

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament

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Since their initial discovery in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls have generated a great deal of interest, ranging from responsible scholarly inquiry to public sensationalism.¹ During the years 1947–1956, local Bedouin and eventually archaeologists found scrolls and primarily scroll fragments (many thousands of them) in eleven caves proximate to the small archaeological site of Qumran, near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. Stories of the initial discovery of major scrolls by Bedouin cousins in what is now called Qumran Cave 1 vary in certain details and have been often recounted, as have stories about the intrigue involved in the authentication of the scrolls and the Israeli acquisition of most of them. Therefore, these accounts are not repeated here.²

Additional Jewish texts from the first two centuries AD have also been discovered in other caves and sites along the western Dead Sea, such as Wadi Murabba‘at, Nahal Hever, and Masada. These texts are sometimes also included under the broad designation Dead Sea Scrolls. As valuable as these are in their own right, the focus of this chapter is on the texts found in the eleven caves near Qumran.

Since the Dead Sea Scrolls are Jewish religious documents, one may wonder why they are discussed in this volume on the New Testament or, for that matter, why knowing something about them can benefit Latter-day Saints in their study of the New Testament. There are actually several significant reasons for this. What follows includes brief comments on the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves and the Jews responsible for their placement in caves near the Dead Sea, plus a more extended discussion of the ways in which these texts help provide



View of the area at Qumran. Courtesy of Lincoln H. Blumell.

a greater context for the people and beliefs recorded in the Christian New Testament, with particular attention given to claims made about possible connections between the Jewish Qumran Community and John the Baptist or Jesus, and to claims about possible connections between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament. These include messianic titles and expectations, as well as particular passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls that sound quite similar to passages and concepts in the New Testament.

It is worth emphasizing at the start that *no* New Testament passages occur in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Jewish group that settled at Qumran was not Christian.³ These are *Jewish* religious texts collected and studied by certain Jews at the turn of the era. But they do have much to offer for our study of the Christian New Testament.

Introducing the Scrolls, Qumran, and the Essenes

The majority of the surviving Dead Sea Scrolls were copied between about 250 BC and AD 60. Dating is established by comparative paleographic analysis (the study of their handwriting styles) and carbon-14 dating. The vast majority of the surviving textual material divides broadly into three categories: (1) copies of texts that became known as biblical (meaning the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament), (2) copies of religious texts more widely read among Jews of the time but that never became part of the biblical canon, and (3) copies of texts that appear to be unique to the sect of Jews who lived at Qumran and elsewhere at the turn of the era, which are thus called sectarian texts. The process of the formation of the biblical canon had not completely occurred by this point in time, so referring in what follows to certain texts as “biblical” must be understood to be somewhat anachronistic.⁴

The assertion is often made that portions of all the texts in the Hebrew Bible were found in the caves around Qumran except for the book of Esther. Although true, this basic state-

ment ignores the important fact that several other biblical books are hardly represented at all. For example, remains of only one manuscript each have been found of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and portions of only two manuscripts each survive for Joshua, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. While some of this is no doubt attributable to accidents of preservation, scholars see the number of surviving biblical texts as providing a relative indicator of what books of scripture were more important to the community. Clearly, the covenantal, legal, and prophetic content of the following books were highly regarded by the Qumran community, given the remains of thirty-six different manuscript copies of Psalms, thirty of Deuteronomy, twenty-one of Isaiah, twenty of Genesis, and seventeen of Exodus.

Two prime examples of popular religious texts that did not become part of the standard biblical canon, but which are well attested in the Qumran caves and are also known from elsewhere, are Jubilees and 1 Enoch. Jubilees, thought to have been composed in the early to mid-second century BC, presents a revelation from God, given by an angel to Moses on Mount Sinai, that relates certain events from the creation of the earth to the Israelite exodus from Egypt, divided into fifty separate forty-nine-year segments.⁵ Jubilees was previously known only through a partially surviving Latin translation and a full version in Ethiopic. Five of the eleven Qumran caves yielded the remains of what appear to be fifteen copies of Jubilees, indicating not only the popularity of this work in the Qumran community, but also that it may have been regarded as scripture by them.

