ABSTRACT

Since their discovery, the Qumran community and the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls have often been viewed through the lens of contemporary and later religious groups, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, or Christians. In this thesis I argue that, to properly understand Qumran, one must first consider the community’s beliefs and behaviors in light of their particular cultural and historical setting. The Qumran community conceived of history as being a cycle of punishment, redemption, and reward ordained by YHWH as a result of Israel’s adherence to or disregard of the Israelite covenant. The Qumran community formed and existed as a result of perceived covenant disregard by the larger Judaean populace, and as a result felt it was necessary to form a separate community, or “remnant”, within Israel in which the covenant could be obeyed in full. Qumran’s manifestations of behavior that separated them wider Judaean society – their disregard for the Temple, ascetic lifestyles, and systems of initiation and pedagogy – are best understood as a means of preserving the internal efficacy of this covenant remnant until the imminent eschaton. This is supported by textual and material evidence, and is particularly evident in some of the community’s oldest documents, such as the Damascus Document and MMT.