

Bright Obiallor

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A Comparison of The Scriptures Matthew 3 With 4Q521

For the purpose of this writing, a comparison was made of two dead sea scrolls findings: 4Q521 with the gospel texts Matthew 3, Mark 1:2, Luke 3:1 and John 1:19. These texts highlight the ministry of John the Baptist. A striking aspect of his life was that he did not do ministry in a place that would be culturally expected of him; like the cities especially Jerusalem. He is rather said to be preaching in the wilderness of Judea. What jumps out to a student of the dead sea scrolls would then be the question of if he had any connections or learning with the religious folks at Qumran or similar sects living and practicing religion in the wilderness. It is no wonder then that there is a debate as to if John the Baptist teachings were influenced by the Qumran community or not.

Nonetheless, the scriptures continue to reveal that John the Baptist preached a message that called people to repentance in view of the coming kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was a kingdom of righteousness and justices, hence whatever is not of righteousness and justice would not only be denied entrance into the kingdom, but would also be judged and made to face eternal damnation. However, the message of repentance was a demonstration of the grace of this same kingdom, that all who repent from their sins-turn from unrighteousness to righteousness, would be shown pardon from their sins and qualified to inherit the kingdom.

In view of 4Q521, it is a collection of Jewish texts discovered in the mid-20th century in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. Specifically, the scroll was found in Cave 4 at Qumran, which is located on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea in the West Bank. The text has a poetic style to it which has led some into thinking it might have been originally intended as a hymn or liturgical

text. Though fragmented, many scholars believe it to be an apocalyptic text that depicts the coming of a Messianic figure. He would be anointed with the Spirit of God and made to sit on the throne of his father David. With the arrival of this Messiah comes the widespread deliverance of the poor, sick, oppressed. In fact there would be the rising from the dead.

There is a striking resemblance between the messages of 4Q521 and that of John the Baptist. It is no wonder that many have assumed that he might have been influenced by the community that produced and used the dead sea scrolls. Both John and 4Q21 pointed to the coming of the Messiah who would right every wrong and liberate the good. John the Baptist was very confident that this was Jesus.

John's message is apocalyptic in nature just like that of the 4Q521. The Messiah is coming to bring an end to all lawlessness and reward the righteous. The wicked would be forever banished from the kingdom of the Messiah. John the Baptist was vivid in his description of the short timing of the coming of this kingdom when he said that the ax was laid at the foot of the tree and any tree that does not bear fruit would be cut down. The ax being close to the tree speaks of the nearness of this judgment.

The call to purity is a central theme for both John the Baptist and 4Q521. The secondary reading for this class highlighted the high regards given to baths, baptism and purity. They all talk about a religiosity that allowed for mercy and grace only if the sinner was willing to be washed of his sins. Washing and baptism signified the washing away of the impurities of the soul by which they were readied for the kingdom of the Messiah if they continued in the path of righteousness.

Even the way John dressed may have hinted at the ascetic nature of the sect of Qumran and thus adding more talking points for those who believe he was influenced by them. John did

not dress in gorgeous robes or wore the royal color of purple, rather one is made to see a strange man not living in pleasure. He is rather clothed in camel's hair and had a leather belt about his waist. Even his food was not afforded the luxuries of wine, fish...rather he fed on locust and wild honey. How did he learn to live this strict and regimented lifestyle? Perhaps from being influenced by the Qumran community? That is what some scholars have affirmed.