity* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 48-49.

exile, the Temple was rebuilt and, later, a Jewish ruler was established in Jerusalem. However, these successes were quickly marked by the same failures as the pre-Exilic rulers, and Judaea was continually threatened by foreign powers who had displayed a clear desire to wipe out Jewish religious practices. Thus, the community conceived of itself not as living in the last era of Jewish Temple worship, but as the last chain of a centuries-old cycle of failure, redemption and regeneration.

### **The “Remnant” as a Concept and its Relation to Qumran**

Another important concept undergirding the Qumran worldview was their own perceived role within the larger body of Israel. The group understood themselves as being the only faithful members of a wider, failed religious community<sup>25</sup>. However, the Qumran community was not simply the few members of a wider group that knew and practiced an “orthodox” religion (or what they considered to be an “orthodox approach” to their religion). Instead, they worked to conform to a very specific role in the eschatological narrative. As guardians of true covenant adherence, they were to be the “seed” from which a more faithful Israel would be reborn. I refer to this particular role as a “remnant”, because that is the term used in the community’s own texts.

A “remnant”, as the term will be used in this paper, is a Jewish population within a certain purpose and cultural setting. They exist during a time of widespread disregard for the covenant when the greater nation of Israel is soon to be condemned and punished for their disobedience. Despite this setting of public hostility and ensuing destruction, the

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<sup>25</sup> In the course of this thesis, I often use the term “Temple-observant society” to describe the Judaeans Jewish world outside Qumran. This term is not entirely flawless – there were undoubtedly some Jews living in the region who had little if any connection to the Temple – it does highlight one of the major differences between the community and those outside of it by the *community’s own* conception, and is thus workable within the narrow scope of this project.

remnant remains faithful to the covenant's tenets in their entirety. As a result of their adherence to the covenant, they will be spared during the destruction of the greater Israel and will thus ensure the perpetuity of Israel as a people.

Like the covenant worldview, the concept of the remnant is based on the Biblical narrative. It is most commonly found in texts that sprang up during the post-exilic period. However, shades of the concept can be seen in some of the older texts in the Hebrew Bible. One of the most prominent examples is found in 2 Kings 19, when the prophet Elijah is fleeing from royal authorities after his confrontation with the prophets of Baal. Although Elijah believes he is the only prophet of Israel left, God assures him that those who have been unfaithful to the covenant will be destroyed. There are "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him"<sup>26</sup>. Even older stories, such as the stories of Noah and Lot in Genesis, also contain some similarities to the remnant concept<sup>27</sup>. These older examples are much less specific than the concept of the remnant mentioned above, but they do serve as examples of a similar concept existing from a very early date in Jewish religious literature.

Ultimately, however, the concept of the remnant as I use it is derived not from texts in the Hebrew Bible, but from the scrolls themselves. The community's remnant identity is mentioned most specifically in the opening lines of the *Damascus Document*:

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<sup>26</sup> 2 Kings 19:18, NRSV.

<sup>27</sup> The story of Lot, depicted in Genesis 19, shows Abraham requesting that God spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if there were as few as ten righteous people within them. In the Flood narrative, God destroys almost the entire earth with water but ensures that humans and animals are able to repopulate the earth through their preservation in the Ark.

“Listen now all you who know righteousness, and consider the works of God; for He has a dispute with all flesh and will condemn all those who despise Him.

For when they were unfaithful and forsook Him, He hid His face from Israel and His Sanctuary and delivered them up to the sword. But remembering the Covenant of the forefathers, He left a remnant to Israel and did not deliver it up to be destroyed. And in the age of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after He had given them into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, He visited them, and He caused a plant root to spring from Israel and Aaron and to inherit His Land and to prosper on the good things of His earth. And they perceived their iniquity and recognized that they were guilty men, yet for twenty years they were like blind men groping for the way.

And God observed their deeds, that they sought Him with a whole heart, and He raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart. And he made known to the latter generations of traitors, those who departed from the way. This was the time of which it is written, Like a stubborn heifer thus was Israel stubborn, when the Scoffer arose who shed over Israel the waters of lies. He caused them to wander in a pathless wilderness, laying low the everlasting heights, abolishing the righteousness and removing the boundary with which the forefathers had marked out their inheritance, that he might call down on them the curses of His Covenant and deliver them to the avenging sword of the Covenant. For they sought smooth things and preferred illusions and they watched for breaks and chose the fair neck; and they justified the wicked and condemned the just, and they transgressed the Covenant and violated the Precept. They banded together against the life of the righteous and loathed all who walked in perfection; they pursued them with the sword and exulted in the strife of the people. And the anger of God was kindled against their congregation so that He ravaged all their multitude; and their deeds were defilement before Him.

Hear now, all you who enter the Covenant, and I will unstop your ears concerning the ways of the wicked.”<sup>28</sup>

As an original composition by the community, this section of the *Damascus Document* provides a great deal of information about the community’s self-identity.

They were clearly adherents of covenant-oriented historical framework<sup>29</sup>, wherein Israel

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<sup>28</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 1.3-2.4. A very similar passage is found in Column 3.5-20, tying the remnant concept to the period of the Exodus and the conquest.

<sup>29</sup> The explicit reference to the destruction of the first Temple would seem to lend credence to the community’s sense of cyclical time – the events of their own era are a mirror of similar events in the pre-Exilic era. The reference, however, could also simply have been the result of determining dates in relation to other prominent events in history. The rest of the passage refers to events that would have been in the relatively recent past of the original authors, such as the actions of community’s founders and rival groups such as the Pharisees (commonly understood to be the “seekers of smooth things”).

was punished for unfaithfulness by a destructive invasion. The authors then describe themselves quite explicitly as the “plant root” from which a future, perfected Israel will arise. This is the core of the remnant concept: no matter how far *most* of Israel had fallen from the covenant ideal, a small, observant subset of society would persevere through persecution in order to perpetuate Israel as a people with a special connection to God.

A similar passage exists in a document known as *MMT* (*Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah*, or “Some Observances of the Torah”). This document is written to a “you” party – sometimes singular, and usually understood to be a Hasmonean High Priest – and explains various aspects of the Torah, or Law, that the authors believe the recipient is practicing incorrectly<sup>30</sup>. This letter describes the covenant worldview, and the necessity of rulers to adhere to the Law lest they suffer the same fate as the unfaithful rulers of the pre-Exilic era; even more importantly, *MMT* states that the community has “separated from the mass of the people” and refuses “to be in contact with them” “because of these matters”<sup>3132</sup>.

The Qumran movement, therefore, was formed with the intention of playing a clearly stated social role. The movement and its members consisted of those – by its own

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<sup>30</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y.: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 121.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Although the overall meaning is clear, the original documents on which these passages were recorded are highly damaged; this particular section is preserved on fragments 4Q397, 4Q398, and 4Q399 (228-229).

<sup>32</sup> At the point in time when *MMT* was written, it is believed that the community still hoped that the Temple establishment would see the error of its ways and the community would rejoin greater Judaeen society. This is in contrast with the view of the *Damascus Document*, wherein the community’s self-identification as a remnant is more directly stated. The *Damascus Document* is believed to be a later composition and probably reflects a gradual change over time in the community’s ideas about its relation to wider Judaeen society, although the possibility still exists – given that *MMT* is so fragmentary – that the remnant identification was as old as *MMT* and was either left out of that document, or is no longer preserved within it.



internal definition - among the wider body of Israel who adhered to the stipulations of the covenant without fail.

### **The “Qumran Community”**

The correct use of terminology to describe the Qumran community is necessary to understanding the community on its own terms. As stated above, one of my primary criticisms of earlier research on Qumran is that the community is often described in anachronistic or culturally inappropriate terms. Unfortunately, the barriers of language, culture and time often make the expression of such proper terminology difficult. Certain terms translated directly have different connotations in English than they would have to their original audience; “ritual” would be a good example of this. Terms used by the community themselves – such as the “saints”, or the “sons of Zadok” – are usually cumbersome or more poetic than descriptive. The community often refers to itself as a *yahad*, the term used in the *Community Rule (Serekh ha-Yahad)*. However, even this term is somewhat problematic because it carries different connotations in different texts, and the word *yahad* is not necessarily an explicit reference to the Qumran community as a discrete entity in the texts of the Scrolls. Finally, there seems to be strong evidence that the inhabitants of the Qumran site were members of a larger, interconnected religious collective – some of whom seem to have lived very differently than those members who inhabited Qumran.

As a result, I use the term “Qumran community” to refer to this larger, interconnected community, including groups associated with the Qumran religious collective who lived off-site. This term is necessarily somewhat inaccurate, and it may

seem odd to refer to potential communities in other cities as part of the “Qumran community”. However, this term does at least permit a discussion of the group without resorting to labels such as “sect” or “order” that bring in problematic associations and inaccurately describe the community’s lifestyle. Hopefully, the term will make up for inaccuracy what it lacks stylistically.

### **Purity, Contamination and Contagion**

Another vital structural element undergirding the Qumran worldview is known as “ritual purity”. Ritual purity in a Second Temple context can be a complex subject for discussion because ritual purity as a cross-cultural concept, often informed by readings of the Hebrew Bible, was widely analyzed in anthropological literature during the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup>. However, “ritual purity” has a specific meaning in a Second Temple context that is not necessarily applicable in cross-cultural analysis. For the purposes of this paper, “ritual purity” will always refer to the Jewish religious concept; it is not intended to have a wider anthropological applicability.

Ritual purity in a Second Temple Jewish context could be described briefly as a state in which the ritual participant is sufficiently untainted by profane influences to freely and safely carry out ritual acts necessary to proper maintenance of the human-divine relationship in such a way that these rituals are both efficacious and unlikely to result in divine retribution<sup>34</sup>. In other words, ritual participants who wished to carry out

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2005), xviii-xx.

<sup>34</sup> This definition is my own, although other definitions of ritual purity in a Second Temple context (and a Jewish context in general) exist, and some scholars – such as Jacob Neusner – have noted some problematic cultural baggage within the term “ritual purity” itself (ie, “ritual” is sometimes viewed as being

the rituals stipulated in the covenant had to be in this state of purity in order for the ritual to be considered acceptable by God and, by extension, for the covenant to be upheld.

The opposite of ritual purity was contamination, which originated from a variety of sources. Some of the most common sources were bodily discharges, sexual intercourse, childbirth, disease, and death<sup>35</sup>. As the above examples demonstrate, it was expected that even the most devout would become contaminated at times and there was not necessarily a moral stigma attached to become ritually contaminated. In some cases, such as funerary rites, it was actually obligatory to acquire ritual contamination in the performance of proper ritual behavior. Other behavior could be similarly contaminating. One ritual known as the “red calf ritual” involved the sacrifice and burning of a red calf, whose ashes would be used as a way of purifying the corpse impurity of others<sup>36</sup>. However, during the course of this ritual, the priests who performed the sacrifice would themselves be rendered unclean during the performance of it.

The mechanics of purity were complex, and were not unanimously agreed upon by all Jews during the Qumran period. Purity, contamination, and the circumstances under which they were transmitted were fiercely debated subjects within various schools of religious thought. This trend only intensified during the Rabbinic period, well after the destruction of the second Temple<sup>37</sup>. Because purity was necessary for acts of worship,

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‘hollow’ or ‘superficial’). For further reference, see Jacob Neusner’s *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* or Hannah K. Harrington’s *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis*.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 11-15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

<sup>37</sup> Hannah Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1993), 33-36. Harrington notes that the gradual trend over time was toward more rigorous demands for purity even during the period of the Torah’s compilation.

the maintenance of purity touched widely disparate features of everyday life. For instance, in Jewish communities, winepresses often featured *mikva'ot* for purification in order to ensure that the wine remained uncontaminated during the production process<sup>38</sup>.

Contamination was generally spread through physical contact with its various sources, and was highly 'contagious'. Touching a leper, menstrual blood, or even a (stagnant) water source into which the body of a dead animal had fallen rendered one instantly impure. Impurity was not dangerous as long as the impure individual was not brought into contact with the divine. However, contact with divine sources in an impure state could bring about punishment from God<sup>39</sup>.

The Qumran community applied this principle of purity and contamination even further, beyond its immediately known purpose for keeping the Temple site and the bodies of its congregants ritually clean. In Qumran's reckoning, the remnant itself functioned as a kind of ritual 'body' whose boundaries needed to be kept separate from unclean sources. The collective body of the remnant stood in as much danger of contamination as the individual bodies of its members. Because any discrepancy, failure of covenant obligation or false teaching compromised the integrity of the community's collective body, potentially contaminating elements were thus extended not only to prosaic sources of contamination like menstrual blood and leprosy, but also to potentially

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<sup>38</sup> Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 17. Liquids were especially vulnerable to contamination, a fact which will become relevant when analyzing the community's sacral meals.

<sup>39</sup> The *War Scroll* provides some examples of this. In its conception of the eschatological war camp, those living in the camp are to maintain a state of absolute purity at all times, because of "the angels" dwelling among them. Attempting to force contact between the divine and the profane would fracture the divine-human relationship. Other parallels exist in the extant textual record. The Hebrew Bible/Tanakh features several stories in which humans who transgress purity boundaries are punished. Uzzah, who touched the Ark of the Covenant against divine commandment, was struck dead as a result of such contact with the sacred.

problematic behaviors, social practices, or any other form of action or belief that could lead to covenant violation. This is why the rules along which the community were structured seem to be so focused on the prohibition of contact with impure or contaminated sources, and why internal punishments were usually framed in terms of restriction from the ‘purity’ of the community<sup>40</sup>.

### **Israel as a Symbolic Concept**

By the time the community was formed, the idea of a unified nation of Israel living under a single ruler with a single, homogeneous approach to religious practice was far removed from reality. The Qumran community conceived of “Israel” in a highly idealized form that was based upon readings of the Torah and other biblical texts<sup>41</sup>. Unfortunately, the community never offers a concisely stated definition of who is a member of “Israel” and who is not<sup>42</sup>. They do seem to have believed that membership in Israel was an ascribed status related to birth, and harshly criticized those members of Israel who failed to uphold the laws of the covenant as they interpreted them<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> This concept will be elaborated upon more fully in subsequent chapters, particularly Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>41</sup> This idealization comes across most clearly in their eschatological texts, such as the *War Scroll* and the *Temple Scroll*.

<sup>42</sup> This sense of vagueness regarding the boundaries of Judaism was not unique to the Qumran community. Nearly all historical texts, whether written by Jews or otherwise, take for granted that some people are ‘Jews’ and some are clearly not, but seemed to feel little need to draw explicit lines between the two.

<sup>43</sup> The *War Scroll*, in particular, goes into great detail explaining that those among Israel who have failed to uphold the laws of the covenant are in danger of imminent destruction and punishment, although the threats of punishment against those who fail to adhere to the covenant properly are a constant recurring theme in most of the community’s original compositions.

Qumran's concept of Israel was also in some ways antiquated, or at least based on pre-Exilic ideas about the nature of Israelite identity. Their social organization, for instance, attempted to accommodate the twelve 'tribes' of Israel – social and geographical lineages that existed in the pre-Exilic period. By the time Qumran was established, this form of tribal organization had lost most of its original relevance, and with the high degree of intermarriage, geographical mobility, and outward expansion that was evident during the Qumran period, tribal affiliation was mostly important for genealogical reasons, and had little impact on daily life<sup>44</sup>.

The simplest way to describe Qumran's idea of Israel, in my view, is "all those who should be practicing the laws of the covenant, whether they currently do so or not". Although this definition is not without its flaws – there are more aspects to being Jewish, obviously, than adherence to a covenant – it is as discrete a statement of Qumran's own definition as I have been able to devise. Qumran divided the Jewish world into themselves and everyone else, and the primary distinguishing factor between these two groups was that their own community upheld the Law as it was intended to be upheld, while outsiders did not. Although Gentiles are occasionally mentioned in the Scrolls, they are usually only present in negative contexts such as being a potential source of contamination of the Temple site<sup>45</sup>. Non-Jews figure into the community's cosmology

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<sup>44</sup> Even genealogical records were rarely kept by common people. The exception to this was the Levites, who were accorded special social privileges (they could, for instance, go further into the Temple than other tribes) both in the Qumran community and outside of it.

<sup>45</sup> Specifically, *MMT* describes potential problems arising from Gentile influence in Jerusalem, which shall be discussed below.

only inasmuch as they are relevant to the narrative of Israel's corruption and eventual restoration, and were perceived as being outside the boundaries of the law altogether<sup>46</sup>.

For the purposes of this paper, "Israel" will be used as a term to refer to Qumran's conception of the collective of people united by a common ancestry that are bound by the divine covenant to obey the rules and follow the ritual practices found in the Torah. It does not refer to any particular polity or even necessarily to an *ethnos*, but instead to the symbolic "wider Israel" as Qumran envisioned it. This includes both those who do not follow their obligations – most of wider Israel – as well as the community itself, who are acting as the remnant according to the covenant worldview.

### **Judaism and "Jewishness"**

Briefly and succinctly defining "Judaism" as it existed in a Second Temple context is a nearly impossible endeavor. Some have attempted to describe practices, actions and beliefs that were widespread enough to form a kind of rough outline of what Judaism was during the time period<sup>47</sup>. However, such efforts have been problematic because of the sheer diversity of practice and belief described in extant textual accounts<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 281. Gentiles do play an important role in the community's eschatological narrative, where they are presented as being the ultimate source of the corrupt greater Israel's downfall – although they themselves will be destroyed by the community at the conclusion of the eschatological war.

<sup>47</sup> E.P. Sanders is one of the most prominent of these scholars, and explores this idea in his 1992 book *Judaism: Belief and Practice* (although that work focuses primarily on the Roman period, and is not necessarily as chronologically pertinent to Qumran's origins). This was a divergence from older, "normative" models of Judaism, it still proved a highly controversial position, being criticized as not accommodating sufficient room for diversity of practice. A later compilation of essays, *Common Judaism*, attempted to address some of these criticisms; both works would serve as a further reference on this subject.

