

The Suffering Messiah

Introduction

The Parables of Enoch is a messianic prophecy which predates the public ministry of Jesus by about 25 years.¹ The seer Enoch is taken up to the divine throne room in heaven where he describes the preparations for the final judgment by a human figure referred to variously as the ‘chosen one’, the ‘righteous one’, and the ‘anointed one’ (i.e. the Messiah). This divinely appointed figure, frequently referred to as ‘that son of man’ or ‘this son of man’, is revealed as the saviour of the righteous (*IEn* 48:4-7, 62:13-16), before sitting in judgment over the wicked angels and impenitent peoples of the earth (*IEn* 62–63). Except for some incongruence caused by later interpolations, the three parables in this book describe, in the three imminent stages, the divine intervention which ends in salvation for the righteous and penitent, and judgment for the wicked and impenitent. At the centre of Enoch’s visions in this book is a composite messianic profile evoking the ‘one like a son of man’ in Daniel (Dn 7,13-14), the anointed king in the Psalms (Pss 2, 110; Is 11:1-5), the chosen and righteous servant in Isaiah (Is 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12, 61:1-3) and the timeless presence of divine wisdom (Prov 8:22-31; Sir 24,1-3). Through its allusions to these biblical texts, the messianic profile at the centre of the Parables of Enoch constitutes a rich representation of the role and mission of a divinely chosen person, who is both the saviour and the judge of human beings.

Generations of scholars and churchmen have been struck by the correspondence between the messianic figure at the centre of the Parables of Enoch and the various New Testament reports on the life and sayings of Jesus Christ. Only recently, however, have they been able to study this correspondence in depth, thanks to the efforts of a few dedicated language experts and textual critics.²

According to the evidence in the Gospels, it is now clear that Jesus Christ personally adopted the title ‘Son of Man’ as his preferred messianic title and used it frequently in the setting of eschatological judgment.³ As it happens the Parables of Enoch is the only known writing from the second temple period that interprets the ‘one like a son of man’ in Daniel (7:13-14) as Messiah and assigns him the role of eschatological judge.⁴ Due to the uniqueness of the association of ‘Messiah’ with ‘Son of Man’ and the judgmental role, it is therefore highly probable that Jesus Christ identified himself with that messianic figure in the Parables of Enoch, thus revealing

¹ The scholarly consensus converges on a date around the turn of the millennium, i.e., 1 BCE.

² The text was preserved down the centuries only by the Ethiopian Church, and in the Ge’ez language.

³ The term ‘Son of Man’ occurs 84 times in the New Testament and 81 of those are in the Gospels, where it is found as a self-reference on the lips of Jesus. It is almost never used by anyone addressing or referring to Jesus (other titles are used, such as ‘Son of God’, ‘Christ’, ‘Lord’ and ‘Saviour’, but never ‘Son of Man’). After the end of the first century CE, the meaning of the term ‘Son of Man’ changed and was used to refer to Christ’s human, as opposed to his divine, nature. According to the rules of dissimilarity (the unique use of this title by Jesus himself and by none of his followers) and multiple attestation (its occurrence in sources of diverse origin), the use of this title by Jesus, in reference to himself, is now deemed to be authentic.

⁴ There may be others, but none have survived. As we will see, other factors make it almost certain that Jesus was influenced by the Parables of Enoch.

his familiarity with this book and his intention to fulfil its messianic prophecy. By implication, the same text can provide insight into the messianic consciousness of Jesus himself, and how he interpreted his mission as Messiah Son of Man.

Objections and Responses

The greatest objection to the position outlined above, concerning Christ's fulfilment of the messianic prophecy in the Parables of Enoch, is the self-evident fact that the eschatological judgment has still not taken place. Furthermore, just when it should have taken place according to the literal interpretation of that prophecy, Christ himself was judged and condemned rather than the wicked angels, rulers and sinners on whom condemnation should have fallen. Instead of the judgment of evil, history has recorded a suffering and crucified Messiah. The apparent inversion of the prophesied outcome is a sign of scandalous failure to some and to others a mystery that is comprehensible only in the light of Jesus' resurrection and subsequent exaltation to heaven. As the suffering of the Messiah Son of Man is nowhere mentioned in the Parables of Enoch, whose prophecy Jesus intended to fulfil, then how, we ask, did Jesus, in his adherence to the prophecy, come to accept his Passion and death as a necessary part of its fulfilment? In other words, how did Jesus, as Messiah Son of Man, come to accept humiliation, suffering and death as a crucial part of his mission, even though it is not mentioned openly in the prophecy?

