

MESSIANIC FORGIVENESS OF SIN IN CD 14:19
(4Q266 10 I 12-13)

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There is an interesting Talmudic account (b. Sanh. 38b) of Rabbi Akiba's efforts to interpret the multiple thrones in chapter seven of the book of Daniel. He first suggested that one was for the Ancient of Days and another for David. This was rejected out of hand as an affront to the divine presence. He then proposed that the two thrones represented different divine attributes, but this, too, was dismissed as unacceptable by R. Elazar b. Azariah, who exclaimed, "Akiba, why are you meddling in Haggada? Keep rather to the laws of leprosy and tent defilement!"

Those who know of my efforts to explore various aspects of Qumran religious law may view as ill-advised this venture into the nebulous realm of theology, especially that of the intensively debated topic of messianism. It might be appropriate to underline *ab initio* the very circumscribed objective of this paper, which is to determine the text and meaning of the messianic reference found in CD 14:18-19 in light of the reading found in 4Q266, one of the early Cave 4 manuscripts of the *Damascus Document*.

The medieval text of Genizah MS A reads:

] זוה פרוש המשפטים אשר]	18
] משיח אהרן וישראל ויכפר עונם]	19

The restoration of משיח was already suggested by Schechter,¹ and on the basis of three parallels in CD, the reading משיח אהרן וישראל was generally accepted by subsequent commentators. It was also recognised that after פרוש המשפטים there must have followed an allusion to the present laws in the pre-messianic age, such as Rabin's restoration, "in which [they shall walk during the epoch of wickedness, until there shall arise the Mess]jah of Aaron and Israel."²

¹ Solomon Schechter, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 54.

² Chaim Rabin, *The Zadokite Documents* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), 70.

There was much less clarity among scholars concerning the subject of the verb **ויכפר**. Syntactically, the most natural supposition should have been that it was the **משיח** just mentioned in the immediately preceding context. However, certain other considerations prevented scholars from accepting this straightforward conclusion. One was already given by R. H. Charles in 1913: "Since in the other four passages where atonement is mentioned [in CD] God is the agent, we conclude that it is so here."³ The cogency of this argument is considerably lessened by the fact that these four other passages are historical, rather than eschatological in character. That the writer of CD may have conceived of God in the future using a soteriological agent for atonement should not a priori be dismissed as a possibility. Moreover, God is nowhere mentioned in our passage. True, Louis Ginzberg, proposed to remedy this lack by emending **עוננו** **ויכפר** **אל** **משוח** **מאחרון** **וישראל** **ויכפר** **עוננו**,⁴ but that was in an earlier age, when textual emendation was held to be a respectable scholarly vocation.

Ginzberg's motives for resorting to this correction were apparently twofold. One was his understanding of the designation **משיח אהרן** **וישראל** as referring to two messiahs, one priestly and one royal. In this he is still followed by a substantial number of contemporary scholars, although Martin Abegg has recently called for a reassessment of this messianic duality in Qumran writings other than the *Serekh ha-Yahad*.⁵ The need for such reassessment is, I believe, underlined by the apparent combination of "priests and kings" among the descendants of Levi in the Cave 4 fragments of an Aramaic Levi apocryphon.⁶ Moreover, the messianic *Rule of the Congregation*, which is often cited as exemplifying the two messiahs concept, actually puts the Messiah of Aaron in the cardinal position as the head of the entire congregation of Israel **כול** **עדה** **ישראל** **ישראל** (1Qsa 2:12). However, since Ginzberg held **משיח אהרן** **וישראל** in CD to denote two messiahs, he could not take them as the subjects of the verb **ויכפר**, in the singular.

³ Robert H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:832.

⁴ Louis Ginzberg, *Eine unbekannte jüdische Sekte* (New York: Ktav, 1922), 129.

⁵ Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Messiah at Qumran: Are We Still Seeing Double?" *DSD* 2/2 (1995): 125-44.

⁶ The preliminary Qumran Aramaic concordance, s.v. **מלך** (2285), cites from a *Testament of Levi* the phrase **ואף כהנין ומלכין חדוון**; contrast the Greek *T. Levi* 8:14, where kingship and "a new priesthood" are to rise from Judah.