<sup>48</sup> John J. Collins, "Judaism, Practice and Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE by E.P. Sanders,". *The Journal of Religion* 73.2 (Apr. 1993), 288-289.

Historically, scholars have tended to analyze ancient Judaism in terms of the “schools” of Judaism presented by Josephus in *The Jewish War*. This has often been presented in terms of competing “sects” of Judaism – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots, while the unaffiliated presumably adhered to one “school” more favorably than the others. This view is not entirely without its applications, because clearly there were individuals who were identified as or identified themselves as members of these groups. However, the “sectarian” model is also flawed and has comparatively little applicability to describing Judaeen society – much less Jewish society – as a whole during the Second Temple period. Judging by historical accounts, the Pharisees and Sadducees competed fiercely and even violently for royal favor<sup>49</sup>, and their beliefs regarding such crucial subjects as the nature and purpose of the Temple rituals or the possibility of the afterlife diverged widely between the two groups. Yet, for all this divergence, Judaeans – Pharisees included – participated in the Temple system, over which the Sadducees, as the priestly class, exercised control. While there were clearly “schools of thought” as Josephus described them, such identities were undoubtedly fluid and were influenced just as much, if not more, by socioeconomic and political factors as they were by religious tenets and ritual behaviors.

The “sectarian” conception of Second Temple Jewish groups is also problematic in that it assumes there is some original, discrete “Judaism” from which such “sects” would have originated. But, as illustrated above, a considerably plurality of belief exists within the Jewish world, and there was no single or composite factor with which such a “Judaism” could be identified. Such factors were instead in a constant state of flux and

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<sup>49</sup> Salome Alexandra, for instance, was a patron of the Pharisees; later, Herod was described by Josephus as favoring the Essenes.



individuals could often move between the “Jewish” and “Gentile” worlds if they had the desire and reason to do so<sup>50</sup>.

Despite, or because of, the confusion surrounding Jewish identity, the Qumran community divided the world into several distinct categories. One of these categories could be referred to as “Jewish”, although they did not use that term<sup>51</sup>. Usually, the Scroll authors will use terms similar to those found in the Tanakh, such as “the congregation of Israel”, tribal or ancestral affiliations (such as the “sons of Aaron” or the “Sons of Judah”), or nondescript terms such as “the people”; in other words, they describe themselves as being a “nation” of interconnected tribes and families.

Regardless of the terminology used, Qumran clearly believed there was such an entity as “Israel”, and the members of that body – the members of Israel, if not “Jews” *per se* – were bound not only by an ancestral covenant with God, but by a particular interpretation of that covenant. The members of the Qumran community, especially their leaders and teachers, were the custodians of this interpretation and it was forbidden to share the community’s teachings with outsiders. The Qumran community was not claiming to be the “true Israel”, but instead the few among a larger Israel who were living as God had commanded their people to live.

In the minds of the community at the very least, a dichotomy exists between “Qumranic Judaism” and “non-Qumranic Judaism”. As a result, in this thesis I use terms

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<sup>50</sup> This fluidity of Jewish identity was quite troubling to Qumran, likely because it created confusion as to who was bound by the rules of the covenant. This will be described more thoroughly in the next chapter.

<sup>51</sup> The Greek term for “Jew”, *Judaios*, is not commonly used in the Scrolls library, as the Scrolls themselves are generally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. *Iudaioi* also simply meant “Judaean”, a geographical and political designation. For further reference see chapter 3 of Shaye Cohen’s *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*.

such as “Temple-observant society” to describe the Jewish world outside Qumran. This is not a particularly artful solution – as mentioned earlier, there were many Jews in the ancient world that had little interaction with the Temple system. However, the term is true in its essence, as no other group in Antiquity rejected the existing Temple entirely. Even the Sicarii, who violently opposed the existing social order and publicly killed social elites, did so primarily in the context of the existing social structure. Qumran, on the other hand, eventually gave up on the Temple system until the eschaton. The contrast between “Temple-observant Judaism” and “Qumran”, while not flawless, allows us to discuss the community’s origin and the points of divergence they had with the society in which they lived.

## **The Temple**

A great deal could be written about the significance of the Temple as a structure, institution and symbol. The full significance of the Temple as viewed by the community will be explored thoroughly in chapter 5. For now, however, it will be sufficient to describe what the Temple was and why it was so crucial in the community’s view of the world.

Second Temple Judaism was notable for being tied to a single, clearly delineated location – the location today known as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. According to the tradition<sup>52</sup>, it was on this location, and this location *only*, where the system of sacrifices

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<sup>52</sup> Prior to the reign of Josiah (641-609 BCE) in Judah, Israelite religion actually displayed a much broader range of spiritual loci; this gradually fell out of favor as the monarchy began to centralize religious power in Jerusalem. However, even by the Second Temple period the issue was far from resolved. The central disagreement between Jews and Samaritans had its origin in the proper location of the Temple; the Samaritans had their own Temple site in Samaria. This dispute produced a great deal of animosity between the two groups during the late Second Temple period.

and rituals known as the Temple cult could be performed. Performance of the Temple cycle at other locations, no matter how sincerely motivated, were not efficacious and thus were unable to fulfill Israel's end of the covenant agreement. Jews considered Samaritans heretical largely because of the fact that they had constructed their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim, even though the system of sacrifices at the Samaritan Temple was quite similar to those in Jerusalem. Likewise, an attempt to construct another Temple in Upper Egypt likely failed as a schismatic exercise due to the fact that it did not conform to the orthodox, Jerusalem-based conception of Temple location<sup>53</sup>.

Understanding the singular nature of the Temple system is crucial to understanding the motivations and behavior of the Qumran community. In their conception of the world, if the extant, physical site of the Temple were to be somehow corrupted, it would not be possible to simply split off from the community and construct another Temple elsewhere. By its very nature, such a Temple would be no more effective at maintaining the Israelite covenant than the corrupted original site<sup>54</sup> or the improper Temple site used by the Samaritans. This meant that the community, despite their clear concern over the maintenance of the Israelite covenant, was entirely unable to perform in the ritual system that the Temple was constructed to accommodate. As a result, the community innovated new ways in which the covenant could be upheld in its

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Rosenberg, "The Jewish Temple at Elephantine", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67, No. 1, Mar. 2004, pp4-13.

<sup>54</sup> This, of course, assumes that the community would have had the resources available to construct another Temple site, which they almost certainly did not. Even the comparatively modest Temple of Zerubabel, constructed early in the Second Temple era with the financial backing of the Persian government, was a monumental public structure that required considerable funding and labor to complete. The later Temple project began by Herod was an even more impressive structure, featuring precious materials and requiring several decades to complete. But even this structure would have been dwarfed by the idealized structure imagined in the *Temple Scroll*, which was so large that it would have been physically impossible to construct on the Temple Mount site.

essence if not directly. This system of innovation likely motivated the community to look for other ways in which the essence of the covenant could be upheld in their alternate society.

The Temple was serviced by a class of priests, who performed the Temple sacrifices and conducted other covenant rituals on the Temple site<sup>55</sup>. The priesthood was a hereditary position and, in practice, the Temple priests formed the wealthy aristocracy of Judaea during the Qumran period<sup>56</sup>. This priestly class was often involved in local political disputes and was generally known to be accommodating to foreign rulers and the maintenance of the status quo. The High Priest was usually the most powerful political position in Judaea during the Qumran period, and the office of the High Priest was fought over constantly during periods of political instability<sup>57</sup>. This was in direct contrast with the ideal ‘covenant’ view of history, in which ecclesiastical and secular powers were scrupulously separated<sup>58</sup>.

The Temple was also notable for the fact that it was viewed as the dwelling place of God. It was for this reason that the elaborate system of safeguards and purity restrictions associated with the Temple was developed. The most sacred spot in the Temple was known as the Holy of Holies and was only accessible to the High Priest, and only then on specific ritual occasions such as the Day of Atonement. The degree of

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<sup>55</sup> Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 48.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Moses Shulvass, *The History of the Jewish People, Volume I: The Antiquity* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 79-84.

<sup>58</sup> A story illustrative of this principle is found in 1 Samuel, where Saul, the first king of Israel, loses his throne because he performed sacrifices intended to be performed by the High Priest. See 1 Samuel 13: 8-14.

holiness decreased in a series of radiating levels, access to which was carefully controlled based on degree of ritual purity. One courtyard was accessible only to Levites, the next was accessible to all Jewish males, and the outer courtyard was also accessible to women. Gentiles were not allowed permission, supposedly under penalty of death, to enter any of the interior Temple precincts, although they were allowed access the Temple Mount itself<sup>59</sup>. Even those who were ‘allowed’ into certain areas of the Temple had to make sure they were ritually pure before entering the interior areas of the complex, lest the site be contaminated. It was part of the ritual duties of the priests to ensure that purification rituals for those seeking them were performed properly.

If practiced correctly, this system ensured that no contact existed between God and profane or contaminated sources. Whether the Temple was viewed as the *literal* dwelling place of God in the Second Temple era is debatable, although the divine presence was explicitly assumed during the pre-Exilic period<sup>60</sup>. Even without such a stated presence, however, maintaining the internal purity of the Temple site was one of the primary requirements of proper covenant adherence and was of high importance to the Qumran community.

The Temple was also highly important from the standpoint of the covenant worldview. As both the dwelling place of God and the seat of power for antagonistic political authorities, the Temple was a symbol of the community’s present struggles and future promise. Its perceived corruption – mostly ignored by the wider Jewish community – reinforced the community’s self-perception as a remnant, since the rest of

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<sup>59</sup> Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 67.

<sup>60</sup> Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 126.

Israel continued to participate in a ritual system that Qumran viewed as inefficacious and inadequate.

### **The Essenes and Qumran**

In his description of the Jewish world, Flavius Josephus described four “schools” of Judaism – the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Essenes<sup>61</sup>. The Pharisees and Sadducees have long been well-known in western scholarship because they are also discussed at length in the Christian New Testament, while the Zealots were a violently anti-Roman political/religious group most known for their actions leading up to the first Jewish revolt. The Essenes, by contrast, were relatively unknown to Western scholarship for centuries after the destruction of the Temple. Josephus describes the beliefs and practices of the Essenes at length in *The Wars of the Jews*. They are also discussed by Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher who predated Josephus, and the Roman Gentile author Pliny the Elder<sup>62</sup>, in *Every Good Man is Free* and the *Natural Histories*, respectively. However, these accounts alone provide little information and until recently the Essenes, lacking descendants, had faded into history.

The Essenes returned to scholarly attention in the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The community depicted in the scrolls practiced a lifestyle remarkably similar – but not identical – to that which the classical sources attributed to the Essenes. Josephus, for instance, describes the Essenes as living a lifestyle of celibacy

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<sup>61</sup> Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Flavius Josephus: Eyewitness to Rome's First-Century Conquest of Judea* (New York: Macmillan Pub., 1993), 24.

<sup>62</sup> Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources*, (Published on Behalf of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies by JSOT, 1989), 1.

and communal poverty, and devoting their efforts toward charity and virtue<sup>63</sup>.

Furthermore, Pliny describes a community of Essenes living in a community “to the west of the Dead Sea”; “below” the community is the settlement of Engedi<sup>64</sup>. This location would place Pliny’s community in the vicinity of Qumran. Because of these parallels, the idea that the community at Qumran was an Essene settlement has gained favor in the field of Scrolls research. This theory was first put forth by Eleazar Sukenik and has subsequently achieved considerable credence in the field of Scrolls research<sup>65</sup>. If the Essene hypothesis is in fact accurate, it would be a considerable boon to Scrolls research, since it provides scholars with multiple outside attestations of the community’s behavior while they were still an active social and cultural presence in Judaea.

However, that Qumran was an Essene settlement is not unanimous, and some remain skeptical of the connection between the two groups. These skeptics believe that it is premature to assume that simply because similarities exist between the two groups that they must have been one and the same, and point out discrepancies between the accounts of the classical sources and the Scrolls themselves. For instance, the degree to which the community was celibate seems to vary between the *Damascus Document*, the *Community Rule*, and Josephus. Josephus and the *Community Rule* seem to describe a community of celibate men, whereas the *Damascus Document* describes a community partially made up of women and children<sup>66</sup>. The Essene hypothesis has also been criticized for the fact that

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<sup>63</sup> (iii) *War* 2. 119- 128.

<sup>64</sup> *Natural History* 5. 17, 4 (73).

<sup>65</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 25-26.

<sup>66</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 43. Josephus does allot for “another group” of Essenes that marry in

it has often been used as a way of “Christianizing” the community – that is, since the Essenes were believed to have been a “proto-monastic” community, headed by a “bishop”, then the community at Qumran was therefore somehow a predecessor to Christianity<sup>67</sup>. Such explicitly Christian connections have fallen out of favor since new dating techniques have placed the founding of the community in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, well before the development of Christianity.

Despite these objections, I believe the Essene interpretation of Qumran to be a valid one. First, the discrepancies between the classical sources and the scrolls are, in my view, comparatively minor, and can be accounted for partially through the use of the remnant model. It is not necessarily true that behavior in some locations would have corresponded directly with behavior elsewhere. The variable practice of celibacy could be accounted for as variations *within* the community. This would seem especially relevant in the context of Jewish religious practice, since regulations did in fact vary based on location – purity laws were extremely different in the divine presence, such as at the Temple, than they were in more prosaic locations. It is also quite believable to me that, on some matters, the accounts provided by either the classical sources, the Scroll authors or both were not entirely accurate. Given that most of the classical sources likely never studied the Essenes in an in-depth, “ethnographic” fashion, it is quite believable that some details would have been lost in their accounts.

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*War*, but he mentions them in only in passing. Whether this reflects the latter’s importance to Josephus or his intended audience is up for detbate.

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 18.



The second objection - that the Essene model is tied up in “Christianizing” interpretations of Qumran - has some validity, as I mentioned in the introduction of this work. However, I believe that such an interpretation is not necessarily intrinsic to the Essene hypothesis, and recognition of the diversity of Jewish practice – including that followed by the Essenes – can advance our knowledge of the history and development of Judaism. This has always been one of my primary objectives in this project and the only obstacle toward this is to disregard the idea that Qumran somehow prefigured later, known religious developments.

Finally, I simply believe the Essene hypothesis to be the most reasonable explanation as to the identity of the Qumran community, given the paucity of evidence. The caution displayed by skeptics is warranted and well-noted, and it would be premature to assume that any new phenomenon – such as the Qumran community – must necessarily align with pre-existing categories. However, to posit a new group at Qumran would be to state that there was a thriving religious community whose beliefs were very similar to the Essenes, had a permanent settlement in the same general location as the Essenes, and developed a system of organization and initiation much like the Essenes, and yet were not Essenes. Given the similarities between the Scrolls and the historical sources, the Essene hypothesis seems the most parsimonious.

Despite this, I have usually tried to avoid using the term “Essene” during my own discussion of the Qumran community. This is simply a matter of trying to use accurate terminology; the community itself never refers to itself as “Essene” in any of the Scroll

texts<sup>68</sup>, and my own objective is to describe the community with its own language as much as possible. As a result, I will only refer to the community as “Essene” when the use of that term is somehow necessary to understanding the point at hand, such as when engaging with or referring directly to passages from Josephus or Pliny. This will be especially relevant in Chapter 4.

## **Methodology**

Conclusions about the behavior, beliefs and motivations of the Qumran community must be derived primarily from the texts of the Scroll library itself. Fortunately, if interpreted properly, the Scrolls provide a wealth of information about the community, its worldview, and its goals. This information seems to demonstrate that the primary purpose and organizing principle of the Qumran community was to function as a faithful remnant within the covenant-history framework.

To demonstrate this, I will describe the ways in which distinguishing behaviors and beliefs practiced by the Qumran community allowed them to act as a viable remnant according to the community’s own conceptions of what such a remnant would entail. In doing so, I will address the community’s own criteria about what a “faithful” Israel should be, why Judaeen society during the Qumran period did not meet these criteria according the community’s own beliefs, and the way the community was constructed so as to internally remedy the shortcomings of wider society.

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<sup>68</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 42. Magness does note that the term *Hasid* (“pious one”) is used in the text, and that some scholars have suggested that *Essene* is a transliteration of this term.

To do this I will rely primarily on information provided in the Scroll library itself, supplemented by the accounts of Josephus, Philo and Pliny the Elder. In particular, I will rely on the *Damascus Document*, the *Community Rule*, and *MMT* for information about the community's origins and daily lives. These three documents are useful for two reasons. First, compared to many other documents in the Scrolls library, the documents themselves are less fragmentary and provide more information about their original contents. Second, they were written at a relatively early date in the history of the community. *MMT* may have predated the site of Qumran itself, and the *Damascus Document* was written not long after the community at Qumran was founded<sup>69</sup>. Finally, the contents of these documents are especially relevant to understanding the community's origin and purpose. As a result, I will use these three documents frequently as primary sources of data regarding the community's lifestyle and its formative history.

I will also make extensive use of contemporary historical sources, especially Josephus. These sources are valuable because they provide insight into the life of the community from outside observers. None of these commentaries provide or even attempt to provide an 'objective' description of the community. However, they are nonetheless useful simply as a secondary source with which to compare the information presented in the Scrolls accounts, and I will attempt to describe and account for the biases, audiences and historical setting of each ancient author when relevant.

Although the site of Qumran was first excavated in the 1950s, most of the archaeological data from Qumran remains unpublished. It seems likely judging from the Scrolls themselves that Qumran was a part of a larger social-religious movement with

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<sup>69</sup> The *Community Rule* was a somewhat later document, and given that multiple copies were found on-site, it likely went through multiple revisions.

associated urban communities existing in towns around Judaea. However, no such community has ever been identified in the archaeological record and at barring new developments it seems improbable that such a community will be found<sup>70</sup>. Given the paucity of data, both at Qumran and elsewhere, I will use material evidence sparingly as a source of primary evidence. Fortunately, certain aspects of Qumran's material culture – such as its ceramic collection – have been analyzed and described in available literature, and this evidence will be used where applicable<sup>71</sup>.