There are three possible explanations for the difference between prophetic schema of the Parables of Enoch and historical fact:

1. Jesus Christ knew nothing about the prophecy in the Parables of Enoch, and it was just a coincidence that he identified himself by the same designations and in the same role as the central figure in that messianic prophecy.
2. Jesus Christ had hopes of fulfilling the prophecy but failed, so his followers invented an interpretation of his death that created the appearance of success and caused him to be ritually praised and worshipped.
3. Jesus Christ did actually fulfill his central part in the messianic prophecy, and this set in motion a process that takes time to reach its completion.

1. Jesus Christ knew nothing about the prophecy in the Parables of Enoch, and it was just a coincidence that he identified himself by the same designations and in the same role as the central figure in the prophecy

There is now an abundance of circumstantial evidence challenging the presumption that Jesus never knew about the messianic prophecy in the Parables of Enoch. In a previous study, I have presented historical, archaeological and topographical evidence for the existence of an Essene settlement in an ancient cave-village carved into the cliffs of Mount Arbel, near to the Sea of Galilee.⁵ In another study, I gave reasons for identifying the Essene character of the Parables of Enoch and described at least four features of the text that point to its origin in the Arbel cave village, finally confirming this proposal with a reconstruction of the dire social situation that prevailed in the area

⁵ John Ben-Daniel, *The Essenes of Mount Arbel and Jerusalem: Origins, History and Influence*, Mogilany, Krakow: Enigma Press, 2023; 7-35.

at the time.⁶ One of the conclusions of this research was that Jesus of Nazareth, whose home town was only a day's walk from Arbel, could have visited the Essene community at the cave village. Josephus informs us that selected young men were accepted by Essene communities for two to three years before having to take the oath of membership⁷ and, furthermore, that Josephus availed himself of this opportunity to learn about the Essenes when he was 16 years of age (c. 55 CE).⁸ It is eminently possible that, as an adolescent, Jesus also joined an Essene community near his home in order to pursue his devotion to Scripture (Lk 2:41-52). This would have the virtue of explaining how he came to have a profound grasp of Essene customs, hermeneutics and worldview, despite the absence of any record of contact with the Essenes of Qumran.⁹

It is now widely accepted that the Book of Parables was written at the turn of the first millennium, within a few years of the birth of Jesus. Jesus would have been eligible to stay as a guest in the Essene community, as a teenager, between 10-15 CE., at a time when the Parables of Enoch was still fresh in the minds of the community. It would have been recited and discussed among the members and the author of that work could still have been alive. These considerations are sufficient to assert 'external plausibility' for the young Jesus of Nazareth to have personally, and directly, encountered the Parables of Enoch, and even its author.

The next step is to present evidence that Jesus was indeed influenced by the content of the Parables of Enoch. A high degree of influence can be established if, and only if, the original document has at least one unique feature which appears in the work of a later author, or in the expression of the person who is suspected of having been influenced by it, or both, as in the case of an author describing a person.¹⁰ A common feature that is 'unique (i.e., not known to have been transmitted by any other source) and explicable only in terms of direct relationship (i.e., first-hand, not second or third hand)' is highly likely to represent a significant degree of "influence".¹¹ As explained in the introduction above, the unique feature of the Parables of Enoch which comes directly through Jesus, according to the sayings attributed to him in the Gospels, is the association of 'the anointed one', i.e., the Messiah, with the designation Son of Man, and with the role of eschatological judge. This combination of designations and roles

⁶ John Ben-Daniel, *The Essenes of Mount Arbel and Jerusalem*, 89-120.

⁷ Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War* 2:137-142 and also 1QS 6:13-23.

