

John J. Collins and Craig A. Evans, eds. *Christian Beginnings and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. 144. ISBN-10: 080102837X. ISBN-13: 978-0801028373. \$16.99 USD, paper.

1. The eight essays presented in this volume by renowned American scholars take up an issue that has attracted experts and the interested public ever since the Dead Sea Scrolls hit the headlines. Although the fundamental aspects of the relationship between DSS and NT seem settled (both are specific parts of the complex and colorful world of late Hellenistic Judaism without being dependent upon each other), many issues remain controversial.

2. After a brief and quite general preface by the editors (pp. 9-14), the first two articles, authored by John J. Collins, address concepts of messiah in both literary corpora. For that matter, Collins critically discusses two recent books that triggered considerable debates. In his first article („A Messiah before Jesus?“, pp. 15-35) Collins argues against Michael Wise’s „The Messiah before Jesus“: While some DSS passages indeed stylize the Teacher of Righteousness according to the Suffering Servant in Isa 40-55, little evidence exists according to Collins that the Teacher was considered messiah: Nowhere in the Scrolls is a living figure called messiah. Three crucial differences between Jesus and the Teacher (the function of their respective sufferings, their roles in the eschatological future, and the different characters of their teaching) should make one extremely cautious. Judaism obviously had different ways of creatively developing messianic concepts which were not necessarily related to each other nor compatible. Collins’ pledge for terminological and conceptual accuracy and restraint is symptomatic for the overall approach of the book and worth following.

3. The second article „An Essene Messiah? Comments on Israel Knohl, *The Messiah Before Jesus*“ (pp. 37-44)—a revised version of a review originally published elsewhere—emphasizes the importance of the Roman connotations of the „son of God“ title and texts like the *Oracles of Hystapes*, but remains rightly sceptical about Knohl’s confidence to see events and persons from around the turn of the era reflected in these traditions.

4. In „Jesus, John and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Assessing Typologies of Restoration“ (pp. 45-62) Craig A. Evans examines „the extent to which the early Christian movement understood itself in terms of biblical typology that gave hopes of the restoration of Israel“ (p. 61): wilderness typology, ritual immersion, the number twelve. While this set of biblically rooted typologies the early Christian movement grew out of cannot be understood „without careful and nuanced appreciation of the Dead Sea Scrolls“ (p. 62), both corpora set their own accents and agendas. The approach we witness in writings from both corpora is eclectic and often influenced by specific historical developments, such as the growing role of baptism as initiatory rite in response to increasing Gentile membership in the case of the early Church.

5. The next two essays move to another classic area of controversy: law and obedience in the Scrolls and the NT. In a number of previous publications, Martin Abegg has already taken sides in the important discussion about the meaning of the term „works of law“ in 4QMMT and the role of *erga tou nomou* in Paul. In his article „Paul and James on the Law in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls“ (pp. 63-74), he now defends his position against criticism from Jacqueline de Roo and Simon Gathercole and reiterates that for the author of 4QMMT, „works of law“ are the means required to maintain covenant status („staying in“) and not the means to enter the

covenant („getting in“). Abegg has important aspects to add to the discussion about 4QMMT and related DSS texts, but—contrary to what the title of his paper announces—he says little about what this might mean for understanding Paul and even less for James.

6. But not only the „works of the law“ and their role with respect to „justification“ have kept scholars busy. Related to it is the question of how humans actually *are* able to keep the law and what the eschatological dimension of keeping the law is. According to Barry D. Smith the DSS address this issue with the term “spirit of holiness” („’Spirit of Holiness’ as Eschatological Principle of Obedience“, pp. 75-99), a „divinely granted capacity of repentance, which in some cases is said to result in atonement“ (p. 97f). While some texts view the granting of the spirit as eschatological gift and „means by which Israel can be spiritually transformed at the eschaton“, others emphasize its aspect of „incipient manifestation of eschatological mercy“ (p. 98). Salvation is in any aspect God’s work: not only did God grant the possibility to be saved through the gift of the law, but also the individual ability of each human being by transforming him or her through the “spirit of holiness”.

7. Scriptural interpretation is a central issue in many writings from both the DSS and the NT corpora. R. Glenn Wooden examines leading hermeneutical principles and major exponents (adding Philo and Josephus), focussing on „practice of inspired, or divinely aided, interpretation“ of scripture („Guided by God. Divine Aid and Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament“, pp. 101-120). Although many authors from different Jewish circles share the claim of divinely aided interpretation, its contents and results are quite different. Here, too, DSS and NT approaches and sources are fundamentally similar, while individual expressions sometimes widely differ.

8. The last two essays concentrate on a particularly important area in which the DSS might be able to contribute to the current Christian theological discussion: apocalyptic theology. According to theologian Jonathan R. Wilson’s „The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Theology“ (pp. 121-128), the value of apocalyptic theology lies in the fact that it—contrary to Western liberalism—represents a “totalizing theology that brings all of life under the decisive judgement of God’s action in history” (p. 126). It leads to a new form of “monasticism” (as opposed to “sectarianism”) that requires “us to break out of familiar habits of thinking and living” (p. 127). Apart from the question of whether the DSS texts really presuppose the existence of an “apocalyptic *community*” that could serve as example of a “new monasticism” and not as a more general *attitude* of rejection and denial (admittedly an entirely exegetical question), Wilson’s critique of Western liberals and his idealization of apocalypticism is also questionable on theological grounds. There are enough examples in history where apocalyptic totalitarianism with its fundamental *Unbehagen an der Kultur* did not lead to a reformed monasticism of authentic believers but to a culture of violence and the dictatorial rule of a minority, that believes it possesses the truth, over the remaining unbelievers (an issue Wilson does not address).

9. In his response, John J. Collins’s („Apocalyptic Theology and the Dead Sea Scrolls“, pp. 129-133) criticizes the post-liberal concentration on Paul’s version of apocalyptic theology and the exclusion of all other forms. Paul’s apocalyptic vision was more radical theologically (making a crucified Jew prime focus of God’s revelation and criterion of his eschatological judgment), but less radical sociologically (permitting believers to live among non-believers) and culturally (Paul himself freely adopting blessings of Greek culture) than what we can read in many of the

“sectarian” DSS. In that respect, according to Collins, the DSS “indeed hold salutary lessons for those who espouse an apocalyptic theology today” (p. 133). Enculturation is not betrayal (as many proponents of “apocalyptic theology” declare), but theologically absolutely legitimate. The alternative is “self-marginalization and irrelevance” based upon an exclusion of much of Christian tradition. Two indices conclude the stimulating volume.

10. My impression of the book is somewhat mixed. While I admire the superb scholarship and argumentative vigor of most of the articles, some of them are quite strongly connected to specifically American discussion (especially the last two). Instead of giving a fuller and more comprehensive assessment of the topic, the articles collected in the book address some of the most crucial topics of the current discussion on Christian beginnings and the DSS, often on the basis of particular publications they wish to comment upon (especially Abegg, but also to a more limited extent the contributions by Collins). This certainly puts their conclusions nicely in context, but also somewhat limits their scope. Most articles form a good point to start from and dig deeper by providing welcome surveys of relevant DSS passages and comments on the state of the academic debate. The collection is useful for all who wish a brief and accessible orientation of high academic standard on one of the most controversial and complex problems of Jewish and Christian literary history.

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