## **Theory**

The purpose of this project has been primarily to develop an understanding of the Qumran community that is based in the community's own understanding of themselves and their place in the world that surrounded them. In doing so, I have attempted to analyze angles of approach to Qumran that may have been neglected by other means of analysis, such as comparative approaches or textual-historical analysis. This is not intended to downplay the validity and importance of these approaches, because such forms of analysis have clearly provided valuable information about the community in the past and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the future. Instead, I have analyzed Qumran using a specific cultural concept grounded in the community's own self-description that will hopefully provide insight into the community's motivations that has previously been unexplored by the field.

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<sup>70</sup> It is in fact unlikely that such communities could be identified archaeologically, given that their material culture was probably very similar to Jews living outside the community.

<sup>71</sup> Material analysis is especially relevant for its comparison to priestly residences, which have also been widely analyzed and published. Comparison between these two sources will be described in Chapter 4.

To illustrate, in “Interpretive Archaeology and its Role”, Ian Hodder writes that one of the problems presented by processual archaeology was that it “placed little emphasis on interpreting general knowledge in relation to internal understanding”, and that its successor, postprocessual archaeology, had largely failed in its attempt to introduce reflexivity between the “text” (the archaeological record) and the “reader” (the archaeologist)<sup>72</sup>. Hodder stresses the adoption of an interpretive approach featuring: a “guarded objectivity” of the past, wherein data are formed within a dialectical relation; an attempt to understand the past in terms of the experiences of social actors; and finally, an identification of the causes for which the past is constructed, and a location of the mechanisms that make it exclusive, in order to critically engage with the voices of other interests<sup>73</sup>.

Hodder primarily studies archaeological prehistory, and the “texts” to which he refers are generally material in nature. However, this hermeneutic approach is also valid when studying historical societies, and even when studying historical texts. His points are also highly useful when studying Qumran. A dialectical approach to Qumran allows us to explain Qumran’s behavior in terms of the concepts, ideas and values that are expressed by the community itself in its extant texts. Likewise, understanding Qumran as a community of social actors enables the interpreter to move away from a conception of the community as a group of people with certain *ideas* and *beliefs* – such as a ‘dedication

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<sup>72</sup> Ian Hodder, “Interpretive Archaeology and its Role”, *American Antiquity* 56:1 (Jan. 1991): 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* In the context of this article, Hodder is referring to groups outside the “dominant” culture – such as descendant communities – and the necessity of incorporating the voices of these groups in historical construction.

to poverty’ or an ‘emphasis on ritual purity’ – and contextualize those beliefs as the products of a group that was living in an active social setting.

This, alone, has hardly been neglected in previous Scrolls research<sup>74</sup>. What I feel has been neglected is an analysis of the community in terms of its own stated goal – to act as a remnant according to the community’s own definition – and a thorough interpretation of the community’s deviations from Temple-observant society in light of that goal. By analyzing the community’s behavior in light of this goal, I hope to demonstrate that the “remnant” is a holistically applicable concept that was a significant motivating factor for the community’s behavior and – in so doing – strengthen the community’s own side of the dialectic. This would allow us to gain greater insight into the lives and motivations of the community’s members as they existed during the community’s life span – and, as Hodder describes it, to allow the community’s “story” to be told<sup>75</sup>.

## Outline

Qumran’s identity as a remnant was not constructed *ex nihilo*. It was instead developed from a preexisting set of cultural concepts such as the covenant worldview, the remnant, and ritual purity. The community was in essence developing a system within

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<sup>74</sup> For example, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State* by Hanan Eshel examines the community in light of its political conflicts and the community’s setting as a group living under Hasmonean rule. *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* by John J. Collins describes the community’s beliefs regarding the eschaton in light of the wider tradition of apocalyptic thought that existed during the Second Temple period. Lawrence Schiffman’s *Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism* is a holistic analysis of the community in light of contemporary Jewish religious, social, political, and legal trends.

<sup>75</sup> Ian Hodder, “Interpretive Archaeology and its Role”, *American Antiquity* 56:1 (Jan. 1991): 10.

the boundaries of an existing system, with the caveat that certain aspects of the old system were no longer viable (particularly the Temple and its associated rituals).

Because of these pre-existing boundaries, the community needed to do three things. Firstly, it needed to define itself in such a way that highlighted its own adherence to the Israelite covenant and clearly delineated precisely who lived within the bounds of the remnant community. Without such a definition, it would have been impossible for the community's members to know who was considered part of the covenant remnant and, thus, whether or not their remnant status was still viable. Secondly, the community needed develop a system by which their own beliefs would be perpetuated and deviations from those beliefs could be sanctioned. In this way, the community was able to ensure they were viable as a remnant by definition because those who violated the community's interpretation of perfect adherence to the law were removed partially or entirely from communal life. Thirdly, the community needed to develop a way to remain efficacious as a remnant even without the benefit of the Temple system, one of the most important aspects of the divine covenant and the original point of dispute from which the community was formed. Developing an alternative to the Temple allowed the community to see themselves as fulfilling all the duties proscribed by the covenant while remaining uncontaminated by contact with the existing system.

In the following chapters, I will address each of these subjects in turn. In Chapter 3, "Israel", I will discuss how Jewish identity as it existed during the Qumran period was unclear and thus troubling to the Qumran community. Because the boundaries of covenant obligation were not clearly defined or enforced during this period, the Qumran

community developed a system in which those within the remnant would be clearly identified and expected to follow certain rules of behavior.

In Chapter 4, “Social Organization”, I will discuss how the community was organized in such a way as to both criticize the existing Temple establishment and ensure that their own community, as a remnant, would last until the imminent eschaton. The community adopted a system of communal poverty as a means of disregarding the contemporary social system and the priestly aristocracy and to display and reinforce their own priority of covenant adherence. They additionally developed an extensive pedagogical and regulatory system by which community members were continually assessed and monitored as to their knowledge and adherence to the law as the community interpreted it.

In Chapter 5, “The Temple”, I will describe how the existing Temple in Jerusalem was seen as unsatisfactory to the community, primarily because they perceived that its purity had been compromised and that its ritual calendar was incorrect. Because of this, the rituals performed in the Temple were no longer efficacious from a covenant standpoint and a substitute had to be developed. The community’s response was to emphasize rituals previously associated with the Temple – ritual meals, prayers and liturgy – but was not required by tradition to take place on the Temple Mount itself. In this way the community fulfilled every requirement of the covenant in essence even if they no longer had access, or allowed themselves access, to the Temple site. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will conclude with a brief summary and a description of some possible counter-arguments to my own remnant-based interpretation of Qumran.



### CHAPTER 3 – ISRAEL

In order for the Qumran community to act as an efficacious remnant, the community first needed to define who was within the boundaries of the remnant and who was not. Although Judaism posited the existence of a single, universal God, it was not a “universal religion” in the modern conception. Israel, and Israel alone, was to receive blessing for adhering to the covenant or punishment for its transgression<sup>76</sup>; the remnant, then, would need to be both visible and noticeable in order to function. In this chapter, I will describe the “crisis” of Jewish identity during the Qumran period, and how Qumran was structured so as to clearly identify and monitor those who were responsible for maintaining the community’s efficacy as a remnant.

Complicating the question of Jewish identity was the fact that “Judaism”, as it existed in the Second Temple period, had grown into a religion exhibiting considerable variation in its various geographical and cultural settings<sup>77</sup>. The parallel destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, along with the mass deportation of their populace, meant that Israelite religion was no longer under the domain of a single ruling polity or Temple establishment in a single, relatively small

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<sup>76</sup> At least, in theory. In practice, the question of Gentiles obtaining God’s favor could be somewhat more complex. Biblical texts show many examples of non-Israelites are blessed by God, usually for acts of kindness or fair-treatment of Jewish people. The book of Daniel, believed to have been written in the Hellenistic period, shows the Persian king Darius in a favorable light; the Persians are also depicted favorably in the book of Nehemiah. But even in these accounts, it is nowhere expected for these Gentile rulers to adopt or adhere to covenant behavior – instead, they are praised for creating an environment in which covenant adherence can take place without interference. Likewise, in the Tanakh, foreign enemies are usually not punished for their own behavior (idol worship, etc.) but are instead judged according to their behavior toward the Israelites.

<sup>77</sup> “The Judaic System of the Dead Sea Scrolls”, Johann Maier. *Judaism in Late Antiquity II: Historical Synthesis*, ed. Jacob Neusner: 84.

region<sup>78</sup>. With the diaspora, many communities of Jews formed that had little connection with the Israelite homeland<sup>79</sup>. The concept of a geographically centralized system of tribes and families following a unified system of cultic practice had little bearing on reality by the period in which Qumran was active.

Qumran, for their part, seems to have given little consideration for diaspora communities in their own writings. As noted in the previous chapter, the community's territory seems to have been concentrated entirely in the region of Palestine<sup>80</sup>. This lends credence to the idea that the community's original members were disaffected priests that split off from the Temple establishment; such a message would have had only abstract resonance with communities in locations such as Asia Minor or Mesopotamia that were already far removed from the Temple context. Given Qumran's eschatological leanings, they may have believed that the faithful in diaspora communities would soon return to the homeland, or that these communities were among the unfaithful Jewish majority that would be purged in the eschaton.

However, for Qumran the essence of Jewish identity was much more than simple geographical location. Instead, the community conceived of "Jewishness" primarily in terms of covenant obligations. This view posited three main groups: those who were not obligated to uphold the covenant (Gentiles), those who were obligated to uphold the covenant and were not doing so (non-Qumran Jews), and finally, those who were

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<sup>78</sup> Admittedly, even in the pre-Exilic period this was an ideal, and the Temple cult was likely not as unified as a strict textual analysis would indicate. During the diaspora and post-Exilic period, however, these trends intensified.

<sup>79</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 233-234.

<sup>80</sup> Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources*, (Published on Behalf of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies by JSOT, 1989), 3.

obligated to uphold the covenant and were doing so (the community). There were various subdivisions within these groups – they recognized the importance of different schools of religious and political thought – but the most crucial factor in Qumran’s view of the world was based on the degree to which the covenant was upheld by a given population.

The daily reality of Jewish life in Palestine during the Qumran period was much cloudier than the stark, covenant-based dichotomy listed above. The Qumran period was instead a time of growing cultural exchange, social and geographical mobility, and political restructuring. This created a period of flux in Jewish identity in which it was not always clear who was Jewish and who was not – and, by extension, it was not always clear who should be upholding the covenant.

For Qumran to maintain their status as a suitable remnant community, they would need to create a system in which those with covenant obligations could be easily identified and monitored. By doing so, they would keep their ranks filled with sincere covenant-adherents and preserve the perpetuity of the Israelite nation. In this chapter, I will describe the ways in which the boundaries of Jewish identity were changing during the Qumran period, and the ways in which the Qumran system were constructed so as to clearly delineate and reinforce their own system of boundaries.

### **Jewish Identity in the Qumran Period**

There is little agreement in scholarly literature about who was a “Jew” in the context of the Second Temple period. This is mirrored by a similar sense of ambiguity in the historical record. Ancient authors seem to have agreed that there were people called

“Jews”, that Jews were connected by some sort of common affiliation and somehow distinct from the non-Jewish people around them. This is a poor definition, but making more specific statements about Jewish identity in the Second Temple period quickly becomes a frustrating proposition. As we shall see, Jewish customs, religious beliefs, and even ancestry was no guarantee of a definitively “Jewish” identity.

The Temple aristocracy is a telling example. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Temple was the central defining institution of Jewish life during the late Second Temple period; its priests were directly responsible for performing the sacrificial rites necessary for maintaining the Israelite covenant, and the High Priest was the *de facto* ruler of Jews living in Judaea. Surely, if anything could be described as unreservedly “Jewish”, it would be the Temple class.

Yet, analysis of the historical and material record demonstrates that this was hardly the case. The Temple aristocracy, as the wealthiest class in Judaea, was heavily invested in the status quo and as a result were often among the most active and vocal proponents of Hellenism and accommodation with foreign powers<sup>81</sup>. The Qumran community, of course, was a strong opponent of such behavior, although they were hardly the first, the last or the most strident of the Temple class’s opponents. Hellenizing practices were often bitterly opposed by rural Jewish communities both before and after the Hasmonean revolt, and it is telling that a revolt to restore the desecrated Temple began not in Jerusalem, but in a rural town to the north named Modi’in<sup>82</sup>. This antipathy

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<sup>81</sup> Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome, A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987), 31. Goodman points out the degree to which these Hellenizing policies could reach amongst the royal family and aristocratic class; Aristobulus I, a Hasmonean, went so far as to adopt the title “Philhellene” in 103 BCE.

<sup>82</sup> Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004), 32. Of course, not all residents of Jerusalem were satisfied with the Hellenizing policies of the

toward the Temple establishment lasted until the Temple's destruction during the First Jewish Revolt in 70 CE, when zealous Jews known as *Sicarii* developed a policy of publicly assassinating members of the priestly class (among others) who they viewed to be collaborating with the then-hated Roman government<sup>83</sup>.

The example of the Temple aristocracy demonstrates that there was no level of society – even the most clearly “institutionalized” aspects of Jewish political and religious tradition – that was not somehow influenced by foreign cultural practices. This pattern applied not only to the collective level, but also to that of the individual. In the late Second Temple period, it was often quite possible for a person's “Jewishness” to be a highly debatable – and, potentially, flexible – aspect of their identity.

### **Ancestry**

Ancestry might seem, at first, to be an unambiguous marker of identity. Surely if one's parents were Jews, then they would themselves be Jewish by extension. As always, the ancient context is somewhat more complicated. During the Qumran period, matters of ancestry and heredity were contentiously debated and there was no universally accepted prerequisite for Jewish ancestry.

Part of this is a result of the historical setting itself. The Qumran period was a time in which various schools of thought regarding legal interpretation were being codified. Groups such as the Pharisees were in the process of developing a body of legal

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priestly class. The construction of a gymnasium in Jerusalem by the High Priest Jason was apparently an unpopular measure – at least, according to *Maccabees*, which is hardly an impartial source.

<sup>83</sup> Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 158.

interpretation – the *Halakha* – but these legal interpretations were neither universally accepted nor legally binding.

This, combined with historical and economic processes that favored mobility, intermarriage and adaptation, led to an increase in marriages between Jews and Gentiles. That intermarriage was a growing phenomenon – or, at least, that it was increasingly perceived as negative – is evident in that the late Second Temple period was a time in which specific prohibitions and restrictions on intermarriage began to be articulated and to a degree codified<sup>84</sup>.

It was also difficult to determine ancestry of an individual prior to the immediate generation. Genealogical records were rare and seem to have been mostly used by priestly families to assure the public of their qualifications for Temple practice; these genealogical records were apparently available for confirmation in the Temple precincts<sup>85</sup>. Given that being a Jew conferred certain rights and privileges in some municipalities<sup>86</sup>, non-Jews would have had at least occasional reason for inflating or even inventing a Jewish identity if they were going to be living or working among Jewish communities. Certainly political leaders were suspected of such fabrications, Herod being the most prominent<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 246. Again, prohibitions against certain behaviors – such as bringing foreign brides into the sacred assembly – existed as far back as the pre-Exilic era. However, these prohibitions did not constitute a true ban on intermarriage, and seem to have developed to negotiate ritual purity boundaries specifically relevant to the pre-Exilic world.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>87</sup> Moses Shulvass, *The History of the Jewish People Volume I: The Antiquity* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 100. Shulvass points out that Herod was unpopular for multiple reasons – his primarily foreign army and administration, as well as his cruelty in crushing his opponents, were both widely

The Qumran period, then, was a period in which Jewish ancestry – and thus, an obligation to uphold the covenant – was an undefined and unconfirmable status. Because the Qumran community believed it was necessary for all those bound by the covenant to uphold its tenets, this would have been a highly distressing predicament. The community's own system would need to account for and control this uncertainty.

## **Conquest**

The Hasmonean policy of conquest would add another layer of uncertainty to the question of Jewish identity. Although the Hasmoneans never had a true “empire” and were always a regional polity, in the early years of the dynasty John Hyrcanus conquered the region of Idumea and forcibly converted the population to Judaism<sup>88</sup>. A similar conquest was made of the Itureans by Aristobulus ca. 104 BCE<sup>89</sup>.

It is unclear exactly how coercive these forced conversions were. In Josephus's account, the Idumaeans and the Ituraeans were given the choice of circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic law, or exile<sup>90</sup>. Many apparently accepted incorporation into the Judaeian state on these terms. There were, however, holdouts. When the inhabitants of the city of Pella refused to convert, they were expelled and the city was destroyed. Even

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unpopular among his subjects - which may have been contributing factors to his perception as a foreigner by Judaeans.

<sup>88</sup> Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 37.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>90</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 111.

a century later, some of the Idumaeans were still practicing the Idumaeen religion in spite of official injunctions otherwise<sup>91</sup>.

Other historians depict a less forceful conversion. Strabo states that the conversion of the two groups was in fact rather mild and was essentially an alliance sealed through an agreement upon circumcision and Jewish legal observance<sup>92</sup>. It is interesting that a Jewish writer like Josephus presents the conversion as forceful, whereas the Gentile Strabo presents the event as the formation of an alliance. What is clear from both accounts is that new *ethnoi* that had not previously been bound by the covenant were now obligated to uphold its tenets by government fiat<sup>93</sup>.

It is not difficult to imagine why this would have been troubling for a community like Qumran. Born Gentiles, these newcomers could hardly have been expected, at least for the first few generations, to uphold the Torah law and maintain ritual purity in a way that would not have exposed the Temple and the nation of Israel as a symbolic construct to ritual contamination. Furthermore, the potentially coercive nature of their conversion would have made it unlikely that these new converts would have even wished to uphold their covenant obligations.

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<sup>91</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 111-112.

<sup>92</sup> Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 39. Schwartz points out that this “conversion” was probably more expansive in theory than in practice. The Idumaeans retained a distinct identity and religious practice went on much as before, at least at first. It seems likely that the Hasmoneans, like the Romans, were more interested in creating a homogeneous religious environment as a way of consolidating political authority and reinforcing their own status as rulers with power over civic and religious life than they were in the extent of covenant adherence in the newly expanded territories - although this is admittedly speculative.