⁸ Josephus Flavius, *Life* 10-11.

⁹ Cf. Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus, the Essenes, and Christian Origins: New Light on Ancient Texts and Communities*, Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2018; and, on a more popular level, John Bergsma, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Revealing the Jewish Roots of Christianity*, New York: Image, 2019.

¹⁰ The best analogy is the identification of a particular person from a unique feature in a photo (a mole or a scar), or from the description of a photo.

¹¹ Unique common feature and direct relationship are the two criteria that need to be met in order to establish high level of influence. In their own ways, the same criteria are used by various scholars, e.g., Joan Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997; 16; also James H. Charlesworth, 'The Parables of Enoch and the Apocalypse of John', *Pseudepigrapha and Christian Origins, Essays from the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, eds. G.S.Oegema and J.H. Charlesworth, New York/London, T & T Clark, 2008; 230-32.

is unique to the Parables and to Jesus of Nazareth, making it highly likely that Jesus was influenced by that text.¹²

In conclusion, it is ‘externally plausible’ that Jesus encountered the Parables of Enoch, and its author, as a visitor to the Essene community in Arbel, and it is highly likely that he was influenced by it.

2. Jesus Christ may have had hopes of fulfilling the messianic prophecy but he failed, so his followers invented an interpretation of his death that created the appearance of success and caused him to be ritually praised and worshipped.

The view that, in his earthly life, Jesus never openly claimed to be the Messiah, or failed to convince his followers that he was the Messiah, has attracted New Testament scholars for at least two and a half centuries. Instead, they have professed that Jesus’ messianic credentials emerged only after his resurrection, when they were proclaimed by his followers in the Church.¹³ In addition, these scholars deny that Jesus predicted his own suffering and death, affirming their views with the claim that “Neither the suffering of the Messiah, nor his death and resurrection appear to have been part of the faith of first-century Judaism”, in the words of Geza Vermes.¹⁴

Following the path of this reductionist historical approach, many recent attempts to write critical biographies of Jesus’ life portray him in non-messianic roles, such as a teacher of wisdom, a peripatetic Cynic philosopher, an anti-Roman revolutionary, a social reformer, prophet, charismatic healer or wonderworker. In none of these reconstructions of Jesus’ life is he depicted as the Messiah. A wide separation has therefore opened up between the so-called ‘Jesus of history’ and the ‘Jesus Christ of faith’, whom Joseph Ratzinger calls the ‘Jesus of the Gospels’. Against this separation, Ratzinger argues “Unless there had been something extraordinary in what happened, unless the person and the word of Jesus radically surpassed the hopes and expectations of the time there is no way to explain why he was crucified or why he made such an impact”.¹⁵

Ratzinger then outlines the fully developed Christology expressed in the hymn cited by St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:6-11), a mere 20 years after the Resurrection. Using this as an example of early Christian worship, he resumes his argument:

“Critical scholarship rightly asks the question: What happened during those twenty years after Jesus’ Crucifixion? Where did this Christology come from? To say that it is the fruit of anonymous collective formulations, whose authorship we seek to discover, does not actually explain anything. How could these groups be so creative? How were they so persuasive and how did they manage to prevail? Isn’t it more logical, even historically speaking, to assume that the greatness came at the beginning, and that the figure of Jesus

¹² The reasons for regarding ‘Son of Man’ as an authentic self-reference used by Jesus were given in note 3.

¹³ J. C. O’Neill, *Who Did Jesus Think He Was*, Leiden: Brill, 1995; 7-11.