The lengthy and complex work known as 1 Enoch recounts various revelations given to Enoch, about whom the Bible preserves so very little (compare Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 1:14; none of the content of 1 Enoch is quite like the Enochic material in the Latter-day



Qumran Cave 4. Courtesy of Lincoln H. Blumell.

Saint Book of Moses). Prior to the discovery of a number of fragments in Qumran cave 4, 1 Enoch was known from surviving portions in Greek and primarily from the full version in Ethiopic, as well as a New Testament use of 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 1:14–15. The remains of eleven copies of 1 Enoch, all written in Aramaic and all discovered in cave 4, as well as evidence of important calendrical and other influences from 1 Enoch, suggest the important influence of this document, particularly during the earlier portion of the Qumran community.

Fragments of other texts from the Qumran caves, such as the Wisdom of Ben Sira (a.k.a. Sirach/Ecclesiasticus) and Tobit, were previously known from their inclusion in the Greek Septuagint, as part of the books referred to as the Apocrypha.

The better-preserved and better-known sectarian texts include the Rule of the Community (1QS, plus portions from cave 4; the “Q” indicates Qumran, the number preceding it indicates in which of the eleven caves the text was found, and the letter or number that follows the “Q” identifies the particular text from that cave). This work provides important information about the community (the *yahad*, in Hebrew), such as its purpose and organization, its dualistic view of the world and how its members fit into it, rules for admittance into the community, and so on. The War Scroll or War Rule (1QM, plus portions from cave 4) foretells the eschatological war between the “Sons of Light” and the “Sons of Darkness,” including extensive information regarding the weapons and instruments that should be used, culminating in the destruction of the evil forces that have opposed God’s rule. Other sectarian texts include hymns, such as those preserved in 1QHodayot, and the *pesharim*, which are commentaries on portions of certain biblical books, such as Isaiah (3Q4; 4Q161–64), Habakkuk (1QpHab), and Psalms (1Q16; 4Q171, 173).

The Dead Sea Scrolls are thus of enormous value for studying the variety of beliefs and practices of Jews in the land of Israel at the turn of the era, all part of the stream of traditional Mosaic religion as it existed at that time. They are also of great value for studying the text and transmission of the Hebrew scriptures, since they not only preserve the oldest copies of these texts but also demonstrate the textual similarities to and differences from what became the traditional text of the Hebrew scriptures after about AD 100, but which was previously best known from Hebrew manuscripts dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries AD. The scrolls also have value for studying the Hebrew and Aramaic languages at the turn of the era, as well as scribal practices in making and copying documents.

Given this assortment of texts, and given that these copies of manuscripts were produced by a variety of scribes over a period of about three centuries, it is commonly accepted that many of these texts were *brought to* Qumran from elsewhere and that many, especially the sectarian ones, were *copied at* Qumran. It is these latter texts that provide much of the information about the Qumran community’s organization, views, and identity.

Qumran and Its Inhabitants

Qumran itself is located on a terrace between rocky cliffs to the west and the Dead Sea to the east. It preserves the remains of a number of walled rooms, a tower, and several cisterns and

miqvaot (ritual bathing pools; *miqveh/mikvah* is singular). Although the site was known for centuries, its primary excavation was only formally undertaken in 1951–1956, after the initial discovery of scrolls in nearby caves, which themselves were also excavated (subsequent, less extensive excavations have also been undertaken at Qumran, its cemetery, and in nearby caves).⁶ Following minor occupation in the eighth to seventh centuries BC, the site appears to have been uninhabited for centuries. Early assessments and publications placed the first major habitation by the Jewish community in about 150 BC, but many scholars now revise this downward to about 100 BC. Members of this community appear to have utilized this site, with a few short-lived interruptions because of an earthquake and other factors, until AD 68, when Roman soldiers camped at Qumran as part of the larger Roman effort to suppress the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70; see chapter 14 herein). Surviving artifacts include pottery, coins, and other small-scale finds. No scrolls or fragments were found “in” Qumran; they all come from nearby caves.