<sup>93</sup> Galileans were another *ethnoi* whose “Jewishness” was sometimes considered suspect by Judaeans – unsurprisingly, given that Galilee was also a territory conquered by the Hasmoneans. See Sean Freyne’s *Galilee: From Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 BCE to 135 CE*.



## Religious Behavior

Given that historically, Judaism has not been a proselytizing religion, adhering to Jewish religious customs might seem to be safe evidence of “Jewishness” – and, by extension, those who observed these customs would be obligated to follow the covenant. Again, the historical reality was more vague, and during the Qumran period many non-Jews adopted Jewish religious practices.

In practice, the religious aspect of “Judaism” during the Second Temple period was more of a spectrum than a dichotomy. This is especially true with regards to Gentiles living within the borders of Judaea and the surrounding Levant. There were undoubtedly Gentiles who were entirely hostile toward Judaism and those who practiced it; likewise, there seem to have been those who fully converted and began living a Jewish life functionally indistinguishable from the “native-born” Jews of the region. Most Gentiles likely fell somewhere in between these two extremes, with the majority skewed toward the Gentile end of the spectrum.

This spectrum of behavior manifested in various ways. Even well outside the Jewish heartland, there was an appreciation for various aspects of Jewish culture and religious practices among the Greek and Roman intelligentsia<sup>94</sup>. Josephus and Philo both mention that Jewish practices have growing currency among the Gentiles, with Josephus specifically mentioning Sabbath rest and observance<sup>95</sup>. Philo and Josephus were both

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<sup>94</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 149. This was, of course, not a unanimously-held position, and anti-Semitic literature is also present in the historical record. Even this, however, points to a growing appreciation among Gentiles of certain Jewish practices, since the anti-Semites sometimes criticized the adoption of Jewish practices by non-Jews; Seneca was one such critic.

<sup>95</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 149.

apologists for Judaism and were likely exaggerating the degree to which Jewish practices were popular among contemporary Gentiles. Their attempt toward making Judaism seem virtuous by Greco-Roman standards is evident in their own sources. For instance, in *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus presents the Essenes in a manner reminiscent of the Stoics, emphasizing their temperance, self-control, and disregard for the passions<sup>96</sup>. However, Gentile sources also mention the growing popularity of Jewish customs among the Gentile population.

Some Gentiles took their admiration for Judaism even further, to the point of purchasing sacrifices for offering in the Temple precincts or exclusive reverence of the Israelite God<sup>97</sup>. The god-fearing Gentile is a familiar trope in the Hebrew Bible, and usually (but not always) appears as a foreign ruler or other important figure who is somehow favored by Jews or God, and offers a statement of praise and honor in return. Darius of Persia, Naaman, and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon – the foreign ruler who destroyed the Temple, no less – are depicted in the Tanakh as receiving favor from or offering statements of praise toward the Israelite God<sup>98</sup>. Some traditions took this

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<sup>96</sup> Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Flavius Josephus* (New York: MacMillan Pub., 1993), 190. Josephus's description of the Essene lifestyle is useful as an object lesson regarding the biases in ancient texts. In some sections, Josephus is clearly writing to accommodate the biases of his audience (here, Greco-Roman individuals with a Stoic bent), whereas in others he presents information that aligns less directly with existing Greco-Roman philosophical positions. Presumably, the latter is more likely to be accurate than the former.

<sup>97</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999, 150-151).

<sup>98</sup> The examples of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius are both from the book of Daniel, believed to have been written in the Hellenistic period. This sort of sympathetic foreign ruler apparently resonated with contemporary audiences, perhaps deliberately in contrast with oppressive or impious official policy. Note that the documents in which these accounts are found are not considered historically accurate and may reflect a desire on the part of the authors to legitimize a certain degree of acculturation toward foreign rulers and the lifestyles they promoted (such as Hellenism).

concept to an even further extreme, with stories that depicting rulers such as Alexander not only acknowledging the God of Israel but actually converting to Judaism<sup>99</sup>.

Although rulers receive the most attention in the historical record, they were not the only ones who thought it worthwhile to be favorably disposed toward Judaism. Practices such as the above-mentioned rest on the Sabbath, and perhaps abstaining from pork, were also adopted by Gentiles in Judaea and elsewhere<sup>100</sup>. This was far from unusual, and actually fit quite well within the changing religious climate of the Hellenistic era. Hellenistic religion inclined toward pragmatic adoption and hybridization of religious practice, and it seems many Greco-Roman polytheists felt little compunction about incorporating the God of Israel into their own pantheon<sup>101</sup>.

Although Qumran seemed to have an ambivalent relationship with the concept of proselytes, they had no regard for Gentiles that would potentially contaminate the sanctity of the Temple. Such contamination would render the Temple and its cultic system inadequate for the purposes of adhering to the covenant.

### **Qumran's Response**

During the Qumran period, the boundaries of "Israel" as a sociocultural concept were fluid. Various actors – the priesthood, divisions of the laity, foreign rulers and foreign religions – were in a constant state of negotiation about the meaning of

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<sup>99</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999, 148.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 143. Sometimes this kind of religious hybridization took forms that would likely have been extremely troubling to groups such as Qumran. One such example is of a Gentile who used verses from Deuteronomy within the curse of his son's epitaph.

Jewishness. As a result, it was unclear not only how to properly uphold the covenant, but who should be involved in this covenant participation. If Qumran's goal was to act as an Israel in microcosm, a remnant able to perform all the actions that made Israel Israel, they would need ways of distinguishing themselves from all others. This included not only Gentiles but also those Jews that did not belong to their own community.

Whether or not this was the Qumran community's goals *vis a vis* the covenant, it is clear that the community's rules regarding admittance and membership allowed them to carefully monitor the members of their remnant community. Most of our information about the community's postulancy process is from the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document*. Josephus and Philo also provide information about the initiation process, although it is doubtful that either of them experienced the process firsthand<sup>102</sup>.

Caution should be used when describing the initiation process, given the nature of the textual material. The *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document* both describe somewhat different communities, the former being a celibate (at least on-site) priestly group and the latter being a 'lay' community of families and children. If, as I believe, Qumran was used as the ritual center of a larger 'lay' community, the initiation process of the priestly community would not necessarily translate to the laity, and vice versa. This is especially important in light of the fact that both documents are fragmentary and some information of the initiation process has been lost.

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<sup>102</sup> Josephus makes the claim to have had an Essene education; scholars such as Vermes doubt the veracity of this statement. It seems unlikely, given the community's strict rules regarding sharing their sacred teachings with outsiders, along with the fact that the community's oaths were taken for life, that they would have conducted this sort of pedagogical training with the expectation that the student would not become a full member of the community. I consider it more likely that Josephus was trying to make his own upbringing conform to Greco-Roman educational customs, wherein students were taught by philosophers of a certain "school of thought" (*haireisis*) such as Stoicism.

Fortunately, for the purposes of our argument this is a relatively minor caveat. This is partially because there is considerable continuity between the two documents regarding the initiation process, and it is reasonable to think that whatever information is absent would also have featured such continuity. Also, whatever differences there may have been between the two groups, the overall *purpose* of the process was the same in both – to carefully control and define “Jewishness” and covenant adherence within the two communities.

Entrance into the communities described in the *Damascus Document* was apparently voluntary, at least for the first generation of converts, although subsequent generations were expected to raise their children within the community<sup>103</sup>. When an outsider wished to join the community, or when the ‘children’ of the community reached the ‘age of enrolment’, they were to present themselves to the ‘Guardian of the community’. This title apparently refers to the highest-ranking official in the urban ‘camps’, and one invested with spiritual authority to interpret and enforce the laws of the Torah<sup>104</sup>. Prior to this, outsiders were forbidden to know ‘the statutes’ – the community’s own interpretation of the Torah, apparently so the Guardian of the community would not be deceived by insincere postulants<sup>105</sup>. After this, the postulant was required to study the laws of the community for ‘a full year’, and the Guardian was to ascertain that they were

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<sup>103</sup>*The Damascus Document* 15.5.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 15.5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 15.10

not “[a] madman, or lunatic [...], no simpleton, or fool, no blind man, or maimed, or lame, or deaf man, and no minor”<sup>106</sup>.

Initiation in the *Community Rule* is a much longer process and the process could apparently last several years<sup>107</sup>. The postulant, after a period of probation, swore an oath to uphold the laws of the covenant as the community interpreted them. However, even upon being inducted into the community in this fashion, the new member was prohibited from contact with the community’s sacral meals and liquids<sup>108</sup>.

After another period of instruction, the novice was summoned before the community to be evaluated on their understanding of the Law<sup>109</sup>. If their understanding was judged to be adequate, they handed over their property to the community (although it was not placed in the community’s common property yet). At this point the novice was permitted to touch the community’s sacred food, but not their liquids. After a final year, the novice was examined and judged again, whereupon their property was absorbed into the community’s common trust and they were permitted to take part in the community’s liquid purity. The novice was ranked internally within the community – presumably at

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<sup>106</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 15.15-16. These exceptions were intended to assure that the ritual purity of the community was maintained (the text states that it is to forbid contact between these sources of impurity and “the Angels of Holiness”). The maimed and mentally unsound, seen as contaminating, were forbidden from certain states of purity. An example of this kind of strict segregation of pure and impure in practice comes from the late Hasmonean period, when two claimants to the Priestly office – Hyrcanus II and his nephew, Antigonus – were jockeying for power. Antigonus captured Hyrcanus and had his uncle’s ears cut off, ensuring that Hyrcanus could never serve in a priestly capacity.

<sup>107</sup> Of course, since “minors” could not serve in this capacity, the postulant first had to reach the age of majority. According to other Scroll texts, such as the *War Scroll* and *Temple Scroll*, this occurred at the age of twenty – the traditional date of adulthood in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>108</sup> Directly translated, the terms used as the community’s “purity” and “liquid purity” (*tohorot* for the former and *mashqin* for the latter). Liquids were viewed as more likely to contract contamination than solid foods. Rabbinic literature also uses these terms to designate pure food (Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 33).

<sup>109</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y., USA: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 33.

the bottom of the hierarchy – and allowed to speak at the community’s councils<sup>110</sup>. Members within the community continued to be examined and ranked based on adherence to and knowledge of the law; these ranks could be changed based on the individual’s actions or behavior. Access to the community’s pure meals and liquids could also be denied or restricted, if the member was to break the rules of the covenant.

While this graduated process undoubtedly had the purpose of socializing the new member, it had a larger and more significant purpose. At every point along the postulant’s journey, they were scrutinized for adherence to and knowledge of the law as the community interpreted it. In so doing the community was able to construct a system of law that was both self-reinforcing and helped them remain efficacious as a remnant of Israel.

Unlike contemporary groups, such as the Pharisees, or later groups like the rabbis, the community did not see the utility of permitting debate or dissent about the proper interpretation of the most crucial aspects of the law. There is little evidence within the scroll texts of competing schools of thought within the community. They instead believed that a single and fully accurate legal tradition had been handed down to them, presumably from the community’s founding visionary, the Teacher of Righteousness. The community’s duty was therefore to practice and preserve this school of interpretation, not to elaborate or alter it<sup>111</sup>. During and after the postulant’s induction

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<sup>110</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y., USA: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 33.

<sup>111</sup> It should be noted that the beliefs of the community did, in fact, seem to evolve over time, and it is very unlikely that all the textual interpretation – such as the *Peshet* texts – were written or transmitted by the Teacher of Righteousness. This is especially true in light of the fact that some of the commentaries describe events late in the Teacher’s life. However, this later interpreters likely considered themselves stewards of an existing school of thought – they may have carried on the Teacher’s legacy, but they did not, in their view, alter or detract from it.

into the community, they were permitted to participate in the community only if they participated and assented to orthodox interpretation and practice. This system, along with the community's own relatively isolated position within larger society, allowed them to maintain a relatively stable form of religious practice over a long period of time – and, in so doing, perpetuate the pure Israel without the risk of outside contamination or deviation from their own legal approach.

### **Conclusions**

The concept of an “Israel” for whom the covenant was intended was a crucial part of the Qumran community's conception of the world. However, during the time period in which the community was active, “Israel” no longer existed as a united religious, political or social body. Instead, various groups scattered across the Mediterranean world – from Italy to Palestine to Mesopotamia – were influencing and being influenced by non-Jewish peoples and cultures.

The Qumran community, to maintain itself as a working remnant of Israel, needed to clearly define their own boundaries in such a way as to leave no doubt who was a member of the covenant community, what was expected of them and the relationship they were to have with the outside world and the divine. They accomplished this through a lengthy initiation process during which the postulant was gradually integrated into the community, taught the laws by which it lived and evaluated according to their adherence to the community's internal tenets. In so doing, the community was able to simultaneously reinforce and practice their covenant interpretation, as well as weeding



out and expelling those members who would threaten to change the community's status as a functional Israelite remnant.

The initiation process was only the beginning of life within the community. Other aspects of the community's daily life also offer evidence of how they maintained and defined their remnant status in relation to the wider Jewish population. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the community's internal society was structured so as to allow them to maintain their status as a pure Israelite remnant.

## CHAPTER 4 – SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The perceived efficacy of the Qumran community as a remnant of Israel was not entirely abstract. The community also created and reinforced their remnant identity through their system of social organization, their patterns of daily life, and even their material culture. The forging of a viable remnant community consisted of more than developing an alternative to the existing Temple system or an initiation process that defined “Israel” specifically and repeatedly by the community’s own scriptural interpretations. It was, instead, a holistically constructed system of behaviors that impacted every aspect of the life of community members, and did so in such a way that was both self-reinforcing and served to define itself as a righteous remnant in opposition to the corrupted greater Israel.

Certain aspects of the community’s lifeways reconstruction are lost barring further archaeological discoveries. The demographics and economic behavior of the urban “camps” outside of Qumran is illustrative on this point<sup>112</sup>. That such camps existed and were viewed by their contemporaries as distinct and noteworthy is attested by the historical record. Josephus remarks upon the unusual social behavior of the Essenes in *War*, describing their great mutual hospitality and selflessness amongst their own,

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<sup>112</sup> Although “camps” is the translated term used in the Scroll library to describe these communities, it is unlikely – albeit not impossible – that the term was meant literally. Judging by the accounts in both the Scrolls and classical sources, these were simply communities living in urban areas practicing a communal lifestyle – presumably, although not explicitly, gathered together in a given area. The term may be intended to evoke the Deuteronomistic war camp, as the same (translated) term is used in the *War Scroll*.

without describing in any way how the communities supported themselves financially<sup>113</sup>. Unfortunately, the passage of time has rendered these distinctions archaeologically mute; no sites in the region have ever been identified as an “Essene settlement” or an “Essene neighborhood”. As a result, certain questions regarding life in the urban camps will likely remain unresolved for the time being.

There are, however, other aspects of the community’s existence that are more visible in the textual and material record. In many ways it the internal life of the community, like their self-definition as Israel, was constructed so as to “correct” trends in contemporary Judean society that the community saw as distressing. This was a two-step process. The community first identified and eschewed those aspects of society that they found to be in violation of their interpretation of the Israelite covenant. They then constructed systems in which their own approach to covenant interpretation could be established and reinforced.

In this chapter I will analyze the actions and social structure of the community inasmuch as they were a reaction to trends in Judean society that the community found troubling from a covenant standpoint. In particular, the community’s dedication to poverty, antipathy toward wealth, social hierarchy, and system of pedagogy were constructed as a means of criticizing the outside world while bringing their own community closer toward their internal vision of the ideal Israel.

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<sup>113</sup> (iii) *War* 2. 122-128. Josephus does describe the ways that initiates signed over their money to the community as a whole, but such funds would have been unlikely to have sustained the communities for any length of time.

## Wealth and Poverty

The Essene practice of communal ownership of property and has been widely discussed since antiquity. Josephus, Philo and Pliny all speak approvingly of the Essene disregard of material wealth<sup>114</sup>, a position that mirrored contemporary Greco-Roman philosophical schools. Because documents such as the *Community Rule* describe the Qumran community as living in communal poverty, this has also been a highly analyzed topic in Scrolls research. A clear parallel does exist between the communal lifestyle of the Jerusalem church depicted and the *Acts of the Apostles* and that of the scrolls<sup>115</sup>, and prior to definitive dating on the scroll texts through paleography, scholars speculated on the relationship of the community to early Christianity<sup>116</sup>.

The community's dedication to poverty also formed the basis of one of the most problematic and enduring views of the group – that Qumran served as a kind of Jewish “monastery”, or that the community lived a “monastic” existence. An example of these comparisons is given by Joseph Patrich in a discussion of living arrangements for those living on-site at Qumran. Patrich uses Byzantine monasteries and Egyptian hermitages as ideal comparative types to which Qumran can be compared, describes the community as “a kind of convent”, and assumes that forms and limits of asceticism of later Christian

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<sup>114</sup> See (iii) *War* 2.122-124, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 81-86, and *Natural History* 5.17, 4 (73).

<sup>115</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y., USA: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 21-23. This parallel is, however, essentially superficial, and with the possible exception of sacral meals, the Jerusalem community depicted in Acts does not engage in any other behaviors outwardly similar to Qumran or the Essenes. Rules regarding ritual purity, initiation and education, distinctive styles of dress, etc. are absent from the Acts community (and early Christianity in general).

<sup>116</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y., USA: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 22.

monks would presumably have been applicable to Qumran<sup>117</sup>. The assumption underlying such claims would seem to be that all ascetic groups are essentially variations on a basic and immutable ascetic type, and that the limits and manifestations of asceticism would be fundamentally comparable between disparate ascetic groups - regardless of the underlying motivations and assumptions for the group's ascetic behavior.

Analyzing Qumran in its historical and cultural context, however, may lead us to a specific conclusion as to why the community – both within the wider community and, especially, on-site – chose to disregard material wealth. When we situate the community within its own time period, the group's motivations for the communal ownership of property are clarified. Qumran's asceticism and poverty was a way of maintaining the community's status as a valid remnant of Israel and of drawing clear separating lines between their own community and the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem<sup>118</sup>.