¹⁴ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1981; 38

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian Walker, New York: Doubleday, 2007; xxii.

really did explode all existing categories and could only be understood in the light of the mystery of God”.¹⁶

In his own way, the late Joseph Blenkinsopp concurs:

“...I can come up with no compelling reason to deny that the tradition about Jesus as Servant, which we have just seen was more probably taken over by Paul than created by him, is rooted in Jesus’ own understanding of his mission. This opinion is reinforced by the narrative logic of the gospel story, in which, as we noted earlier, the close relation between Jesus and John the Baptist is an important element the historicity of which few would deny. Following on the execution of the Baptist, Jesus seems to have concluded that his own death was foreordained, and therefore foretold prophetically, and from that point on the suffering and death of the Servant casts a dark shadow forward over the narrative”.¹⁷

What is missing here, on both sides of the argument, is the discovery that Jesus was familiar with the Parables of Enoch (see 1 above), which was the earliest known document in which ‘this/that son of man’ refers to the person who is also called ‘the anointed one’, or ‘Messiah’, the central figure in the prophecy. So, whenever Jesus referred to himself as ‘Son of Man’, turning the term of reference into a nominal self-reference, he was tacitly identifying himself as the Messiah. However, since the prophecy was not widely known at the time, only his closest disciples would have understood this meaning of Jesus’ use of the term Son of Man (cf. Mt 16:13-20). To the rest, the term would have been understood as an impersonal pronoun, like ‘one’ in English, ‘man’ in German, or ‘on’ in French. The ambiguity of the term ‘Son of Man’ therefore allowed Jesus to maintain the secret of his messianic status until his trial and crucifixion (e.g., Mt 26:63-65), for the main purpose of the ‘messianic secret’ was to avoid premature arrest, and execution by the Roman authorities as a messianic claimant.

Seeing that Jesus was using terminology derived from the Parables of Enoch, it is reasonable to assume that he was not only familiar with its prophecy, but also that, in identifying as the ‘Son of Man’, he regarded himself as the central figure.¹⁸ Furthermore, the inner circle of disciples who knew about this, would have had profound insight into the divine origin and purpose of his mission, and with this insight, now as then, there is no way his mission could be called a failure.

3. Jesus Christ did actually fulfill his central part in the prophecy, and thus set in motion a process that takes time to reach completion.

The answers given to the previous statements go a long way to confirm that Jesus did actually accomplish what he came to do, and the effects of his mission are still evident in the world to this day.

¹⁶ Op. cit. xxii-xxiii. It is the messianic prophecy in the Parables of Enoch, above all, that answers Ratzinger’s rhetorical question “Where did this Christology come from?”

¹⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2006; 289-290.

¹⁸ For the authenticity of its use by Jesus, see note 3 above.

However, the objection can be made that, although Jesus applied the title ‘Son of Man’ to himself and set about realizing those acts of salvation assigned to his title in the prophecy (Is 61:1-3; Lk 4:17-21), he did not fulfil the prophecy literally to the end, because it describes salvation and judgment simultaneously, and Jesus refrained from its most important aspect, which is the destruction and elimination of the wicked. Ironically, this continues to be one of main reasons for doubting the messianic status of Jesus.¹⁹

Christ’s focus on acts of salvation and his lack of emphasis on judgment also raised questions in the mind of his forerunner, John the Baptist. It is evident from the Gospel report on the Baptist’s preaching that, in accord with the Parables of Enoch (*IEn* 62:1–63:12; 69:26-28), John expected the Messiah to save his people and judge the wicked in a single operation, like a farmer separating the wheat and the chaff:

“I am baptizing you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3,11-12).

So, when John learnt that Jesus was not taking immediate action against the wicked, he sent him a message from prison asking for clarification:

“When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me” (Mt 11,2-6; cf. Lk 7,18-23).

In this reply, Jesus ignores the judgmental aspect of the Son of Man’s role, and instead recalls an ancient tradition regarding the works of future messianic salvation (cf. Is 61:1-3; Ps 146:5-10; 4Q521 fr.2), expressed in a form that “affirms that Jesus, despite appearances, is the fulfilment of John’s expectation, although perhaps not in the way he may have hoped”.²⁰ As John was in prison at that time, his expectations were surely coloured by self-concern and hope for liberation, which would explain the tinge of criticism in Jesus’ response: “among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom is greater than he” (Mt 11,11).

Between Jesus and John, there seems to have existed a creative tension which is felt throughout the New Testament: while Jesus thought universally and prioritized works of salvation for all peoples, starting with the House of Israel, John thought locally and focussed on the final stage, when the righteous will be vindicated and the wicked condemned. There was a difference in emphasis and scale in their individual

¹⁹ Ironically, because it sounds like a taunt from the wicked who presume the final judgment will never come.

