

Dead Sea Scrolls & New Testament

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Lecture Review Week 5

John the Baptist and the Qumran: Exploring the Connection between Purity and Baptism

Introduction John the Baptist is a prominent figure in the New Testament who played a critical role in preparing the way for Jesus Christ. His ministry was marked by a message of repentance and the practice of baptism. However, John's relationship with the Qumran community and their shared emphasis on purity and baptism has been the subject of much debate among scholars. In this paper, we will explore the connection between purity and baptism in the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as John the Baptist's relationship to Qumran.

Purity and Baptism in the Qumran Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls The Qumran community was a Jewish sect that lived in the Judean Desert from the second century BCE to the first century CE. Their primary focus was on the pursuit of purity and holiness, which they believed was necessary for the coming of the Messiah. One of the ways in which they pursued purity was through the practice of baptism.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the mid-20th century in caves near the Qumran site, provide evidence of the Qumran community's beliefs and practices. The scrolls include several texts that discuss the importance of purity and the practice of baptism. For example, the "Community Rule" (1QS) states that "they shall immerse in water for repentance" (1QS 3:4). Similarly, the "Rule of the Congregation" (1QSa) describes the practice of baptism as a way to purify oneself from sin.

The Qumran community also believed in the importance of ritual purity, which required strict adherence to certain dietary laws and the separation of the pure from the impure. The "Manual of Discipline" (1QS) provides detailed instructions for maintaining ritual purity, including the use of ritual baths for purification.

John the Baptist in the Gospels & Josephus in the New Testament, John the Baptist is depicted as a prophetic figure who prepared the way for Jesus Christ. His ministry was marked by a message of repentance and the practice of baptism. The Gospel of Matthew describes John baptizing people in the Jordan River and proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

The Jewish historian Josephus also wrote about John the Baptist in his work "Antiquities of the Jews." Josephus describes John as a "good man" who "commanded the Jews to exercise virtue" and "to be baptized" (Antiquities 18.116-119). He also notes that Herod Antipas had John arrested and put to death.

John the Baptist's Relationship to Qumran The connection between John the Baptist and the Qumran community is a subject of much debate among scholars. Some scholars have suggested that John may have been a member of the Qumran community or at least influenced by their beliefs and practices. Others argue that the similarities between John and the Qumran community may be due to their shared Jewish heritage and the common emphasis on purity and holiness in Second Temple Judaism.

One piece of evidence that suggests a connection between John and Qumran is the fact that both groups practised baptism for repentance. Additionally, John's message of repentance and the coming of the kingdom of God is similar to the Qumran community's belief in the coming of the Messiah and the need for purity in preparation for his arrival.

However, there are also differences between John's message and the Qumran community's beliefs. For example, John's focus on the coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah is not present in the Qumran texts.