Ginzberg's other motive was frankly theological and he articulated it in categorical fashion: "Ein 'Sünden vergebender Messias' wäre nur in einem christlichen Werke denkbar."⁷ Hartmut Stegemann appears to lend support to this theological axiom when he writes: "Sündenvergebung aber kann nach alttestamentlichen Zeugnis kein Mensch gewähren, weder ein Priester noch ein Prophet, weder der Messias noch der gerechteste oder heiligste aller Frommen, sondern stets nur Gott allein (vgl. Mk 2,7)."⁸ This view was according to the Gospels (cf. Matthew 9:3) shared by the scribes who looked upon Jesus' forgiving of sins as tantamount to blasphemy. We would, however, caution that that which was blasphemy for the presumably Pharisaic scribes, may not necessarily have been blasphemy for the visionaries of Qumran.

There are two Qumran works which display a distinct proclivity to attribute the divine roles of judgment and forgiveness to mediating figures. The first, *11QMelchizedek*, describes him as the archangel presiding in judgment as אלוהים over the divine assembly of Psalm 82. Melchizedek is to proclaim liberty for all the Sons of Light by releasing them from the burden of their sins. This will take place on the Day of Atonement at the end of the tenth jubilee, the time preordained for atonement to the Sons of Light בני עול כול (11QMelch 2:7-8) [אור].

Some commentators have tried to mitigate this radical arrogation of divine power by an angelic intermediary, suggesting that כפר has here the sense of "making expiation." Since Melchizedek was a priest he could obtain atonement by performing the appropriate cultic rituals. However, this approach fails to reckon with the fact that no such priestly function is mentioned in the text. It is the role of universal judgment which is attributed to the king of Šedeq who is to bring about the conviction of Belial and his cohorts as well as the granting of forgiveness for the Sons of Light.

While Melchizedek is portrayed as a divine hypostasis, we now have another figure whose redemptive role is described as emerging on the plane of human activity. We owe to Émile Puech the publication of 4Q541, a fragmentary Aramaic text concerning the eschatological priest also known from *Testament of Levi* 18. The best preserved

⁷ Ginzberg, *Eine unbekannte jüdische Sekte*, 129.

⁸ Hartmut Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 303.

continuous text is found in fragment 9 which describes the illuminational teaching of the future priest: "His word is like the word of the heavens, and his teaching according to the will of God. His sun will illuminate the world and his fire will burn to all the ends of the earth."⁹ Despite this glorification, he is depicted as the object of rejection and calumny on the part of his antagonists, much like the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. Yet, he is to atone for all the children of his generation, **ויכפר על כול בני דרה**.

Here, too, scholars have been inclined to limit the eschatological priest's atonement function to expiation through sacrifice, although neither 4Q541 frg. 9, nor its parallel, *Testament of Levi* 18 make mention of any priestly sacrifice. The claim that **כפר על** always refers to ritual expiation is contradicted by the occasional usage in both biblical and Qumran Hebrew of this phrase for divine forgiveness.¹⁰ Moreover, even if we take **כפר** in the sense of expiation, the allusion to the hostile disparagement suffered by the priest suggests that like the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:10) his humiliation was itself considered to constitute an **אשם**, a guilt offering for the sins of his generation.

Neither Melchizedek nor the eschatological priest are designated as messiahs. In *11QMelchizedek* the term **משיח דרוה** is used for the herald (**מכשר**), who has a distinct role. Yet, these eschatological figures illustrate well the tendency in Second Temple apocalyptic to assign divine functions such as judgment and atonement to heavenly or earthly intermediaries. This must be considered in assessing the nature of the messianic atonement referred to in CD 14:18-19.

We have seen how from the beginning the theological axioms toward which both Jewish and Christian scholars were predisposed influenced their understanding of this passage. It may be that such influence still lingers and should be consciously evaluated. Thus one finds repeatedly the presumption that the verb **ויכפר** in CD 14:19 refers to expiation obtained by the priestly Messiah presumably by offering the prescribed sacrifices or performing the atonement rites. This opinion is expressed by scholars who, in consonance with others, take **משיח אהרן וישראל** to signify two messiahs; yet they attribute the

⁹ Émile Puech, "Fragments d'un apocryphe de Levi et le personnage eschatologique: 4QTestLevi^{c-d(?)} et 4QAJa," in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18-21 March, 1991*, ed. Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vega Montaner (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 466.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 18:23; CD 4:10; 4Q221 4:4.

singular verb ויכפר to the priestly Messiah because he is the one who can perform the cultic acts necessary for atonement. If so, we may ask, leaving the grammatical problem aside, why is the Messiah of Israel mentioned altogether?