Based on the small size of the site, most archaeologists presume that the community generally consisted of about one hundred to two hundred people. The most likely scenario is that the site itself served as a community center, which members of the community entered daily for ritual purification, worship, study, instruction, and group meals. Few if any of them appear to have actually lived in the buildings, but rather in caves and tents in the surrounding area. Alternative proposals for Qumran’s function include a fortress, a trading center, and a country villa, but these views have attracted few proponents, and the available evidence best supports the original view that it was a religious community center.

The identity of the inhabitants of Qumran is related to the purpose of the site (over-viewed above) and to the scrolls found in the surrounding caves. Despite occasional claims to the contrary, it is untenable to detach the Qumran inhabitants from the scrolls found nearby; these are the remains of their collection. Most scholars generally continue to accept that Jewish Essenes inhabited Qumran on the basis of a confluence of claims about the locations and practices of Essenes found in the writings of authors such as Philo, Pliny the Elder, and Josephus, plus the related contents in some of the Qumran scrolls and the nature of the archaeological remains at the site. As best we can tell, the Jewish sect called the Essenes emerged as a distinctive force in the mid- to late second century BC, about the same time that the better-known and more influential Pharisee and Sadducee sects began to emerge (these more prominent groups receive much attention in the New Testament and elsewhere). The term *sect* when used for ancient groups is not pejorative, as it often is today. It connotes a small subset of a religious tradition, the beliefs and practices of which mark it as distinct from and as the self-declared correct and legitimate successor to the greater tradition from which it separated itself.

The available documentary evidence suggests there was variety among the Essenes scattered throughout the land of Israel. The Jewish men who gathered to the wilderness community at Qumran (never completely isolated from its greater surroundings) seem to have embraced a celibate lifestyle and were required to participate in a two-year initiation process, which if successfully completed resulted in their handing over all their possessions

and allowed them to participate in the community meals and decisions. The hierarchy of this group consisted of priests. The community was also composed of Levites and non-Levitical Jews. They had strict rules regarding obedience and purity, emphasizing repentance and regular ritual self-immersion (*not* Christian baptism), holiness, and spiritual preparation for the great last battle. There may well have been other, similar separatist-oriented communities of Essenes of which we lack knowledge. Quite different were the Essenes who lived in groups in cities and towns and who had families and private property. It is still not clear how to reconcile the differences between these two broad portions of the sect, nor how they viewed each other.

Surviving evidence indicates that the Qumran Essenes believed they lived in the last days, that they constituted the true remnant of Israel with whom God had renewed his covenant, and that ancient prophecies would be fulfilled with and through them in their day. They believed they were predestined by God to be his “Sons of Light,” as opposed to all the “Sons of Darkness,” and would successfully fight alongside their soon-to-return messiah(s). This passage from their Rule of the Community (1QS 8.3–10), in describing expectations for the community and its initiates, nicely captures their view of their important role in the last days, to serve as a replacement for the polluted temple and to atone for the land as they awaited the coming of their messiah(s):

They are to preserve faith in the land with self control and a broken spirit, atoning for sin by working justice and suffering affliction. They are . . . true witnesses to justice, chosen by God’s will to atone for the land and to recompense the wicked their due. They will be . . . a fortress, a Holy of Holies for Aaron, all of them knowing the Covenant of Justice and thereby offering a sweet savor. They shall be a blameless and true house in Israel, upholding the covenant of eternal statutes. They shall be an acceptable sacrifice, atoning for the land and ringing in the verdict against evil, so that perversity ceases to exist. When these men have been grounded in the instruction of the Yahad for two years—provided they be blameless in their conduct—they shall be set apart as holy in the midst of the men of the Yahad.⁷

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament⁸

In the seven decades since their discovery, the relationship between the scrolls and the New Testament and early Christianity has garnered a great deal of attention. Early claims were made that the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls would destroy Christianity because Christianity would no longer be viewed as unique and that the Vatican had conspired to hide scrolls seen as problematic (neither of these claims is true). More recent claims include conjecture that a few passages from the New Testament are preserved on small fragments from cave 7, which contained only fragments written in Greek; that the Gospel accounts were really written in code to secretly convey the identity of John the Baptist and Jesus with figures mentioned in the scrolls; and that there was an Essene temple on Mount Carmel, where Joseph

and Mary were married.⁹ These and similar claims require convoluted readings of the scrolls and have usually resulted in sensational media attention, but they have no legitimate support in the scrolls themselves nor acceptance among most scroll scholars.