In all periods relevant to Qumran – Hellenistic, Hasmonean, and Roman – the Jerusalem priesthood formed the wealthy ruling class of Judaea, and the material record attests to their opulent lifestyles. Upper-class residences in Jerusalem during the Roman period were constructed along the lines of contemporary luxury villas – lavish, single-dwelling units featuring mosaic floors, frescoes, and complex bathing facilities in the

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<sup>117</sup> Joseph Patrich, "Did Extra-Mural Dwelling Quarters Exist at Qumran?" *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20-25, 1997* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in Cooperation with the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, 2000), 725-726.

<sup>118</sup> That Qumran would have compared themselves to the priestly aristocracy is one of my own underlying assumptions. However, I believe the assumption is valid, because those living at Qumran seem to have very much conceived of themselves as the priestly class of their own alternate society.

Roman style<sup>119</sup>. Some homes featured wall frescoes complete with Greco-Roman artistic motifs such as birds, lions, and in one instance, even a pig<sup>120</sup>. Representations of animals and humans were stigmatized in traditional Jewish thought, being associated with idolatry and the worship of foreign deities; for the inhabitants of priestly homes to have disregarded such traditions was a sign of considerable predisposition toward Hellenistic aesthetics.

There is also evidence that the Jerusalem upper class also consumed imported wines from such locations as Rhodes, Kos, Italy and North Africa<sup>121</sup>. Fragments of *amphorae*, ceramic vessels intended to be used to transport liquid goods over long distances, have been found in a late Second Temple context. The consumption of imported wines might seem a minor form of luxury, but in context may have been quite problematic. Purity laws ordinarily forbade the consumption of wine made by Gentiles, since it had to be assumed that the wine was not produced according to Jewish purity rules. Early in the Qumran period the consumption of such forbidden wine seems to have been limited to a fairly small subset of society, and is primarily associated with Hasmonian residences. Later, during the Herodian period, the consumption of foreign wine seems to have grown much more common among the upper class.<sup>122</sup>

It should be noted that the priestly aristocracy was not entirely dismissive of traditional purity rules. Instead, the priestly class developed a hybridized approach to

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<sup>119</sup> Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 10.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 57-58.

purity observance and covenant adherence that allowed them to partake in the best of Hellenistic culture without violating their obligations and ritual integrity. Second Temple-period mansions in Jerusalem have yielded large quantities of expensive, finely made stone dishes modeled after foreign fine wares. Such innovations allowed the priestly class to conspicuously display their status and live comparably to non-Jewish elites while still maintaining their ritual obligations as priests in the Temple<sup>123</sup>.

For Qumran, however, such compromise was hardly an innovation. It was, instead, a mark of spiritual debasement that would eventually result in being cut off from the covenant and being cursed by God. The *Damascus Document* gives an example of the community's antipathy toward wealth and social status:

“During all those years Belial shall be unleashed against Israel, as he spoke by the hand of Isaiah, son of Amoz, saying, *Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the land* (Isa. XXIV, 17). Interpreted, these are the three nets of Belial with which Levi son of Jacob said that he catches Israel by setting them up as three kinds of righteousness. The first is fornication, the second is riches, and the third is profanation of the Temple.”<sup>124</sup>

In the eyes of the community, although wealth was perceived by the ignorant to be a “kind of righteousness”, it was in fact a “net of Belial” designed to entrap and mislead people from righteous behavior. The community had a strongly dualistic outlook, in which they, as the “sons of light”, were the only righteous inheritors of the covenant, while outsiders and apostates were “sons of darkness” condemned to punishment and ultimate destruction. For the community not only to condemn wealth as

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<sup>123</sup> Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 58. Stone wares were particularly important for the purposes of maintaining ritual purity. Because stone was a “natural” – ie, God-created – substance, it could not contract contamination the same way that man-made ceramic vessels could. Stone vessels were commonly used for ritual ablutions before meals for this reason.

<sup>124</sup> *The Damascus Document* 4.14-19.

immoral, but to describe it as a “net of Belial”, was to condemn riches in the strongest possible terms<sup>125</sup>.

Why was the community so strongly opposed to material wealth? It appears that their primary objection originated in how the upper classes obtained their riches.

Elsewhere in the *Damascus Document*, the Temple priesthood specifically is condemned for sins they have committed in the pursuit of wealth:

“None of them brought into the Covenant shall enter the Temple to light His altar in vain. They shall bar the door, forasmuch as God said, *Who among you will bar its door? And, You shall not light my altar in vain* (Mal. i, 10) [...] They shall separate from the sons of the Pit, and they shall keep away from the unclean riches of wickedness acquired by vow or anathema or from the Temple treasure; they shall not rob the poor of His people, to make of widows their prey and of the fatherless their victim (Isa. x, 2).”<sup>126</sup>

In this passage, the wealthy are condemned because the means by which they acquired their wealth took advantage of the poor and violated the laws of Temple sanctity. That this passage is referring to the priesthood is explicit in the reference to “lighting [the] altar”. The reference to stealing from the Temple treasure may refer to the confiscation of the Temple treasure by Antiochus IV, one of the preceding events that led

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<sup>125</sup> An interesting aside regarding the community’s distaste for riches is document 3Q15, the *Copper Scroll*. Unlike most of the scrolls, which were written on parchment or papyrus, the *Copper Scroll* was “written” by cutting letters into sheets of hammered copper. It describes vast sums of money – Vermes gives sixty-five tons of silver and twenty-six tons of gold as an estimate – being secreted away in various locations throughout Judea. Although it is unknown whether the treasure referred to in the *Copper Scroll* was real or imaginary, or even whether the *Copper Scroll* was a Qumran composition, its presence in the Scrolls library is unusual given the community’s normal attitude toward the accumulation of wealth.

<sup>126</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 6.12-17.



to the Hasmonean revolt, perhaps the authors of the *Damascus Document* believed the priestly class was complicit in this act or somehow benefited from it<sup>127</sup>.

There is also evidence that the references to “robbing the poor of His people” was not mere polemic, but had its basis in historical fact. In Galilee, at least, it is known that absentee landlords had been a feature of peasant life since the third century BCE<sup>128</sup>. In Palestine, this time period is also marked by an extremely uneven distribution of wealth, a trend that is especially pronounced in rural areas. Although the Hasmoneans replaced the Seleucid-friendly aristocracy with their own supporters after they had assumed power, it seems little changed from a practical standpoint for the average Jewish laborer. In later times, these landlords were even known to collaborate with the Romans, just as their predecessors had done for the Seleucids 200 years before<sup>129</sup>. The image of absentee landlords extravagantly adopting the lifestyle of foreigners while living on the backs of their countrymen could not have sat well with those given to pious charity or nativist tendencies; Qumran had both.

Qumran’s own system of poverty, then, existed as an explicit rejection of the value system of the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem. Material wealth, to the community, was only a trap laid by Belial to tempt people away from upholding the covenant; it was certainly not the grounds for social or political power. The material record at Qumran gives supporting evidence to the idea that the community had antipathy toward the forms

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<sup>127</sup> Hanan Eshel, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 13. The use of temple treasuries as a kind of civic treasury was widely practiced in the Greek-speaking world.

<sup>128</sup> Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1980), 198-199.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

of status display and conspicuous consumption favored by the Temple elite. Aspects of material culture often used to mark social status were absent at Qumran<sup>130</sup>. Unlike the material culture of the aristocracy, which was designed to integrate Hellenistic aesthetics and lifestyles with Jewish ritual laws, Qumran's material culture was concerned only with function and the maintenance of ritual purity rules.

The Qumran pottery assemblage provides an example of this disregard for ornamentation and status display in favor of a strict utilitarian approach. Qumran favored the production of simple ceramics of a functional local style and avoided imported pottery<sup>131</sup>. High-status vessels are absent from the Qumran assemblage, even those that would have allowed the maintenance of ritual purity, such as the elaborate stone vessels found in contemporary priestly neighborhoods in Jerusalem. The only form of unique pottery vessel found at Qumran were the famous "scroll jars", which were apparently used and designed specifically for the purpose of storing religious texts<sup>132</sup>.

Various explanations exist for the construction of the scroll jars. Religious scrolls, especially Torah scrolls, were themselves considered sacred and the community may have seen it as necessary to store the scrolls where they would be protected from potential sources of ritual contamination. The scroll jars could have also served a more prosaic purpose. Written documents were both highly valuable and highly fragile; storage in ceramic vessels may have protected the scrolls from natural threats such as

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<sup>130</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 99-100. Magness compares Qumran to high-status villas and farm estates in the region and notes the almost complete absence of fine pottery, interior decoration, architectural elements or features (such as bath structures) or any other material evidence of luxury or status display.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-76.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

mice, insects and water when not in use. Whether the threat to the scrolls was natural or supernatural, what is clear is that the community placed a high value on their religious documents and was willing to innovate to ensure that those documents were not harmed. Material culture, as with all other aspects of life within the community, developed so as to promote and perpetuate covenant adherence as the community understood it.

### **Leadership and Pedagogy**

The community's leaders also offer a noticeable contrast to the Temple aristocracy. The overseeing leaders of the community, both in the *Damascus Document* and the *Community Rule*, are identified as priests<sup>133</sup>. Although it appears the leaders of the community oversaw all the normal ritual observances expected the priesthood – altered, of course, in such a way as they could be observed outside the Temple context – the community's leaders also served a performed the crucial function of instructing the community's members on how to properly observe the rules of the community.

The leadership role mentioned most frequently in the scrolls is the “Guardian (*mebaqqer*) of the Community”. The Guardian was apparently the highest ranking member of the community, and the office carried with it a series of stringent requirements. In the *Damascus Document*, the Guardian is required to be between the ages of thirty and fifty, and “one who has mastered all the secrets of men and the languages of all their clans”<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>133</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 13.5; *Community Rule*, 1

<sup>134</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 4Q267, fr. 9 v, 11.5. The exact meaning of this is unclear; it could refer to the necessity of speaking or reading Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew. By the Qumran period, Greek was the dominant language of the region and would likely have been the language spoken by diaspora converts, (continued) if such people existed. Aramaic was primarily spoken in the Judean heartland; Hebrew, of course, was the language of the scrolls themselves.

According to the scroll library, the Guardian was also invested with considerable power over lay members of the community. It was the Guardian who placed members of the community in their hierarchical rank system<sup>135</sup>, which determined privileges such as who was allowed to speak first in assemblies. The Guardian was also in control over who was allowed into the ranks of the camp, and no one was allowed to be admitted into the community against the Guardian's wishes. The Guardian was even given authority over the community's marriages and divorces, at least to the point where members of the congregation were advised to defer to the Guardian's advice in such matters<sup>136</sup>.

The primary duty of the office, however, seems to have been pedagogical. It was their responsibility to ensure the continuity of the community's interpretation of the laws of the covenant. Until the Guardian had given permission, no member of the community was allowed to transmit information on the community's teachings to a postulant<sup>137</sup>. It is then the Guardian who instructs the new member on the rules and teachings of the community, and is subsequently responsible for their periodic examinations on the subject of the law<sup>138</sup>. Violations of the community's rules were also handled by the Guardian, who imposed sanctions on members depending on what precept they had violated<sup>139</sup>.

Because of the community's mutual dedication to poverty, it was (at least ideally) impossible to gain clout or authority within the community through material means.

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<sup>135</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 13.12.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 13.15-20.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 15.12

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 15.15.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 9.16-24

Instead, the requirements for the office were based on ability to lead, communicate and reinforce the community's teachings among its members. Because of this, the Guardian was then given considerable authority over their community and charged with ensuring that its members both knew and observed the covenant as the community interpreted it. This enabled the community to minimize deviation in belief or practice from the community's ideals, and in so doing ensure that the covenant as the community understood it was continually being upheld.

### **The Qumran Community's Education and *Gymnasia***

The construction of a *gymnasium* in Jerusalem during the late Seleucid period was a highly contentious issue in its day. The uproar this event caused was partially because students in the *gymnasium* exercised nude during their athletic training. Public nudity was a taboo in ancient Jewish culture, carrying connotations of public indecency and acculturation to foreign lifestyles<sup>140</sup>. Because circumcision was viewed with distaste in the Hellenistic world, some Jews had gone so far as to have their circumcisions surgically reversed so they would fit in during athletic sessions in the *gymnasium*. This made the attainment of a *gymnasium* education especially contentious among pious traditionalists<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>140</sup> Gerard Israel and Jacques Lebar, *When Jerusalem Burned* (New York: Morrow, 1973), 17. However, other sources attest that this taboo on public nudity was relaxed in certain context. Magness notes in *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit* that laborers often worked nude because the average laborer could not afford clothes specifically dedicated to working (and, presumably, to alleviate the oppressive Mediterranean heat). However, labor, while technically "public", probably carried different connotations than educational nudity; the former may have been regarded as an unfortunate necessity, while the latter likely was not.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

*Gymnasia*, of course, were not used only in Jerusalem. In fact, it seems that Hellenistic educational practices had been absorbed by the wider Jewish population, especially in the Diaspora. Lists of *ephebes* trained at *gymnasia* in Diaspora contexts often feature the names of clearly Jewish individuals such as Jesus, Elazar and Judas<sup>142</sup>. Such ephebic lists usually contain an invocation to Greek deities like Heracles and Hermes, lending a possibly idolatrous connotation to participation in the *gymanasia* system<sup>143</sup>. No ephebic lists remain from the Jerusalem *gymnasium*; *I Maccabees* only mentions that “[lawless men] joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil”<sup>144</sup>. If membership in a *gymnasium* required some sort of show of support toward Greek deities, it would seem unusual for *Maccabees* not to mention it. It is more likely that the Jerusalem *gymnasium* was a hybridized institution that blended the benefits of Greek culture with the laws of Judaism, much like the elaborately-made and expensive stone serving dishes used by the priestly class. The Qumran community, however, would almost certainly have been unsatisfied with such compromises. An ephebic list with a dedication to the Israelite god would not have changed the fundamental nature of the *gymnasium* as an institution for spreading Hellenistic values and behavior.

The community, then, needed to develop their own competing system of education that would guide its members toward honoring their sacred covenant duties. Document 1Q28a, the *Messianic Rule*, gives further detail about the way education was

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<sup>142</sup> Erich Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 123.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 123. Gruen points out that membership on such a list probably did not denote explicit worship of Greek deities, instead describing the affiliation of Greek gods and *gymnasia* as a “token dedication”.

<sup>144</sup> *I Maccabees* 1.15.

structured for those born within the community. It mostly corroborates what is explained in the *Damascus Document* regarding the community's educational system, albeit in more depth:

“From [his] youth they shall instruct him in the Book of Meditation and shall teach him, according to his age, the precepts of the Covenant. He [shall be edu]cated in their statutes for ten years[...] At the age of twenty years [he shall be] enrolled, that he may enter upon his allotted duties in the midst of his family (and) be joined to the holy congregation.”<sup>145</sup>

The rest of this column describes the graduated process by which the new member assumes responsibility within the community – at what age they are allowed to testify during legal proceedings, when they are competent to serve as leaders of the community, and so on. What is particularly relevant in the historical context is that the community had developed a system of education that began in childhood and was concerned with a very specific curriculum: “The Book of Meditation” and “the precepts of the covenant”.

Exactly what document the “Book of Meditation” refers to is unknown, although it is mentioned elsewhere in similar educational contexts, such as in the *Damascus Document*. Presumably it was a book that explained the precepts of the community and the ideal way to practice the community's rigid lifestyle; it may or may not have been one of the extant documents in the Scroll library<sup>146147</sup>. The meaning of “the precepts of the

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<sup>145</sup> *The Messianic Rule*, 1.7-10.

<sup>146</sup> It very possibly may have been the *Community Rule* or the *Damascus Document*, given that several copies of each of those documents were found within the Scrolls collection.

<sup>147</sup> In ancient contexts, books did not usually have “titles” in the modern sense of the word. In the Hebrew tradition, books were usually referred to simply by the first few words of their text. For instance, the book known in the Christian traditions as Genesis (a Greek descriptive title derived from the Septuagint translation) is known, in Hebrew, as *Bere'syt* (“In the beginning”).

Covenant”, of course, is quite clear. The community’s lifestyle of constant covenant adherence was not only something chosen by adults, but was also a system into which many of its adherents would have been born and raised<sup>148</sup>.

An educational system rooted in religious knowledge was not entirely unheard of in the Second Temple period. For men, at least, learning the precepts of the Torah was considered necessary to participate in Jewish ritual life. In this light, an educational background dedicated to “learning the precepts of the covenant” is to be expected within the community – the purpose of education was to guide and impart knowledge concerning legal observance along with ritual and moral behavior. However, this passage does underscore the importance of covenant adherence in the eyes of the community, and demonstrates that the community not only reacted against problematic cultural practices – such as *gymnasium* attendance – but that they also developed alternative systems of their own.

## **Conclusions**

The internal life of the community, both at Qumran and in urban camps off-site, was not rooted in a simple rejection of the existing social order. It was instead a self-perpetuating system with very clear values and ideas about the proper behavior and focus of a covenant-observant Israel. With these values in mind, the community attempted – and for a period of two centuries, succeeded – to create a system that would explain and reinforce their own covenant beliefs.

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<sup>148</sup> This is another example of the difficulties reconciling the community with a “monastic” existence. Monasticism generally relies on the initiation of adult postulants and children who are “given” to the monastic community at a very early age; however, children are generally not born in a monastic environment, due to celibacy and segregation of the sexes.



Internally, the community reinvented itself in the opposite image of the system that they had left behind. The Temple aristocracy was wealthy, given to displays of conspicuous consumption, and attempted to integrate themselves into the wider Hellenistic world. They enjoyed the benefits of living at the top of the Judean social hierarchy and as a result often cooperated with reigning authorities – such as the Seleucids and the Romans – even when such cooperation could potentially result in danger to the efficacy of the covenant.