Let us now see how the interpretation of this passage is affected by the reading found in 4Q266 10 i

זוה פרוש	11
[המשפטים אשר יש]פטו כם ¹⁹ עד ממוד משיח אהרון וישראל	12
vacat []יכפר עונם ממנחה וחטת ° 13

The significant addition here is the phrase “meal and sin offerings” which follows after the required restoration of [ויכפר עונם]. In his edition of the Genizah manuscripts for which he used the Cave 4 fragments, Elisha Qimron restored [מנחה וחטת] and left it at that. He perhaps took מנחה וחטת to be the compound subject of the preceding verb, but this is syntactically very difficult. Clearly a preposition is needed before מנחה וחטת. It was suggested to me that a *bet* might be restored before מנחה, thus yielding the sense through “meal and sin offerings.” This may appear straightforward, but it raises the question as to why the coming of the Messiah is needed for the bringing of regular atonement sacrifices. Moreover, in Genizah MS A, the curvature of the base of the letter after עונם fits a *mem* rather than a *bet*, as Qimron has properly indicated. The reading which best conforms to the criteria of both the Genizah and the Cave 4 MSS is [ויכפר עונם ממנחה וחטת] “and he (the Messiah) will atone for their sin better than meal and sin offerings.” This comparative connotation of the prepositional *mem* is supported by a significant parallel.

The *Community Rule* looks forward to the time when the *yahad* will be established as a House of Holiness for Aaron and a Communal House for Israel, “to atone for iniquitous guilt and for sinful unfaithfulness and as good will for the earth better than the flesh of burnt-offerings and the fat of sacrifices” (1QS 9:4), לכפר על אשמת פשע ומעל, חטתה ולרצון לארץ מבשר עולות ומחלבי זבח. The prepositional *mems* in this passage have been rendered by some translators in the privative sense, “without the flesh of burnt-offerings and without the fat of sacrifices.” Jaacov Licht took them to denote comparison, “better than,” which is preferable as a more commonly used connotation of מן. In either case, this 1QS passage is relevant to our text not only grammatically, but conceptually. Both envision a time when the perfection

of priestly and lay institutions will become a source of atonement which will be available without the need for ritual sacrifice.¹¹ In CD 14:19 it is the Messiah of Aaron and Israel, standing at the head of the total community, both priestly and lay, who will have the role of providing atonement. He will do so not through any prescribed ritual, but as the divinely anointed redeemer through whom forgiveness of sin will be granted.

Is such a delegation of the divine power of atonement to the Messiah conceivable in a pre-Christian Jewish text? On the basis of the Gospels, one may infer that the contemporary scribes would have viewed it as bordering on blasphemy. We also noted the disapproval of later tannaitic sages of any suggestion assigning a judgment throne in the heavenly court to David. In the same context the Talmud sharply rejects the notion that Metatron, the mysterious angel whose name was associated with that of God (Exodus 23:20-21) had any discretionary authority (b. Sanh. 38b). In apocalyptic literature, however, one finds considerably less restraint in assigning the function of divine judgment to surrogate figures.

This is well illustrated by the role of the Elect One or the Messiah in the *Parables of Enoch*, whose pre-Christian origin is now widely accepted. As Nickelsburg observes, “the Elect One is the agent of God’s judgment and as such is depicted with imagery that the early chapters of *Enoch* ascribe to God himself.”¹² Michael Knibb notes that both the *Similitudes of Enoch* and *4 Ezra* “assign almost divine status to their respective messianic figures.”¹³ Strack and Billerbeck early on made the same observation and explained it as due to the fact that the Messiah, looked upon as the preexistent figure for the redemption of God’s people, ultimately assumed functions originally reserved for the Creator.¹⁴

¹¹ John Collins has in private conversation raised the valid question whether the parallel with 1QS 9:4 is not weakened by the fact that this passage deals with the atoning value of the institutions of the community in the present age, while CD 14:19 refers to the messianic era, when a purified sacrificial cult would presumably be restored. Granting the centrality of some form of eschatological temple, divinely or humanly built, as in the visions of *4QFlorilegium* and the *Temple Scroll*, it nevertheless seems inevitable that the emphasis on prayer and “perfection of way” as superior offerings had its effect on Qumran concepts of ultimate atonement.