Rather than further recounting and refuting such claims in more detail, what follows is an overview of possible intersections and interesting overlaps between the Dead Sea Scrolls, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the New Testament. Similarities in the community's and Christians' use of titles and biblical scripture passages are readily apparent. Space permits only the more obvious highlights.

New covenant

Central to the Qumran Essene community's existence was its sense of self-identity. They referred to themselves as the true remnant of Israel, with whom God had made a new or renewed covenant. For example, the Damascus Document emphasizes a "new covenant" (e.g., CD 6.19; 8.21), and the Rule of the Community instructs that initiates into the community be brought into this covenant with God, which was renewed annually (1QS 1.16–2.25). For these Essenes, the renewed covenant had a Mosaic orientation. However, the use of the phrase "new covenant" in the New Testament is generally understood by Christians to move beyond the Mosaic era to a new dispensation (e.g., Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8–10), which Latter-day Saints associate with Melchizedek priesthood ordinances. Both the Qumran community and the early Christians drew on the prophecy of a future new covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31–33: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel." Thus, in this and other instances, both groups used the same prophetic passage but applied it differently, each to their own movements.

John the Baptist

The New Testament never specifically mentions the Essenes, but some scholars have connected John the Baptist with the Qumran community, and the introductory film shown at Israel's Qumran National Park confidently depicts John as associating with and then leaving the community. Reasons for this include Qumran's location and the New Testament statements that following his birth and blessing, John "was in the deserts [or wilderness] till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (Luke 1:80). And John, with his priestly lineage, was active during his ministry in the southern Jordan River Valley (Mark 1:4, 9; John 1:28), not that many miles from the priest-directed community at Qumran. Furthermore, some authors postulate that John's baptizing effort was impacted by the ritual self-immersion regularly practiced at Qumran, even though there are distinct differences and though self-immersion was practiced by other Jews in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the land. John also warned about coming judgments (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9). But during his ministry, John did not retreat to

the wilderness to prepare for the arrival of the messiah(s), as the Qumran community had done; rather, he went out to preach the message of preparation. While it is possible, and even likely, that John the Baptist knew of and had some interaction with Essenes near the Dead Sea, significant differences exist in his message and practices. His reliance upon the Qumran community cannot be substantiated.

Perhaps the most fascinating intersection is that the New Testament depicts John fulfilling Isaiah 40:3 as the voice in the wilderness preparing the way for Jesus: “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee [Malachi 3:1]. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight [Isaiah 40:3]” (Mark 1:2–3; Matthew 3:3). The Qumran Rule of the Community uses this same passage from Isaiah to present the community as preparing the way of the Lord by their separating from the impure Jewish priestly leaders in Jerusalem and going into the wilderness to live and teach God’s law in preparation for the imminent (to them) eschatological battles: “When such men as these come to be in Israel, conforming to these doctrines, they shall separate from the session of perverse men to go to the wilderness, there to prepare the way of truth, as it is written, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God’ [Isaiah 40:3]” (1QS 8.12–16). Thus, again, the Qumran community and early Christians understood and employed the same prophetic passage in different ways.

Jesus and the Gospel accounts

As with John, links have been asserted between the Qumran community and Jesus, even though the New Testament depicts Jesus interacting with Pharisees and Sadducees but not with Essenes (of whom he must have been aware). Jewish followers gathered around Jesus, just as they had around the community’s leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, but Jesus was not Qumran’s Teacher, as some have claimed.

Many scholars suggest that Jesus’s statement in Matthew 5:43–44 betrays awareness of the Essenes. In presenting a series of antitheses, Jesus states, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies.” The injunction to love one’s neighbors is clearly specified in Leviticus 19:18. But as commentators now regularly observe, the encouragement to hate one’s enemies is found nowhere in the Hebrew scriptures or other early Jewish texts, except those from Qumran. For example, the Instructor [*maskil*] was to teach the community members “to love all the Children of Light [the Qumran community and those who believed similarly]—each commensurate with his rightful place in the council of God—and to hate all the Children of Darkness [other Jews and all Gentiles], each commensurate with his guilt and the vengeance due him from God” (1QS 1.9–11). Although this is a possible connection, the account of Jesus’s sermon does not include any other uniquely Essene-oriented statements.