To the community, this kind of behavior was in fact a sign of impiety and would result in assured destruction in the eschaton. The proper role of a true covenant adherent, in their eyes, was to disregard material wealth and social status in favor of textual study, prayer and other facets of religious observance. In comparison with the Temple aristocracy, the leaders of the community achieved status through strict devotion to the tenets of the community, the covenant itself, and God. Thus, their system of communal poverty, hierarchical leadership and education was both an indictment of the existing, corrupt system in Jerusalem, and a means by which the community ensured the perpetuation of their own collective in its capacity of a faithful Israelite remnant. The community's division of boundaries allowed them to delineate who, in their own eyes, was under covenant obligations and who was not; the community's internal structure allowed them to maintain their own status as a pure remnant while ensuring the community's perpetuity until the eschaton. In the next chapter, I will describe how the site of Qumran itself acted as a Temple replacement, allowing the community to function not simply as a schismatic sect of Judaism, but as an alternate Israelite nation that fulfilled all the requirements of their sacred covenant.

## CHAPTER 5 – THE TEMPLE

Beginning in the Exilic period, elements within Jewish society began to develop ways of practicing their religion outside of the Temple context. Yet, during the Qumran era, the Temple remained the ritual and symbolic center of Jewish religious life. It was still the site where the all-important sacrificial rituals, upon which the Israelite covenant depended, were carried out, and it was still the seat of the High Priest, the *de facto* ruler of Jews living in Palestine.

Given the centrality of the Temple in Qumran-era Jewish thought, it is unsurprising that the Temple was also of central importance to Qumran's own conception of Jewish identity and covenant adherence. Over time, the community developed and articulated many grievances with outside society in the Scroll texts, but their original point of divergence was in a dispute over the practice of the Temple system<sup>149</sup>. The Temple was the axis upon which Israel's covenant revolved; if they were to act as an efficacious remnant of Israel, the issue of the Temple and its sacrificial system would need to be internally addressed.

To understand the Qumranic response to the Temple's contamination, we must first address the nature of the Temple's perceived corruption in the eyes of the community. Fortunately, the Temple practices were written upon extensively by the both the community and contemporary historical sources, and it is relatively easy to parse the

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<sup>149</sup> James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 212.

community's objection to contemporary Temple practice.

### **Precedents for Temple Contamination**

The Qumran community emphasized the importance of unceasing adherence to the covenant laws in all aspects of life. This adherence to covenant law was even more important in a Temple context. Strict and sincere performance of the Temple cycle was a substantial part of the covenant agreement. More importantly, the Temple was explicitly the site of the divine presence<sup>150</sup>. As a result of this, the community was extremely preoccupied with ensuring that ritual was adhered to without fail, and that no contaminating subject could enter the Temple precincts.

By the Qumran period, substantial problems had developed concerning the Temple's purity status. One such problem was an undisputed contamination of the Temple by the Seleucid Greeks in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE. In one of the precipitating events of the Hasmonean revolt, Antiochus IV captured Jerusalem and ordered a foreign altar or cult object to be placed within the sacred precincts of the Temple<sup>151</sup>. Eventually, the Maccabees retook the Jerusalem and reconsecrated the Temple complex<sup>152</sup>; this event is now remembered as the origin of Hannukah.

This desecration of the Temple took place a generation prior to the establishment of Qumran, but it is highly relevant to understanding the Qumran mindset. The events of

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<sup>150</sup> This is elaborated upon in several scroll texts; the nature of the divine contact during Sabbath rituals is explicated, albeit somewhat opaquely, in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. The idea that the Temple is the site of the divine presence is also an underlying assumption in the *Temple Scroll*, and the necessity of enhanced purity "because of the presence of the angels" is described in the *War Scroll*.

<sup>151</sup> Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 22.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* These events are described both in the apocryphal books of the *Maccabees* as well as in Josephus.

the revolt reinforced quite clearly the textual conception of history in which proper covenant adherence was under attack by those who would see the covenant adulterated or destroyed. To the pious, the parallels between the present and the scriptural past – specifically, the prophets and the Deuteronomists – would have seemed very timely. The events preceding the Hasmonean revolt place direct threats to the substance of the covenant itself well within living memory of the community’s foundation. It is no wonder that they believed the stakes were so high regarding the maintenance of the covenant relationship.

Secondly, the revolt established a precedent in which the Temple would have been unambiguously contaminated and thus ritually invalid. The placement of a foreign cult object or altar was a clear violation of the Temple’s purity and, at least in the conception of historical records such as Josephus or *Maccabees*, it was mutually understood that the Temple needed to be reconsecrated before it could function as the site of God’s presence and ritual efficacy<sup>153</sup>. There is no evidence in the scrolls that the Qumran community believed that the Temple remained contaminated from the Seleucid desecration. However, the event remains as an example of how the Temple could be rendered ritually inadequate through observable historical events, and thus required action on the part of the pious to be restored. The community’s objection to the post-Hasmonean Temple was of the same essential character as the earlier objection to the

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<sup>153</sup> It seems likely that the imposition of foreign cult objects within the Temple was not entirely conceived or carried out by the Seleucids. Cohen notes the possibility that Jewish collaborators in Jerusalem, as opposed to Greeks, may have been responsible for introducing the cult object/altar into the sacred precincts of the Temple. Certainly the priestly aristocracy was accused of accommodation to the Seleucids, giving the Hasmonean revolt a socioeconomic dimension as well as a religious one (the Hasmoneans were rural priests, and drew most of their support from other rural laborers). Most of this old, Hellenizing aristocracy was driven out of Jerusalem or killed when the Hasmoneans assumed power (Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 22-23) although, it did not take long for the new, Hasmonean-selected aristocracy to take up similarly Hellenizing behavior.

presence of foreign religious objects within the Temple; both were derived from the presence of contaminating elements.

The community, however, was clearly neither politically or militarily powerful enough to challenge the practices of the Hasmonean Temple. As *MMT* shows, the earliest hopes of the community was for reconciliation. The absence of such reconciliation forced the community to adapt a new means of fulfilling its covenant obligations outside of a Temple context.

### **Calendrics**

One of the Qumran community's key objections to the Temple establishment revolved around calendrical disputes. Because the Jewish ritual calendar required certain rites to be performed on precise and predetermined days of the year – Passover and the Day of Atonement being particularly important – it was crucial that the correct calendrical system was used in order for the covenant to be completely upheld<sup>154</sup>. Otherwise, even if the rituals of the Temple cycle were performed scrupulously, they would be inadequate for the maintenance of the covenant<sup>155</sup>.

Evidence that the calendrical issue was important to the early community is found in *MMT*, believed to be a letter from the community to the early Hasmonean High Priests

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<sup>154</sup> Johann Maier, “The Judaic System of the Dead Sea Scrolls”, *Judaism in Late Antiquity II: Historical Synthesis*, 98.

<sup>155</sup> That this was a particularly weighty issue for the community – and was, in fact, one of their primary motivations for their split with Temple-observant society – is illustrative about the community's approach to the Law and the best way to uphold the covenant. Groups such as the Pharisees were known for extrapolating *principals* from the Laws in order to build their body of *halakhah*; although the Qumran community did a great deal of interpretive innovation of their own, this was usually done as a means of negotiating covenant adherence away from a Temple context, as will be explored later in this chapter, their primary motivation was ensuring that the dictates of the Law were followed precisely, no matter what lengths they had to go to do so.

and the Jerusalem priestly establishment. *MMT* is thought to have been written by the community in order to convince the Jerusalem priestly establishment, and the High Priest in particular, that elements of the contemporary Temple cult were inappropriate and threatened to violate the covenant<sup>156</sup>. Notably, some of the first lines of the letter deal with calendrical discrepancies that were troubling to the community<sup>157</sup>.

The Qumran community used an unusual calendrical system that was not shared by the outside Jewish community. Specifically, this calendar consisted of “twelve months of thirty days each, plus four extra days added to each of the four seasons”<sup>158</sup>; this calendar was additionally organized along a six-year cycle<sup>159</sup>. Society outside the community – including the Temple priests - apparently preferred the use of a lunar calendar of 354 days<sup>160</sup>. That the community’s concern with these issues was related to proper ritual observance is attested in that the calendrical passages are structured by series of Sabbaths, and make references to dates upon which ritual events should fall. Although *MMT* is fragmentary, holidays mentioned specifically include the Feast of

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<sup>156</sup> James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 212.

<sup>157</sup> There is some debate as to whether this calendrical text was actually part of the original *MMT* document, or whether it was simply written on the same scroll for some other reason. Scroll material was precious and such combinations would not have been unusual, and the next section of the document, *MMT* B, begins with a sentence that could be construed as an introduction. However, many of the other scroll documents deal with the same issue present in *MMT* A – reconciling the lunar and solar calendars – as shall be discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>158</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y.: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 347.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

Weeks, the Feast of Wine, and the Feast of Oil<sup>161</sup>.

There are other calendrical documents within the scroll library besides *MMT*. One of the most notable and complete is called the *Calendar of Priestly Courses*, which describes in great detail which priestly family is to officiate in the Temple services during the given weeks of a year<sup>162</sup>. This document is particularly important, because it illustrates quite clearly the reactionary nature of Qumran's calendrical system.

We have already established that the Qumran community took issue with the priestly calendar that was used in the existing Temple system. In order to ensure that their own community did not make a mistake and thus commit a similar violation – thus rendering ineffective their status as a remnant of Israel – they had to remedy the problems created by the lunar calendar. The *Calendar of Priestly Courses* does precisely this, comparing the two calendars and describing specifically how dates in the lunar calendar correspond to the solar calendar:

“(There is full moon) on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the week of Jedaiah, (corresponding) to the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar month, which falls on the 30<sup>th</sup> of the second (solar month).  
(There is full moon) on the Sabbath in (the week of) Hak]koz, (corresponding) to the 30<sup>th</sup> (day of the lunar month), (which falls) on the 29<sup>th</sup> (day) in the third (solar month).”<sup>163</sup>

These works of calendrical correspondence show that the Qumran community was concerned with ensuring that the calendar they used for their own ritual practice was the correct one. In so doing the community was able to make sure that their own internal

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<sup>161</sup> *MMT A*, 1.1-5.5.

<sup>162</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y.: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 347.

<sup>163</sup> *The Calendar of Priestly Courses*, 1.5-6

efficacy as a covenant remnant was maintained. This raises two questions, the first being why the community believed that the solar calendar was more accurate than the lunar calendar. The community never explicitly states the reason for its preference, at least not within the scroll library itself. The solar calendar is also mentioned in the apocryphal books of *Enoch* and *Jubilees*, and fragments of these books were found at Qumran. Given that the canonization of the Tanakh was not formally complete until after the destruction of Qumran, it is possible that the community's founders believed *Enoch* and *Jubilees* to be canonical, and thus their calendrical system was ritually binding. Temple-observant society did not consider the books canonical, however, and the two works were ultimately left out of the canonical Tanakh.

The second question involving Qumran's calendrical documents is why works such as the *Calendar of Priestly Courses*, which explicitly compared the two calendars, were considered necessary. It is possible, given that many of Qumran's inhabitants were apparently converts<sup>164</sup>, that these documents were intended to help new members who were used to the lunar calendar and needed to be educated on the proper ritual calendar<sup>165</sup>. The texts could also have been written during the community's formative period, when the specifics of their internal ritual calendar were still being developed. Regardless of the community's motivations for adopting the solar calendar, it is clear from the textual evidence that they took issue with the ritual calendar of the existing

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<sup>164</sup> "Converts", here, in the sense that they although they were born Jewish, they were not necessarily born into the Qumran community.

<sup>165</sup> This is a position taken by Pliny, although his writings on the subject are probably inaccurate; he views the Essenes as entirely celibate, and uses hyperbolic figures to describe both their antiquity and the number of converts who joined the community. Given that Qumran seems to have been the ritual center of a larger community, it is possible that 'lay' members born into the community joined Qumran as a voluntary act. Also, the 'camps' of lay members undoubtedly were made up, at least partially of converts.



Temple, and that they structured their own ritual calendar so as to properly adhere to the covenant as they interpreted it.

### **Contamination of the Temple Site**

The Temple was the site of God's presence and the axis of ritual purity on Earth. Because of this, it was of the utmost importance that the Temple site remained uncontaminated by outside influences. Unfortunately, in the community's conception at least, the Temple site was at risk of pollution from various contaminating elements.

Again, *MMT* is useful, as it records many of the community's issues with the purity of the Temple site. One of the first sources of contamination mentioned in *MMT* was the "offering of the wheat of the Gentiles"<sup>166</sup>. That this was a ritual purity concern is stated explicitly: "(4)[...]They touch it and de[file it... One should not accept anything] from the wheat [of the Gen]tiles [and none of it is] to enter the Sanctuary."<sup>167</sup>

Gentiles, because they were ignorant of or did not obey the purity laws outlined in the Torah, represented a contaminating influence. Because contamination was transferred through physical contact, any offering that had been handled by Gentiles was a potential source of contamination for the entire Temple site. The rest of this section in *MMT* is very fragmentary and its precise meaning is unclear. Another line, in 4Q395(8), mentions a "sacrifice of the Gentiles". Although the wording of the text seems to indicate sacrifices offered directly by Gentiles, "to [an idol]"<sup>168</sup>, it is more likely that this

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<sup>166</sup> *MMT*, 4Q394:1-5.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

refers to some sort of offering on behalf of or purchased by Gentiles within the Temple system, given that the section surrounding it revolves around proper Temple practice<sup>169</sup>.

Gentiles were not the only source of contamination that endangered the Temple site.

*MMT* also details various minutiae of Temple practice, such as the disposal of the skin, ashes and bones of the sacrificial offerings<sup>170</sup>.

Another potential danger to the Temple site involved intermarriage.

Intermarriage was common throughout the Second Temple period, although it was often met with disapproval from various official actors. Ezra and Nehemiah attempted to expel “foreign women” from the Judaeen community<sup>171</sup>. Interestingly, the Torah itself does not explicitly forbid the intermarriage of Israelites and Gentiles, although it does forbid certain groups from “entering the congregation of the Lord” – probably a prohibition against presence at the Temple instead of an outright ban on intermarriage<sup>172</sup>.

In the Qumran community’s self-conception, Qumran itself functioned as a

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<sup>169</sup> The precise meaning of “Gentiles” in this context could be interpreted in multiple ways. During the Hellenistic period and later, some foreigners, especially Greeks, began to adopt certain Jewish religious practices. This easily could have included participating, at least through intermediaries, in the Temple cult, and historical accounts describe some (usually fictitious) accounts of Gentiles who attend Temple services, especially on holidays. The term could also have referred to groups whose Jewish credentials were sometimes disparaged, such as Samaritans or Idumean converts, although the likely dating of *MMT* probably precludes the latter, who were only forcibly converted to Judaism after the invasion of John Hyrcanus ca. 125 BCE.

<sup>170</sup> *MMT*, 4Q394 1-7.

<sup>171</sup> Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 261.

<sup>172</sup> Again, this seems to indicate ritual purity concerns – that the presence of Gentiles would introduce a contaminating element into the Temple precincts. Injunctions against intermarriage would begin to solidify during the post-Exilic period, although it remained a common practice. By the Talmudic period, when the injunctions against intermarriage were fully formed, exception was given for Gentile women who converted to Judaism upon marriage. There seems to have been comparatively little concern about Jewish women who married Gentile men, although according to Cohen, the Matrilineal principle – wherein Jewish ancestry was passed along matrilineal lines of descent – seems to have emerged in the Rabbinic period as a result of such unions.

replacement Temple, and the purity variables within the bounds of Qumran were tightly controlled. The community's rules generally punished the violation of purity through restriction from the "purity" of the community (in this context, referring to the food and liquids consumed by the community during their communal meals, with the latter being more susceptible to contamination and thus more tightly controlled).

Rules for purity at Qumran, as described in the *Community Rule*, are essentially similar to those in the Temple. Members of the community living on-site dressed in the same way as priests in the Temple – white linen robes – and followed priestly rules regarding purification and contamination modeled upon those of the Temple. One of the most remarked-upon aspects of daily life at Qumran was their unusual toilet habits. Essenes in the historical record were described as following very strict rules regarding toilet behavior, such as not allowing their bodies to be exposed and scrupulously covering waste with dirt<sup>173</sup>. Because of the Temple's heightened purity requirements, excretion was considered a contaminating act, and Qumran seems to have been constructed so as to accommodate this interpretation. *Mikva'ot* were located near toilets and areas which were especially important to purity maintenance, such as the dining areas and pottery workshop<sup>174</sup>.

The view of the Qumran complex as being analogous to the Temple site could

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<sup>173</sup> Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 135. Josephus describes Essene toilet habits in *War* 2.147-49.

<sup>174</sup> Yizhar Hirschfield, *Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 89 (Fig. 4.1). Apparently, the community's scrupulosity with regard to *mikveh* placement increased over time. The original Hasmonean-period structure only featured two *mikveh* on-site; the much larger Herodian-period complex featured five more, located near not only the dining room and pottery kiln (Herodian additions) but also the garden and the entrance to the complex itself. It is possible that the rooms in the original Hasmonean structure were repurposed after the larger complex was built, since the Hasmonean structure does not feature important rooms such as the dining hall.

account for an unusual absence in the material record – specifically, the lack of any identifiable residential areas of the site. None of the rooms at Qumran seem to have been for residential purposes<sup>175</sup>, and it is likely that the residents lived somewhere outside the complex on-site, either in tents or the nearby caves in which the Scrolls were discovered.

There is also little evidence that women were ever permanent residents on-site<sup>176</sup>. This would make sense if Qumran was constructed with the intent of serving as a Temple substitute, because women were forbidden from entering the inner precincts of the Temple complex<sup>177</sup>. This restriction was likely rooted in concerns about the purity or contamination of the Temple site. Women were more at risk for ritual contamination than men, and particularly female sources of impurity – menstrual blood and recent childbirth – were temporary and difficult to detect<sup>178</sup>.

### **Prayer and Sacrifice**

As mentioned above, the community's separation from Temple – both the site of the Temple complex itself, and the social system that supported and upheld the Temple – placed the community in a tenuous position. The primary function of the community was to serve as a tenable remnant of Israel, wherein all the necessary duties of the Israelite covenant could be scrupulously upheld. However, one of the most important elements of

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<sup>175</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 176.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>177</sup> Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 64.