²⁰ Cf. Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus, the Essenes, and Christian Origins*, 84-95, quote is from 94. Under the circumstances, it is significant that the actions listed by Jesus, according to Mt 11,4-5 and Lk 7,22, did not include the “liberation of captives”, as in the sources (Is 61,1, Ps 146,7, and 4Q521 2 ii 8).

interpretations of the Parables of Enoch, whose prophecy they worked together to fulfil.²¹

As noted above, this prophecy blends at least two distinct roles under the various titles of the Messiah: the judgmental role of the Son of Man and the salvific role of the chosen and righteous Servant.²² It appears that the Baptist read the text literally, giving more weight and urgency to the judgmental role assigned to the Messianic Son of Man (Ps 2, 110; 1 En 62-63). Jesus, on the other hand, embracing the boundlessness and universality of God's mercy, prioritized the role of the chosen and righteous Servant, whose mission was to be a covenant of the peoples, a light to the nations, and a saviour for the afflicted and oppressed (Is 42:1-9, 49:1-11, 61:1-3; *1En* 48:4). Though not directly invoked in the Parables of Enoch, the chosen and righteous Servant's role in the original text of the prophet Isaiah includes the suffering Servant passage (Is 53).²³ In this passage, the suffering Servant is the 'righteous one' (צדיק) whose death makes many righteous (Is 53:11) and whose descriptive name reappears as one of the messianic titles in the Parables.²⁴ Although the suffering Servant passage may have been the eulogy of a converted disciple to a deceased prophet, composed at the end of the Babylonian exile, it eventually became paradigmatic for other righteous people who suffered and died, which is to say, who were martyred because of their faith.²⁵

Among those *Hasidim* persecuted by the Seleucids, and then by the Hasmonians, the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 offered a paradigm for explaining the meaning and value of their suffering—a paradigm which eventually appears to have been widely adopted by the rest of Judaeen society. Several literary compositions illustrate this point, including the accounts of the martyrdom of Eleazar the scribe and of a mother and her seven sons, for refusing to transgress Jewish law (2Macc 6:18–7:42), the persecution and death of the righteous person related in the Wisdom of Solomon (4:7-19), the anonymous compendium of the 'Lives of the Prophets' dating to the turn of

²¹ For the way this prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist, see Ben-Daniel, *The Essenes of Mount Arbel and Jerusalem*, 132-140.

²² It should be noted that, for reasons unknown, the word 'servant' is does not occur in the Parables of Enoch, and is used only in specific contexts in the Dead Sea Scrolls; see Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*, 202.

²³ It is important to note that no distinction is made, in the texts under consideration, between the Chosen Servant texts (Is 11, 42, 49, 50, 61) and the suffering Righteous Servant text (Is 53). They are considered as a whole. For those scholars who detect a contribution from the Isaianic Servant passages in the profile of the Enochic Messiah Son of Man, see Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*, 263-64 n. 25; George Nickelsburg in *1Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of Enoch Chapters 37-82*, Hermeneia Series, Minneapolis MI: Fortress Press, 2012; 258-59.

²⁴ Regarding this contribution, Blenkinsopp has a minimalist view: In the Parables of Enoch, "Dependence on the Isaianic texts is far from glaringly obvious. The attribution to the Son of Man of the titles "the Righteous One" and "the Chosen One" is worth considering, since the former is attached to the suffering servant (1En 38:2-3, etc; Isa 53:11) and the latter occurs regularly in Isaiah 40-55 in parallelism with Servant (...). On the other hand, these titles are fairly common and contextually too isolated to establish a firm connection", *Opening the Sealed Book*, 263-264. For a firmer connection between the suffering Servant passage, the Essenes and the Parables of Enoch, see the Appendix at the end.