An obvious parallel between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament is a messianic emphasis, a complex phenomenon among Jews and Christians at the turn of the era.¹⁰

The New Testament preserves several references to Jesus as a royal Davidic messiah (e.g., Matthew 1:1; 22:42; Luke 1:32; 2:11); a priestly messiah after the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (e.g., Hebrews 3:1; 5:5–6; 8:1); a prophetic messiah (Deuteronomy 18:18–19; Acts 3:2–23); and as a suffering, atoning messiah (e.g., Isaiah 53:4–6; Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:19–20; 23:39–46; Acts 8:30–35; Romans 5:10). The Qumran texts teach of a separate Prophet and two messiahs who will come as part of the last days, the age in which they thought they lived: “They shall govern themselves using the original precepts by which the men of the Yahad began to be instructed, doing so until there come the Prophet [Deuteronomy 18:15–18] and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel” (1QS 9.10–11; see, e.g., CD 12.23–13.1). The messiah of Aaron was a priestly messiah of the Aaronic, not Melchizedek, order. The nonpriestly messiah of Israel, as indicated elsewhere, was viewed as the royal messiah, a descendant of David (e.g., 4Q252 5.3: “until the Righteous Messiah, the Branch of David, has come”). At least many in the community therefore believed in multiple messianic figures with different roles, especially royal and priestly functions (i.e., from a Christian perspective, they fragmented the various roles of Jesus, the true Messiah, among separate individuals); their messiahs were not imagined to be fully divine, and their messiahs would come with power and bring a new order to the earth (not unlike what Latter-day Saints and other Christians expect Jesus to do at his second coming). However, after the coming of their messiahs this new order would be based on a pure form of the law of Moses.

Finally, a few comments on some of the Dead Sea Scrolls passages that have attracted much attention in relation to Jesus and the New Testament will have to suffice for this overview.

4Q246

This fascinating composition, popularly dubbed the “Son of God” text, is written in Aramaic and was copied late in the first century BC. Three immediately obvious parallels exist between phrases in this text and Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary about her future son Jesus, as found in Luke’s Gospel account: he “will be called The Great” (4Q246 i 9; Luke 1:32), “he will be called the Son of God” (4Q246 ii 1; Luke 1:35), and “they will call him the son of the Most High” (4Q246 ii 1; Luke 1:32). Because 4Q246 is incomplete, we do not know to whom these phrases refer in that text. Various scholarly opinions range from a human king and the Jews collectively to an angel and one of the messiahs. Whoever this figure is in 4Q246, some form of Lukan dependence on this earlier text from Qumran has been claimed. However, in the Hebrew scriptures God, kings, and others are described as “great” (e.g., Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Samuel 7:22; 2 Kings 18:19), God is called the “most high” (e.g., Genesis 14:18–20; Psalm 7:17; 47:2; 57:2), and kings descended from David were designated God’s “son” (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:26–27). Thus, it is most likely that 4Q246 and the prophecy in Luke 1 were utilizing phrases and concepts from older Israelite texts to designate a divinely sanctioned deliverer, Jesus in the case of Luke 1, without positing direct dependence. Nevertheless, the concentration of similarities in these two passages is striking.

4Q285

Labeled the “Book of War,” this poorly preserved Hebrew text originally gained attention because it was claimed that fragment 7 (originally labeled 5) supported the notion that some Jews in the first century BC believed in a dying messiah, a view that is otherwise attested only in Christian documents, not in Jewish ones. The Hebrew text includes the messianic title “Branch of David,” and the key word in question is *whmytw*, which can represent either “and they put (him, the messiah) to death” or “and he (the messiah) will cause him (someone else) to die.” Scholars now confidently prefer the latter reading, as evidenced in this translation (the portions in brackets are restorations): “[This is the] Branch of David. Then [all forces of Belial] shall be judged, [and the king of the Kittim shall stand for judgment] and the Leader of the congregation—the Bra[nch of David]—will have him put to death. [Then all Israel shall come out with timbrel]s and dancers” (4Q285 frag 7.3–5). Drawing as it does on portions of Isaiah 10 and 11, this text describes the future success of a royal messiah vanquishing his enemies; it does not prophesy of a dying one.