<sup>178</sup> Rahel R. Wasserfall (ed), *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (Hanover: University of New England, 1999), 26. A similar prohibition existed – both in the Temple and in the Qumran community – for men with a *zav* (“flux”), a condition that is generally translated as an abnormal seminal discharge and was perhaps seen as analogous to menstrual contamination (*niddah*).

maintaining the covenant was the practice of the cycle of sacrifice, atonement and worship that took place on-site at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In order to fulfill their role as a remnant, the community had to develop a way to perform the function of the Temple cult without the proscribed actions involved. This was especially difficult given that the community's standard approach to legal adherence was not improvisation, but strict adherence to those views that were perceived to have precedent or traditional weight.

There was, of course, an era in Israelite history wherein the sacrificial system was carried out absent a Temple or a Jerusalem context, which the community would have also been quite familiar with. During the pre-monarchical period, and specifically the Exodus and conquest of Canaan, the "Temple site" of the Israelite people was actually a mobile worship site known as the Tabernacle or Sanctuary. This was essentially a tent laid out along the same layers of decreasing ritual purity as the Temple would later be, with the Ark of the Covenant – the site of God's presence – at the very center; sacrifices were performed in a courtyard outside. There is, however, no evidence that the community took this approach, or even considered taking it, in the archaeological or historical record. There are multiple possible explanations for this. The first is simply that the community had no desire to separate from the *concept* of the Temple, or even from the extant Temple site. Their grievances were instead with the way the Temple was being run, and how the Temple establishment dealt with some rather specific issues.

The community also would have had difficulty establishing a ritually efficacious Tabernacle structure based on the Exilic/Conquest model. The most important aspect of the Temple complex was, of course, the divine presence itself. Absent the Ark of the

Covenant, another Tabernacle would have simply been a large and elaborate tent structure with no compelling ritual power. There would have been no reason to think sacrifices performed before such a structure were more useful for upholding the covenant than performing them anywhere else on Earth. For these reasons it does not seem to have occurred to the community to construct a Tabernacle as a replacement Temple for their remnant<sup>179</sup>.

We have already established above that the Qumran site itself was viewed as a replacement for the Temple in the eyes of the community. Likewise, the *activities* of Qumran's inhabitants were developed as a replacement for the Temple's sacrificial cult. Specifically, the activities the community used as a replacement for the sacrificial system were communal meals and prayer.

The scroll library does not leave a clear explication of the meaning of the community's communal meals. However, that they served a ritual purpose is clear from the textual and archaeological evidence. The *Community Rule* demonstrates that members of the Qumran community were prohibited from partaking in ritual meals if they had somehow acquired a state of ritual impurity or had violated rules of the community's covenant<sup>180</sup>; clearly the meals had more than a subsistence purpose. The community's ceramic assemblage also lends credence to the idea that the meals were

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<sup>179</sup> This is also supported by the community's eschatological texts. In works such as the *Temple Scroll*, the community's ultimate goal was the destruction of the current system and the restoration of proper Temple adherence; although eventually a larger Temple would be built, there would not be a move toward an Exilic/Conquest model of society. The possible exception to this is the *War Scroll*, which describes the armies who will fight in the battles at the end of time living in "camps" reminiscent of the Conquest era, with God dwelling among them. However, this seems to have simply been an exigency resulting from the war itself, and not a model of society to be emulated in the community's present.

<sup>180</sup> One example is in *Community Rule* 7.3: "If [a man] has spoken in anger against one of the Priests inscribed in the Book, he shall do penance for one year and shall be excluded for his soul's sake from the pure Meal of the Congregation. But if he has spoken unwittingly, he shall do penance for six months".

events of heightened ritual purity. Although most meals in an ancient Near Eastern context were eaten communally, with large serving dishes, Qumran instead featured many individual ceramic vessels so that its inhabitants could eat individually<sup>181</sup>.

Caution should be used when exploring the sacral nature of Qumran's communal meals, especially given the above-mentioned tendency of early scholars to interpret the Scrolls through a Christian lens; in this light, Qumran's sacral meals would seem to be parallel to the early Christian Eucharist. Again, however, Qumran's behavior is best understood as a means of replacing or standing in for Temple-oriented society. The symbolic context of the Eucharist is highly dissimilar to that of Qumran's sacral meals; there is no mention, for instance, of partaking in the flesh or blood of a Messiah recorded in the Scroll texts, in sections describing their meals or otherwise. Likewise, Archaeological evidence of Qumran's sacral meals indicate a connection with the existing Temple cult. The faunal remains of Qumran's communal meals were prepared and disposed of in a way analogous to the Temple sacrifices – specifically, by being boiled or roasted, and later buried in shallow pits or piled on the ground. Additionally, the absence of sacrificial features – especially an altar – makes it unlikely that the animals at Qumran were sacrificed in according with the Temple regulations<sup>182</sup>. Thus, the sacral meals appear to have been religious in nature, but not explicitly sacrificial themselves.

As early as Josephus, the communal dining spaces used by the community were

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<sup>181</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 116. Magness also notes that Josephus describes these individual serving habits as being unusual for the period in *The Jewish Wars*.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 118-120.

described as “holy precincts”, clearly reminiscent of the Temple’s system of purity boundaries. Josephus also describes how the community immersed themselves in a *mikveh* prior to eating, mirroring the procedure required for priests offering sacrifices in the Temple<sup>183</sup>. Although some degree of purification, such as dipping the hands in a stone vessel filled with water, were practiced by groups such as the Pharisees, full immersion prior to eating is only attested at Qumran<sup>184</sup>. Magness points out that the remains of animals consumed in the community’s meals were disposed of in ways analogous to the sacrificial remains in the Temple, although there is little evidence that the animals were actually sacrificed the way that the Temple offerings were<sup>185</sup>. Some scholars, such as Hartgut Stegemann, have drawn parallels between Qumran’s communal meals and those held in the Temple on pilgrimage holidays<sup>186</sup>.

Meals eaten within the Temple were also a point of concern to the community’s founders. Although the section of the document describing these meals is highly fragmentary, one of the first of the community’s grievances listed in *MMT* somehow involves cooking “the meat of the sacrifices”, and another line describes some kind of problem regarding the proper way to eat the meat of the sacrifices<sup>187</sup>. Another activity of central importance to the site was prayer, according to the scroll library. Most of the sacrifices commanded in the Torah were for the purpose of covenant maintenance or

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<sup>183</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 116-117.

<sup>184</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, 39.

<sup>185</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 119.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 116-117.

<sup>187</sup> *MMT*, 4Q395 6-9.



atonement for sin. The community, citing scriptural precedent, stated in the *Damascus Document* that sincere prayers were more valuable than insincere sacrifices<sup>188</sup>.

That prayer was an important activity on-site at Qumran is also supported by the contents of the scroll library. Several of the documents found at Qumran seem to have been liturgical works or prayer texts that are unique to the community and were presumably composed on-site<sup>189</sup>. Some of these seem to have been written with the intent of “daily” use – that is, days other than a holiday or Sabbath. 4Q503, simply entitled *Daily Prayers* by Vermes, is an example of this type. Such prayers typically describe blessing and praising God on what seems to be an organized schedule (prayers spoken at sunrise are a common recurring theme)<sup>190</sup>. Other documents in the scroll library are even more directly tied to the Temple cycle. 4Q507-9, entitled *Prayers for Festivals*, describes prayers that were apparently intended to be spoken on the Day of Atonement: “...Prayer for the Day of Atonement. Remember O Lord, the feast of mercies and the time of return (?)... Thou hast established it for us as a feast of feasting, and an everlas[ting] precept... Thou knowest the hidden things and the things reveal[ed]...”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 118. The specific passage cited is a slightly altered version of Proverbs 15:8, and reads “No man shall send to the altar any burnt offering, or cereal offering, or incense, or wood, by the hand of one smitten with any uncleanness, permitting him thus to defile the altar. For it is written, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination but the prayer of the just is an agreeable offering*” (CD 11.18-21), emphasis original.

<sup>189</sup> It is also possible that these texts were used by other Jewish groups outside of Qumran, and have simply been lost to history for preservation reasons, but even if this is the case, their presence at Qumran shows the importance that the inhabitants placed on prayer and worship activities.

<sup>190</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y.: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 386.

<sup>191</sup> 4Q507, *Prayers for Festivals*, Fragment 2.

The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) was the most holy day of the Jewish ritual calendar, and the sacrifices held on the Day of Atonement required the direct participation of the High Priest. Another document, 1Q28b, describes blessings upon the High Priest alongside members of the community, such as the “Prince of the Congregation”<sup>192</sup>. These documents attest that the prayers practiced by the Qumran community were not simply an exercise of piety, such as the recitation of the *Shema* that was practiced by all levels of Jewish society during the Qumran period. Their prayers, instead, made up an organized body of liturgy intended to be used on clearly delineated occasions that mirrored the practice of the Temple cycle<sup>193</sup>.

It is easy to see how prayer and sacrifice could have been used as substitutions for the sacrificial system in an alternate Temple context. Prayer and communal meals were both part of the Temple system, although apparently in the eyes of the community they were not tied as directly to geographical considerations as the sacrificial cult itself. Downplaying sacrificial acts while simultaneously emphasizing prayer and communal meals allowed the community to appropriate existing and efficacious ritual actions without actually ‘replicating’ the Temple cult. These rituals allowed them to fulfill the sacrificial aspect of the covenant as much as possible outside of the Temple context.

### **The Role of Qumran in the Wider Community**

My final point regarding Qumran has to do with its purpose of the Qumran

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<sup>192</sup> *Blessings*, 5.20.

<sup>193</sup> Esther G. Chazon, “The Function of the Qumran Prayer Texts” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Major Issues and New Approaches: An International Congress, the Israel Museum Jerusalem, July 20-25, 1997: Abstracts*, ed. Lawrence Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. Vanderkam (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2000), 217.

community itself in the context of the wider “remnant” community. The overwhelming tendency within scholarly literature has been to view Qumran as a kind of ‘schismatic’ or ‘splinter’ group, at times even within the sub-society of the original Temple objectors. This position generally states that the community was an ‘offshoot’ of the Essenes that moved to Qumran in the pursuit of even greater purity than the earlier community. This view has been so pervasive that at times it is almost taken for granted in scholarly literature. A good example of this is provided in Vanderkam and Flint’s *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*; in a comprehensive assessment of all major DSS publications contemporary to the book’s publication in 1999, editor Adam S. Van Der Woude states an implicit assumption of the Qumran community’s schismatic nature<sup>194</sup>.

Scholars disagree as to what kind of separatist community Qumran was. Many, such as Vermes, Vanderkam, Flint and Yadin take the position that the community was a group of Essenes. Others take a more cautious approach, stating that we cannot assume that the Qumran community was named in the historical record and was likely some since-forgotten group; Lawrence Schiffman is one example of this school of thought, as is Johann Maier<sup>195</sup>. Many scholars of the Essene school could likely accommodate a

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<sup>194</sup> Specifically, Van Der Woude draws a distinction between the Qumran community and the Essenes. For instance, regarding the possibility of a Qumranic ‘canon’ used by the community on-site, he states: “Although several nonbiblical works found in the caves were written prior to the settlement of the community in the desert of Judah, these writings were apparently regarded by the members as compatible with their own ideology and halakhah, since they attested to the apocalyptic and Essene traditions which eventually gave rise to the world-view and halakhah of the Qumranites.” (Adam S. Van Der Woude, “Fifty Years of Qumran Research”, *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty years*, 4). This clearly draws a distinction between “Qumran” and “Essene”.

<sup>195</sup> Maier, like Schiffman, bases this distinction in a conservative and skeptical methodological approach. Because Josephus was writing for a Hellenistic pagan audience, he employs various tropes that would seem to make the Essenes both more familiar and more virtuous for his readers. Thus, “it is necessary to treat Josephus’ alleged Essaioi and Essenoi and the Qumran texts apart from each other”. “The Judaic System of the Dead Sea Scrolls”, Johann Maier, *Judaism in Late Antiquity II: Historical Synthesis*, 86.

view of Qumran that is more connected to the wider Essene community than is generally assumed, but most take for granted that Qumran was an isolated, self-sustaining, holistically-contained unit.

The roots of this assumption go back to the earliest days of Qumran research<sup>196</sup>. As I mentioned in my introductory chapter, interpretations of Qumran have been greatly colored by reading Christian and monastic concepts onto Qumran. This is more than a matter of terminology, such as De Vaux's labeling of various site features using monastic terminology (*scriptorium*, *refectory*, etc.). It has also influenced the nature of how we have interpreted Qumran's relationship with the outside world. Christian monastics, especially the earliest desert monastics, were known for their extreme isolation and general disconnectedness from even fellow practitioners of their religion<sup>197</sup>. Qumran has subsequently been viewed as a kind of collective of desert fathers – extremely holy men living piously ascetic lives in an isolated location, interacting only occasionally with the outside world.

However, this conception of Qumran does not necessarily translate well to a late Second Temple context. In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate that Qumran was viewed by its inhabitants as a replacement for the Temple. But the Temple itself carries with it some implicit symbolic assumptions. The Temple does not exist in a vacuum; it is first and foremost a site wherein the ritual responsibilities of an entire *nation* can be carried out. A Temple without an Israel is akin to a monarch without a

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<sup>196</sup> Arguably, it can be traced back to the classical sources, who describe the 'celibate' Essenes as a more 'elite', or pious, group living in a community separated from the outside world.

<sup>197</sup> In the ideal, at least; even desert hermits usually interact with larger society in some way; otherwise we would have no record of their existence. But the image of the disconnected hermit – or hermit community – has a long history in both the popular and academic consciousness.

country or a priest without a congregation – a symbol with no clear ritual purpose, and no audience to interpret it.

When the Temple is mentioned in the body of the scroll library, it is always in just such a context – a site of ritual significance for a wider ‘lay’ community. This is clear in the community’s eschatological texts, such as the *Temple Scroll*. The role of the priesthood is clearly defined, and because of the importance of the priesthood in upholding the covenant, they are (arguably) given the most power over the wider body politic of Israel. A similar dichotomy exists in the *War Scroll*, which shows the importance of adhering to the covenant even in the context of the eschatological war that would end history, but nowhere assumes that all of Israel would be subsumed under the priesthood. The idea that the entire “remnant” of Israel would consist of observant, celibate priests simply does not exist in the scrolls. The Temple exists to serve and as part of a wider lay community.

It is also notable that nowhere in the scroll library do we have any indication that the Qumran community had its own schismatic event in which it separated from a wider religious community. The scrolls are admittedly fragmentary, and what information we do have about the original Temple schism is incomplete; we should not necessarily assume that events not recorded in the extant textual record did not occur. But if the Qumran community was forced to again isolate themselves from their own remnant community after having already separated from the Temple, it would seem likely that this event would have been mentioned within the scroll texts at least once, given that the original Temple schism is mentioned multiple times (if only obliquely).

Thus, I believe that Qumran was established for the specific purpose of serving as

the Temple site of a wider socio-religious community – specifically, those other communities (described in the historical sources as Essenes) that existed contemporary with Qumran. This interpretation helps explain some of the contradictions within the historical and textual record, specifically why there seems to be different ‘types’ of Essenes living in Judaea during the late Second Temple period.

Historical sources contradict as to exactly how the Essenes lived. Josephus mentions that some Essenes may marry, whereas Pliny seems to assume they are celibate; notably, Pliny describes the celibate Essenes as living in the vicinity of Qumran<sup>198</sup>. The scroll library itself can be contradictory, as well. The *Community Rule* makes most sense when read as a series of rules for a community of celibate men, but the *Damascus Document* seems to have been written for a community that allowed marriage and families<sup>199</sup>.

I believe that the discrepancy within these rules is not a contradiction in the community’s beliefs, but is instead evidence that the community had different sets of rules for the community’s “Temple priesthood” (Qumran) and its laity (the “camps” described in the Damascus Document). The more stringent requirements for behavior and purity found at Qumran are rooted in preserving its efficacy as a Temple site, and not in the assumption that these rules were binding for all true adherents of the covenant.

This interpretation of Qumran, although not without its flaws, does help to explain some discrepancies regarding Essene practices and beliefs. Ancient writers such as

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<sup>198</sup> *Natural History* 5. 17, 4 (73)

<sup>199</sup> An example of this is in Column 7, which specifically mentions “marrying” and “begetting children” in “camps” – generally thought to refer to Essene communities in various cities across Judaea. *The Damascus Document* 7.7-10.

Josephus or Pliny would not have been likely to have known about the intricacies of the Essenes' own internal beliefs, and they were apparently famous for secrecy about these beliefs. The contradictions in the historical record do not reflect two separate 'kinds' of Essenes, but are instead evidence of incomplete information on the part of the historical sources.

## **Conclusions**

Because the Temple in Jerusalem had been defiled in the eyes of the community, it was no longer possible for rites performed at the site to function in upholding the covenant. The Temple's calendrical system was considered invalid by the community, and the Temple was apparently polluted by several sources, such as Gentile offerings and the incorrect disposal of sacrificial remains. The existing Temple establishment refused to accommodate the community's demands, so in order to ensure that their half of the covenant was fulfilled, a new site was needed to act as the ritual center of the remnant community.

Qumran was a site where rituals analogous to the sacrificial system could be performed, and which already had precedent as efficacious ritual acts associated with the Temple - specifically, communal meals, prayers and various kinds of liturgical ceremonies. This role as ritual center was reinforced by the strict and constant maintenance of ritual purity on-site, so as to ensure that their own secondary Temple site would remain uncontaminated and thus efficacious for the purposes of upholding the covenant.

## CHAPTER 6 – FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND COUNTERARGUMENTS

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran has often been misunderstood in both the popular and academic imagination. The community has been interpreted through the lens of movements and ideas that both postdate the community and had considerably different goals and motivations than the community identifies itself as having. In particular, scholars have often been tempted to view Qumran as an early prototype of the Christian monastic “impulse”, with the lifestyle of Qumran serving as a kind of prefiguration of early Christian monasticism<sup>200</sup>.