¹² George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 215.

¹³ Michael A. Knibb, “Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha in the Light of the Scrolls,” *DSD* 2/2 (1995): 170-1.

¹⁴ Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922), 1:68.

The Qumran tendency to assign divine functions to surrogate personifications is, as we have seen, well illustrated by the glorification of Melchizedek as the one who presides over the celestial court. This surrogation of the role of *Elohim*, who is called upon in Psalm 82:8 to rise and judge the earth himself, קומה אלהים שפטה הארץ, would, I suspect, have been particularly jarring to some of the Tannaim and presumably also their Pharisaic forerunners. At the end of the mishnaic tractate dealing with the Day of Atonement there is appended a haggadic homily, not found in all the manuscripts, which is attributed to R. Akiba: “Fortunate are you Israel! Before whom do you purify yourselves, and who purifies you? Your Father who is in heaven” (m. Yoma 8, 9). Fourth century homilists drew a similar lesson from Isaiah 35:10: “And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, not the redeemed by Elijah, not the redeemed by the royal Messiah, but the redeemed by the Lord.”¹⁵

That God was the supreme judge of all mankind and the ultimate source of forgiveness was, of course, not denied in Qumran theology. This is affirmed repeatedly in the *Hodayot* and in the lyrical prayers appended to the *Community Rule*: “For with God is the judgment of every living being” (1QS 10:18); “(By) his judgment I am chastened according to my iniquities . . . and to God I call “My Righteousness” קצד (1QS 10:11). Yet, this did not prevent Qumran teachers from attributing the dominion of all the Sons of Righteousness to the Prince of Lights and personifying קצד, Righteousness, as a divine warrior who will rejoice on high when he overcomes the dark forces of Belial (1QM 17:6-8).

In this connection I tried some years ago to redirect attention to Josephus’s statement concerning Essene belief: περιμάχτην ἠγούμενοι του δικαίου την πρόσδοδον (*Antiquities* 18.18). Strugnell and Feldman pointed out that πρόσδοδον must be taken in the sense of “approach” rather than “rewards,” which usually requires the plural. Feldman translates: “[They] believe that they ought to strive especially to draw near to righteousness,” taking δίκαιον as equivalent to δικαιοσύνη.¹⁶ However, “to draw near” would be better with προς το δικαίον,

¹⁵ *The Midrash on Psalms*, tr. William G. Braude (New Haven: Yale, 1959), 2:196.

¹⁶ John Strugnell, “Flavius Josephus and the Essenes: *Antiquities* XVIII. 18-22,” *JBL* 77 (1958): 109; Louis H. Feldman, trans., *Josephus* IX, Loeb edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 15-16; Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Heavenly Tribunal and the Personification of Sedeq in Jewish Apocalyptic,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.19.1 (1979): 219-39.

rather than the genitive. In view of the messianic belief in the coming of one who will teach Righteousness יורה הצדק (CD 6:11), perhaps Feldman's alternative interpretation: "[They] believe that the approach of the righteous one is highly to be prized," is worthy of renewed consideration. Such an eschatological credo would fit rather well following Josephus's reference to the Essene belief in immortality.

In conclusion, the receptivity in Qumran eschatology for agents of divine salvation, whether angelic or human, removes the basis for the scholarly reluctance to read the now more fully available text of CD 18:19 in anything other than its literal sense. The Messiah of Aaron and Israel, that is of the total eschatological community, would with his coming atone for any sins resulting from the previously imperfect knowledge of the Law. He would do so not through ritual sacrifice, *בגן חדה ורחם*, but through his illuminational presence as the embodiment of divine good will for the earth.