4Q521

This fragmentary Hebrew text, also copied in the first century BC, has been labeled the “Messianic Apocalypse” because it describes a future messianic age. Most relevant here is the enumeration of messianic signs that are remarkably similar to those associated with Jesus in the New Testament. For example, for the Qumran community a coming messiah “will honor the pious upon the th[ro]ne of His eternal kingdom, setting prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind, raising up those who are bo[wed down]. . . . For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall revive the dead, He shall send good news to the afflicted, He shall sati[sfy the poo]r, He shall guide the uprooted, He shall make the hungry rich; . . . the Reviver [rai]ses the dead of His people. Then we shall [giv]e thanks and relate to you the righteous acts of the Lord . . . thos[e destined to d]ie. And He shall open [the graves]” (4Q521 f2 ii+4.7–13; and f7+5 ii 6–9).

Several of these phrases are also found in Luke 4:16–21, which reports Jesus’s reading from Isaiah 61:1–2 and applying that prophecy to himself, and in Luke 7:21–22, which reports Jesus instructing John the Baptist’s disciples about himself: “And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.” Luke’s Gospel account (compare Matthew 11:2–5) depicts Jesus as already demonstrating these messianic capabilities mentioned in Isaiah 35:5–6 and 61:1–2 during his mortal ministry, including restoring the dead to mortal life, although the actual resurrection of dead individuals had to wait until after Jesus’s own resurrection. 4Q521 presents an unnamed messiah doing similar things, including raising the dead, thus representing an additional witness to certain messianic ex-

pectations some Jews had in Jesus's day, but in both cases based on earlier prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures.

4QMMT (4Q393–399)

As currently understood, this text provides important insights into the thinking of the Qumran community, illuminating at least some of the reasons they separated themselves from priestly leaders and others in Jerusalem. Only fragments of multiple copies of this work were found in Qumran cave 4. Despite the inherent problems of its fragmentary nature, this text has generated great interest for its display of the community's views on some ritual and purity matters and for its potential value for studying the New Testament. *MMT* is an abbreviation for the Hebrew phrase *miqsat ma'ase ha-torah*, "some of the works of the law," which occurs in the epilogue of *MMT*. This phrase occurs in its Greek form, *erga nomou*, in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans. In 4QMMT the author/leader claims that "we have written to you [an opposing priestly leader or someone who has left the community] some of the works of the Law, those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people" (C 26–27, 4Q398 f14_17ii.3). These "works" seem to be the particular aspects of the greater law of Moses highlighted earlier in the text. Alignment with these works as part of the law, it is claimed, "will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him" (C 31, 4Q398 f14_17ii.7). By way of contrast, Paul proclaims, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16; compare 3:2–3; Romans 3:20–28). Taken in the context of other statements in Qumran sectarian texts that emphasize God's graciousness and the need for human repentance (e.g., 1QS 10.20–23; 11.10–15), the claim in 4QMMT cannot be superficially contrasted with Paul's statements. However, it appears that Paul was countering a widespread view that reliance on keeping the Mosaic law was the basis for salvation, a view that allowed no place for the fundamental role of Jesus Christ as Redeemer and our need to exercise faith in him and his saving powers.

11QMelchizedek (11Q13)

Given the paucity of information about the priest Melchizedek in the Old Testament (Genesis 14) and the use of this name as a title in Psalm 110:4, it is no surprise that several early Jewish and Christian texts variously expanded the role of Melchizedek, creating a complex of competing views about him and his significance. 11QMelchizedek, for example, depicts him as a semidivine being who will come from God in the last days to execute judgment against the wicked and deliver the righteous. The Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament cites Melchizedek primarily to highlight a priesthood greater than Aaron's (as do a few other non-canonical works), thus emphasizing that Christ's Melchizedek priesthood was greater than Aaron's, which was associated with the law of Moses (Hebrews 5; 7). Hebrews 7:3 clearly

indicates Melchizedek is “like” but different from Jesus Christ: “but [Melchizedek was] made like unto the Son of God; [and] abideth a priest continually.” Thus, again, the Qumran community and early Christians employed passages of Hebrew scripture to present their own particular views.

