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 NT770: Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament
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 March 8, 2033

Week 8 Response Paper 6: Apotropaic Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

The two selected texts are 11Q5 Column 19, *Psalms Scroll*, specifically "Prayer for Deliverance" and 4Q213^a, *Aramaic Levi*. (11Q5 is also known as *Apocryphal Psalms I* (Vermes 307). It is also known as *Apocryphal Psalms of David* (Wise et al 447). 11Q5 was found in Cave 11 (no date given in the reading) and is a compilation of non-canonical poems and canonical Psalms written in Syriac, Hebrew and Greek whose authorship is ascribed to biblical David (Vermes 307, Wise et al 447). However, since some are written in a form of Hebrew that postdates the time of David it is likely that Davidic authorship is reflective of the Second Temple Judaism custom of writers to attribute their works to greater ones in their historical past (Wise et al 447). Yet at the conclusion of the scroll it is recorded that David Son of Jesse wrote 3,600 psalms (Vermes 313).

Vermes describes the "Prayer for Deliverance" as a prayer of Thanksgiving whose initial lines have been lost (Vermes 310). Vermes' depiction is in contrast to Flusser, Wise et al and Wold's assessments whose focus is on the apotropaic aspect of the text. The psalm begins with the writer exclaiming how thanksgiving is to be given to God (assumedly) by all those who are alive (Vermes 310 line 1-4). The writer then acknowledges that God is the reason for life and implores God to treat "us" according to His goodness, mercy and greatness (Vermes 310 line 5). The writer continues to extol God's virtues (Vermes 311 Line 7), which includes a line reminiscent of Psalm 103:4b KJV: "who crowns his pious ones with loving-kindness and mercies;" cf. "who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

The psalm continues in this vein until line fourteen where the tone and perspective of the psalm turns from joy and praise to contriteness and entreaty. The writer now is supplicating for forgiveness of sins and a request of a “spirit of faithfulness and knowledge” (Vermes line 15, 16). Moreover, the writer pleads with God not to be controlled by Belial nor “an unclean spirit” (Vermes line 16). Then just as swiftly as the turn from joy to fear, the writer returns to praising God and ends the psalm like the beginning exclaiming the goodness of God and rejoicing (Vermes 311 line 17 to the end).

4Q213^a, *Aramaic Levi* is also known as *The Testament of Levi (i)* in Vermes (557). 4Q213^a dates back to the mid first century BCE (Vermes 557). Although portions of the scroll were damaged, the completion of most of the scroll was made possible due to the surviving portion of a Greek manuscript of the same text (Vermes 557). The text begins with Levi immediately acknowledging God from the moment he awakens and affirming that God knows everything that is the hearts of people (Vermes 557 beginning of Column 1). However, then he employs what Flusser calls a “dualistic approach” (Flusser 200). In the same breath, Levi requests “all the paths of truth” for him and his sons, while simultaneously beseeching God to “distant” them all manner of evil, fornication and pride (Vermes 557 line 12, 13, 14). Levi continues his appeal by requesting counsel, wisdom and knowledge in order to do God’s will in his life (Vermes 557 lines 14, 15, 16), but then just as quickly resorts to appealing to God to “let no adversary have dominion” or to be “led astray” (Vermes 557 lines below 15). Levi also adds a plea of mercy to supplication. The testament concludes with Levi praising God for the blessing of his parents, Abraham and Sarah and the fulfilled promise of giving them “righteous seed” (Vermes 558 just above line 10). The segment ends with Levi appealing to God to “listen” to

prayer and not to be removed from God's sight (Vermes 558 line 9,10). The remainder of the scroll are incomplete and fragmented phrases.

Although the topic of this week is apotropaic prayers, neither one of these scrolls are wholly apotropaic. According to Flusser it is not uncommon for apotropaic prayers to have other literary motifs (Flusser 202). One of the debates among scholars is whether or not apotropaic prayers is a genre in and of itself and what should be considered apotropaic (Wold 3). As Vermes rightly points out, although 11Q5 column is entitled, *Prayer for Deliverance*, it is primarily a prayer of Thanksgiving. Yet what both scrolls share in common is apotropaic appeal to God. They are also personal prayers of appeals, not community or sectarian based. Flusser acknowledges 4Q213^a as personal prayer (Flusser 195). However, the differences are subtle and are central to the differences of perspectives in the two secondary articles (Flusser and Wold). In 11Q5, the writer identifies Belial as independent and separate from an unclean spirit (Vermes 311 line 16). In contrast, the writer of 4Q213^a, only identifies an evil spirit and an evil proclivity to do bad things (i.e. fornicate and be prideful) (Vermes 557 line between 5 and 10). The apparent difference lies in the perceived evil. For one, Belial is an outside force that has the power and ability to influence or perhaps even do bodily harm whereas for the other, it is more of an internal influence and a cry for some type of restriction or limitation of effect (Wold 3).

Another contrasting point of view is how each writer sees the effect of the evil (whether external or internal). Levi apotropaic prayer does not seem to equate the malevolent entity with the ability to cause sin or even broaches the subject of sin in his prayer. What is missing from Levi's prayer is an entreaty for forgiveness. However, in the Psalm Scroll even before the appeal, the writer acknowledges his sin and asks forgiveness. This could allude to the worldview of each writer. One where sin is a *given* and needs to be forgiven even prior to crying out for God's

divine help; while the other may see inherent protection from through the praising and acknowledging of God. Though if that is the case, then what would be the need for the apotropaic portion of the prayer?