This approach emphasizes the surface aspects of the Qumran community’s lifestyle – the dedication to poverty, communalism, and ascetic piety – to the detriment of understanding the community’s own reasons and justification for action. It is not impossible that early Christianity, or other pious movements of the first century such as John the Baptist’s following, were influenced by the rhetoric and lifestyle of the Qumran community. Parallels certainly exist between the two groups. But the groups are considerably more different than they are similar, and to properly interpret Qumran’s actions, beliefs and motivations we must disregard any cultural baggage that is carried through our now-ancient familiarity with Christianity and Christian conceptions of the world.

The Qumran movement was one possible outcome of a religious system that imposed strong, lasting motivations on its adherents to uphold the obligations of the

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<sup>200</sup> Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 45.



Israelite covenant and to strictly observe the laws of the Torah. This motivation was imposed by the promise of blessing and divine favor should the covenant be upheld, and the guarantee of punishment, invasion and destruction should the covenant be broken. The late Second Temple period, with its periodic social instability, pressure from powerful foreign empires, tension over religious observance and a growing trend toward the integration of ways of life perceived as foreign into Judean society, was an especially stressful time for those who adhered to a strict covenant view of history. The perceived Hasmonean failure to bring about an ideal Jewish state that they had hoped for, the community's founders were forced by their own internal conceptions of the covenant to separate from Temple-observant society and to develop their own system in which the covenant could be upheld until the eschaton brought about a divine rebirth of society.

The community resolved this dilemma by constructing a new identity from existing strains with currency in established Jewish thought – specifically, the idea that a pious remnant existed during times of covenant failure which would allow the continuity of Israel as a nation, even as the impious majority was given over to destruction. The community also used scriptural justification to situate themselves in a divinely-ordained eschatological narrative. This was accomplished by their own form of scriptural interpretation, wherein significant verses were analyzed for potential references to important events in the community's past – such as their original separation from the Temple system – or the eschatological future.

The community, for the most part, did not engage in a great deal of scriptural debate and or Torah explication like the contemporary Pharisees or the later rabbis. Instead, they believed that information necessary toward proper covenant observance

had, for the most part, already been handed down to them by one of the founding members of the community, the Teacher of Righteousness. The community's duty was instead to preserve the Teacher's interpretation until the eschaton.

It was not enough, however, for the community simply to be secure in the knowledge of their own perceived rightness regarding covenant observance and ritual practice. To truly remain viable as a remnant of Israel, they had to place this system of belief into action as much as was possible absent the Temple system. Toward this end, they developed a highly sophisticated alternate society that could act as Israel in microcosm, performing all the covenant obligations of Israel as a symbolic construct, yet doing so with a drastically reduced population and, according to their own records, often being in conflict with contemporary temporal and priestly authorities.

In urban enclaves, or "camps", across Judaea, the community practiced a lifestyle of complete adherence to the rules of the Torah as they themselves interpreted it. As a means of drawing a distinction between themselves and the outside world, these communities deliberately eschewed aspects of contemporary Jewish life they saw as spiritually contaminating. In particular, the pursuit of wealth was believed to be irrevocably associated with exploitative behavior, impiety, and the practice (or at least accommodation) of problematic and foreign lifestyles. Toward this end, the community adopted a functional and utilitarian aesthetic in much of their material culture, in deliberate contrast with the opulent tastes of the priestly aristocracy. Their strict devotion to poverty, communal ownership of goods, and assistance to the poor allowed them to maintain a sincere dedication to covenant precepts while simultaneously criticizing the existing Jerusalem elite.

The camps also were notable for their complex and graduated system of pedagogy. From childhood or – for converts – the initial stages of postulancy, prospective members of the community were educated by seniors of the community in the details of exactly how to maintain the covenant as the community interpreted it. They were regularly assessed by the community’s elders so as to ensure that all members of the community remained dedicated to its precepts. Finally, a rigid system of rules that punished covenant violations or transgressions against the community’s own internal rules meant that the community would remain pure by definition. Potential threats to the community’s status as a completely faithful remnant were punished by temporary or permanent exclusion from the community’s ritual life.

This system of inclusion and exclusion is particularly important, because it drew a clear boundary as to who was part of the community and who was not. In wider Jewish society, Jewish identity and the boundaries of covenant obligation were often extremely vague. The community remedied this by developing a lengthy initiation process wherein the postulant’s identity and own views were gradually reformed according to the community’s own particular beliefs. This initiation process formed the boundary not of covenant obligation, but of perceived covenant adherence, and reinforced the community’s sense not only as an alternate Israel, but as the true and faithful Israel.

Finally, the most vital part of this new covenant practice was the establishment of a substitute Temple. Eventually, this substitute Temple was sited at Qumran itself<sup>201</sup>. At Qumran, the community emphasized aspects of the Temple cult they could replicate off-

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<sup>201</sup> It is likely, given that the *Community Rule* postdates other documents that list the community’s grievances against the existing Temple system (such as *MMT* and the *Damascus Document*) that the community existed in some capacity prior to the establishment and articulation of Qumran as an alternate Temple site.

site, using sacral meals and prayer as a way of entering the divine presence, while downplaying the “insincere sacrifices” of the existing Temple cult, citing scriptural precedent. This allowed the community to maintain their covenant obligations “in exile” using practices familiar practices already associated with piety and the Temple system.

The Qumran community, as revealed through historical sources, archaeological data and the Scroll library itself, was ultimately a means of fulfilling the community’s interpretations of the Israelite covenant in a cultural and historical setting where this fulfillment was otherwise impossible. Their goal was made additionally difficult by the requirement that their own remnant remain pure and free from contamination by outside sources, false teachings, and internal discord, but the community was able to maintain their obligations through a comprehensive system of education, sanction and reward.

### **Emic Interpretation and the Qumran Community**

I believe the interpretation of the community listed above is valuable because it is derived from an attempt to discover the community’s own motivations for its behavior. The community’s own scholars were not historians or anthropologists; they left no clear explication of their own history, and were not given to apologetics or detailed explanations for their own behavior.

They did, however, attempt to situate themselves in an existing historical narrative that they viewed as having great relevance to their own times – the Biblical cycle of faithlessness, punishment and ultimate renewal. Armed with the knowledge that the community’s overriding goal was to be the seed from which the future and true Israel would sprout, other aspects of the community’s life which would demand explanation are

clarified. Their strict emphasis on ritual purity, their internal rules that varied from Qumran to urban “camps”, their clearly delineated hierarchy and usage of Temple purity codes away from the Temple site – all these and other aspects of the Qumran community were developed as a means of either creating an alternate remnant of Israel or maintaining the efficacy of that remnant until the eschaton.

In this project I have not attempted to holistically address every aspect of the community’s life, either at Qumran or in affiliated urban communities off-site. Such an attempt is beyond the scope of the scope of this project, currently available data and my own skills and accessible resources. What I have instead attempted to do is outline the basic framework of the community’s self-conception and structure, based on concepts that existed prior to the community’s establishment and that seem to have been particularly relevant to the community’s members, judging by their own writings, beliefs and behavior. This is approach hopefully gives an interpretation more in line with the community’s self-conception as an living and viable entity.

My approach is, however, admittedly flawed in some respects, and there are some aspects of the Qumran question I have as yet been unable to address. In the following section I will attempt to address some potential issues with my own approach.

### **The Teacher of Righteousness and the Zadokite Lineage**

In this thesis I have only briefly discussed the most prominent founding leader of the community, known as the Teacher of Righteousness. Prior to the Hasmonean revolt, the high priesthood had traditionally been held by the Zadokite family, a priestly lineage

that dated back to the period of the united monarchy<sup>202</sup>. One popular theory for the community's foundation is that the Teacher of Righteousness, a Zadokite, may have been snubbed for the succession of the High Priestly office after the Hasmonean revolt<sup>203</sup>. If this is the case, some may feel I have neglected one of the most crucial catalyzing forces in the formation of the community, downplaying the human element – the struggle for succession of the High Priestly office – and instead emphasizing comparatively abstract forces such as culturally-absorbed covenant motivations.

However, my comparatively short treatment of the Teacher of Righteousness was intentional. The Teacher was undoubtedly an extremely important figure in the formative period of the community. It was by all indications the Teacher's instruction, guidance, and method of scriptural interpretation that gave the community its shape in its early years. The importance of the role of the Teacher is referenced in the *Damascus Document*, which describes how the predecessors of the community, confused and without guidance in the aftermath of the Hasmonean revolution, were given structure and a new sense of purpose upon the Teacher's arrival<sup>204</sup>.

I personally do not argue that the Teacher was unimportant in the formative period of the community; in fact, given the evidence in the Scroll texts, I believe it is quite possible that the community would not have existed without the Teacher's

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<sup>202</sup>Cana Werman, "The Sons of Zadok", *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after their Discovery: Major Issues and New Approaches: An International Congress, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, July 20-25, 1997: Abstracts* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1997), 624.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 623. Werman, writing in 1999, states that the view of the 'invalid succession' theory still is 'generally held' within the Scrolls community, and nearly every scholarly text in the bibliography of this work addresses the Zadokite issue in some way or another. The view has considerable age within Scrolls research. Robert Eisenmen's *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran*, published in 1983, also states the ubiquity of this view and traces it back even earlier, to the early 1960s.

<sup>204</sup> *The Damascus Document*, 1.11.

intervention and guidance. However, I do not believe that the primary grievance the community had with the existing Temple structure was the fact that the sitting High Priest was not a Zadokite, because the community's own objections as listed in documents such as *MMT* and the *Damascus Document* do not list a non-Zadokite high priest as being one of their primary complaints about the status of the Temple. In fact, nowhere in the Scrolls library are the Hasmoneans criticized for failing to belong the proper priestly line<sup>205</sup>. They instead focus on questions regarding calendrical practices, rules about ritual purity and the contamination of the Temple by unclean agents. *MMT* seems to have been written in the hope that the community could potentially be reconciled with the existing Temple establishment; it seems unlikely that the community would have had such hopes if they had been essentially asking the Hasmoneans to abdicate the seat of power they had only just acquired.

It is true that the community regularly refers to itself as the "Sons of Zadok" in their own documents, both compositions original to Qumran and in *peshet* texts. However, this title may have been somewhat misleading; the term "Sons of Zadok" may have been used by the community to refer not to a particularly priestly dynasty but instead to the priesthood as a distinct social and cultural class<sup>206</sup>. Qumran may have been particularly predisposed to using it because of its connotations to a period in Israel's history in which the construction of Israel as a covenant body was more in line with its own conception of the Israelite ideal.

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<sup>205</sup> Cana Werman, "The Sons of Zadok", *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after their Discovery: Major Issues and New Approaches: An International Congress, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, July 20-25, 1997: Abstracts* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1997), 627.

<sup>206</sup> Cana Werman, "The Sons of Zadok", *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after their Discovery: Major Issues and New Approaches: An International Congress, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, July 20-25, 1997: Abstracts* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1997), 629.

In short, although the events described in the succession theory may very well have taken place, I am not of the opinion that the community was formed, institutionalized or perpetuated because of their dissatisfaction with the line of priestly succession, because the textual evidence does not seem to indicate it.

### **Hellenistic Influence at Qumran**

Another potential objection involves the conception of Qumran as a perfectly observant “remnant” community. My argument is essentially that the ultimate goal of the community was to act as a completely flawless remnant in which every law of the Torah was scrupulously upheld and the covenant was kept without reservation, free from contaminating influences or any form of behavior that could potentially detract or interfere with covenant maintenance. The community’s ascribed to a highly idealized version of “correct” covenant maintenance, and the world they sought to construct seems to have been based in part on imagery from the Biblical texts that seem particularly “Jewish” or “Israelite” – the Temple, the nomadic war camp, and others.

Some might point out – quite rightfully – that there may in fact have been elements of Hellenistic society that had penetrated even the corpus of the Scrolls texts. The most noticeable of these “stray” Hellenistic elements is 4Q318, referred to by Vermes as *A Zodiacal Calendar and Brontologion*<sup>207</sup>. Although the months referred to are in the Jewish calendar – the document apparently begins in the month of Nisan - scholars have noted strong parallels between this document, late Greek *brontologia* and

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<sup>207</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, N.Y.: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 374. A *brontologion* is “a prediction of prodigies or ill-omens by means of an interpretation of the sound of thunder on certain specified days of the month”.



Akkadian “omen literature”<sup>208</sup>. Given the community’s views on covenant adherence and the strong distaste for cultural practices seen as foreign, 4Q318 makes an unusual addition to the scroll library.

One possible rebuttal to the presence of this text in the scrolls is that we do not know the context of the document’s presence in the scroll library – it is possible that the document was an outside acquired for the purpose of a polemic or a rebuttal. This, however, is a weak explanation – the text itself simply provides calendrical data, and there seems to be little indication that the community intended to formulate some sort of argument against the use of *brontologia*. Furthermore, the document was written in Hebrew, and paleography has dated its composition to the early Herodian period, well after the establishment of the community at Qumran<sup>209</sup>. The reasonable conclusion is that the document was acquired by the community for reasons of its own or was perhaps even an internally developed composition.

A more subtle, but nonetheless noteworthy, Hellenistic intrusion is in the description of the eschatological Temple in the *Temple Scroll*. In this document, the eschatological Temple is described in great detail, in terms of its architecture, furniture and other physical aspects. One noteworthy feature is the presence of a *stoa* – a covered and colonnaded public space – in the Temple precincts<sup>210</sup>. The *stoa* was a distinctly Greek architectural feature, developed in the Greek mainland in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It was a common fixture of public life in the Greek *polis* and was used as a meeting place

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<sup>208</sup> Helen R. Jacobus, “4Q318: A Jewish Zodiac Calendar at Qumran?”, in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Texts and Context*. ed. Charlotte Hempel (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 368.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 365.

<sup>210</sup> Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 53.

where citizens could meet and engage in the trappings of Greek public life. Although *stoa* were sometimes found in association with Greek temples, its presence in the sacred precincts of Qumran's ideal Temple is somewhat curious.

There are undoubtedly more scraps of Hellenistic thought and ideas within the Scrolls noticeable to the observant and informed reader. However, such holdovers do not negate my central thesis – that Qumran was structured from the outset to serve as a covenant-adherent remnant of Israel to ensure the perpetuity of Israel. They instead illustrate either that the community did not find such practices problematic from a covenant standpoint, or that they had themselves become somewhat Hellenized after nearly two hundred years of Hellenistic rule.

### **Qumran and Politics**

Some may raise the objection that the remnant interpretation of the Qumran movement does not situate it clearly enough in its historical and political contexts, or that this image of the community seems to exist in a political vacuum. In other words, the community that would become the Qumran movement grew dissatisfied with Temple-observant society and simply abandoned it to practice their own form of the covenant away from the wider Jewish world.

This is in fact one of the images of Qumran that I have attempted to correct with my own interpretation, and one of my primary objections with the “monastic” view of Qumran as a community of isolated, pious desert ascetics<sup>211</sup>. The purpose of the community was not specifically to withdraw from society. It was instead to isolate it

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<sup>211</sup> Of course, even the later Christian desert ascetics were not themselves removed from their larger cultural context, although this is the common image of the ascetic lifestyle.

from potentially contaminating influences and to preserve it until the (imminent) eschaton. The community's "withdrawal from society" was performed not because they sought isolation for its own sake, although a degree of distance from Jerusalem may have been desirable in the community's early years because of the apparently violent persecution they suffered. Isolation was, instead, useful for maintaining the ritual purity boundaries upon which the community believed their validity as a remnant depended.

It is also debatable to what degree the community was actually isolated from the larger Jewish world. Although they clearly associated primarily with each other and refused to transmit their teachings to outsiders, it also seems that the community continued to be political actors in the Judean world long after their own separate communities had been established. In *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus records an incident where an Essene encounters Herod as a child, and uses the story to illustrate both the Essene powers of prophecy and Herod's doomed status as a ruler from the outset<sup>212</sup>. In *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus describes some of the leaders of the revolt as being Essenes<sup>213</sup> – an unsurprising fact in light of their belief that an eventual war with the Romans would signal the end of the world – and it has been speculated, albeit not proven, that some of the defenders of Masada were originally from the Qumran community.

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<sup>212</sup> (ii) *Ant.* 15. 373-380. This incident is also used to explain an apparent favorability Herod displayed toward the Essenes, although to my knowledge no record of Herod's favorability exists within the scroll texts.

<sup>213</sup> (iv) *War* 2. 567, 3.11

## **Final Conclusions**

Qumran, and the community with which it was associated, arose out of a relatively simple conflict. The founders of the community felt a pressing motivation to uphold a set of religious and ritual laws that proscribed certain actions, but were unable to do so without violating ritual restrictions of equal gravity. It was out of this essential conflict – between the need to uphold the covenant, but the necessity of doing so without violating the laws of ritual purity – that the Qumran community was born. Unable to function within the existing system, the community created a new system in which no such conflicts could occur.

Qumran, then, was an exercise of innovation within existing boundaries. For all the parallels it might have with other religious and philosophical schools of thought, the community was ultimately designed for a very specific, culturally defined purpose that was rooted in the texts, beliefs and history of a single people – Jews living in Palestine in the last two centuries before the Common Era. Their innovations were informed and shaped by their identity, cultural materials and collective consciousness, and however radical their behavior may have seemed, their ultimate objective was a familiar one – to faithfully fulfill their role as a covenanted people and ensure the perpetuity of Israel as a nation.

Through analyzing the community's own texts, especially those texts written nearer to the founding of the community and in which their own motivations are most clearly stated, we can engage in a dialectic that transcends the break in time, distance and culture between ourselves and the community. This not only allows the community to speak for themselves as much as possible, but also helps us to understand our own

assumptions and preconceptions about what the community was or should have been. Strengthening this dialectic with texts highlights these preconceptions and allows us to discard them, and in so doing, hopefully come closer to the underlying reality of the community's lifestyle and an accurate interpretation of historical events.

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