Wrapping Up / Making Sense

Despite the fact that no New Testament manuscripts were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, some people have claimed that John or Jesus had some connection with the Qumran community. Even with interesting parallels, there are striking differences demonstrating that neither John nor Jesus was an Essene, and although presumably aware of the Qumran community, they were separate from it. Jesus, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, was uniquely the divine Son of God in the flesh, and he (and his followers) thus uniquely applied the contents of the law and prophecies in Hebrew scripture to himself.

But even in this, the overlaps in scripture passages and interpretations indicate that Jesus and his followers were not isolated from their context. Most Jews, including those who became Christians, were familiar with and had faith in Jehovah, the Mosaic law, and the Israelite prophetic writings. Many Jews in Jesus’s time were looking for a messianic deliverer and a priestly leader and based their expectations on prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures and in additional texts produced between Malachi and John the Baptist that reworked earlier scriptures.

However, for Latter-day Saints, Christianity did not just “develop” from Jewish roots. Jesus’s ministry and resurrection inaugurated a new gospel dispensation. Nevertheless, Jesus’s efforts, and those of his apostles and earliest followers, took place in a particular historical time and place that involved Jewish religious forces and factors, some of which bear an interesting resemblance to what is in the New Testament. So even though the Dead Sea Scrolls are not Christian texts, they share an assortment of interesting similarities with Christian writings in the New Testament and can be fruitfully employed to better understand the world of Jesus and his earliest Jewish followers.



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Further Reading

Translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Abegg, Martin G., Peter W. Flint, and Eugene C. Ulrich. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

Vermes, Geza. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. New York: Penguin Putnam, 2004.

Introductions to the Dead Sea Scrolls

(Note: Newer works are generally preferable since their authors have had access to more recent and more accurate information. For recent, responsible overviews of the scrolls and their significance, see the following.)

Collins, John J. *The Dead Sea Scrolls, A Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

VanderKam, James C., and Peter W. Flint. *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002.

Latter-day Saint approaches to the scrolls

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Notes

1. There are several recently published, reputable books on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some examples are listed under "Further Reading" and in the notes that follow. Since space is limited here, interested readers are advised to consult these for further information. Additionally, pictures of many of the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments, along with introductory comments, are now available online through the Israel Antiquities Authority at <http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/home>. Lastly, the official publication series for the scrolls is *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (New York: Oxford, 1955–2010). See also Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 2nd expanded ed., 2 vols. (Boston: Brill, 2014).
2. For details of the discovery and early work on the scrolls, see Weston W. Fields, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Full History*, vol. 1 (Boston: Brill, 2009).
3. See, for example, Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 184–85.
4. The Hebrew scriptures had not been completely limited to the Old Testament biblical canon as we now have it until about AD 100–150, at least beyond the traditional core of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). The Qumran community, for example, appears to have accepted books such as Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and the Temple Scroll as authoritative, although these compositions never became part of the traditional biblical canon.
5. The name *Jubilees* derives from the concept, found in the Bible, that under the Mosaic law every fiftieth year was a "jubilee" year.
6. See Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).
7. Unless otherwise noted, quoted translations of nonbiblical Qumran texts are from Accordance, "Qumran Non-biblical Manuscripts: A New English Translation (QUMENG)," version 4.2, which is based on *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New English Translation*, ed. Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Edward M. Cook (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
8. In addition to chapters on this topic in the introductory volumes cited in "Further Reading," there are also books that specifically address the possible connections between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament and early Christianity. Although of uneven quality, see, for example, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); and James Charlesworth, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
9. Due to space limitations, interested readers are encouraged to find reputable publications that overview these and other such theories. See, for example, James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002); and Flint, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 311–30.
10. For an extensive review of this topic, see John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).