²⁵ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Revised and Enlarged, Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996; 192-93.

the first millennium, and certain passages from the Thanksgiving Hymns (*Hodayot*) preserved in the caves of Qumran (1QH_a; see the ‘Appendix’ below).²⁶

In this context of social injustice, mere mention of the title ‘righteous one’ could function as a verbal cue signifying ‘suffering for the sake of others’. So, returning to Jesus, it is quite probable that his identification with the ‘righteous one’ in the Parables (*1En* 38:2; 53:6) would also have called to mind the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and posed the vicarious suffering and death of that righteous person as a possible, or even necessary, paradigm for his own earthly mission.²⁷

This final observation answers one of the most vexed questions of all time: why did Jesus, as Messiah, undergo suffering and death, if “neither the suffering of the Messiah, nor his death and resurrection, appear to have part of the faith of first-century Judaism”?²⁸ Although this assertion is true as stated, there was, as explained above, a general understanding in Judaeon society, verified by experience, that the suffering of the righteous person had an atoning effect on that person’s circle, and that the suffering Servant in Isaiah was the biblical paradigm for this salutary effect (cf. Is 53:11). There may have been no expectation for a messiah who suffered and died for the sins of the many, but in a society which persecutes the righteous, it is logical to expect that the Messiah, whenever he should come, would also be persecuted for his righteousness. The historical reality of a righteous and suffering Messiah is not some fault of the Messiah, but a sad reflection of a society that is thoroughly impenitent and corrupted by evil.

Much more unexpected than the humiliating death of the Messiah, however, was the outcome of that death, which far exceeded the consequences of the death of suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. From the resurrection of the messianic ‘righteous one’ arose a following of disciples that flourished and grew until it had converted the Roman Empire to its cause and spread throughout the world. But, according to the messianic prophecy in the Parables of Enoch, that is not the end of the divine plan, for the final judgment is yet to come. This is the final act in the drama of salvation, in which the Messiah Son of Man returns to judge and eradicate all that is corrupt and evil, leaving the creation transformed by God’s presence. For this final part of the prophecy, we no longer turn to Enoch’s Book of Parables, for this was updated and replaced, at the end

²⁶ For the martyrdom of Eleazar, the mother and her seven sons, and the list called ‘Lives of the Prophets’, see David A. DeSilva, *The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James, and Jude: What Earliest Christianity Learned from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Oxford: University Press, 2012; 158-74; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*, 264-65 for the Wisdom passage, and 269-82 for Thanksgiving and Self Exaltation Hymns.

²⁷ For clearly John’s imprisonment and execution at the hands of Herod Antipas signaled the outcome of Jesus’ mission as well. If acceptance of their message, national repentance and reform were to be labelled “Plan A”, and their rejection, arrest and execution were to be labelled “Plan B”, then it would have been clear to Jesus, from the arrest of John the Baptist, that “Plan B” was the operating principle for him too.

²⁸ As stated by Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 38.

of the first century CE, by the Revelation (Apocalypse) of St. John, the final book in the New Testament canon.²⁹

Appendix

For those who are not convinced that the mere mention of the title ‘righteous one’ in the Parables of Enoch, through its association with the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:11, would have alerted Jesus to the kind of death he would suffer, there was another source of influence operating through the Essene community in which he would have first encountered the Parables of Enoch (see 1 above).

Firstly, a word about the Essenes. Although there is good evidence of a schism between the Qumran sectarians and the rest of the Essene movement, the Dead Sea Scrolls represent the main primary source of information on the doctrine and discipline of the Essene movement as a whole.³⁰ The main cause of the schism was disagreement on the required degree of segregation of their communities from the surrounding society (CD 19:33–20:27). On returning to the Land of Israel from ‘the land of Damascus’ (c. 100 BCE), the Qumran branch (who called themselves *Beit Yachad*) appears to have taken this to an ‘introversionist’ extreme, while the other ‘mainstream’ communities (polemically called *Beit Peleg* by the Qumranites) separated themselves in a more moderate way. As many of the writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls date from their ‘unitive’ period (c. 150-100 BCE), prior to the schism, these writings would have influenced both sides, taking account of the presence of later editorial alterations and subsequent rivalry.

Among the examples of literary works that were modelled on the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, we mentioned above the Thanksgiving Hymns (*Hodayot*) preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran (1QH_a). It is now understood that several parts of these Hymns, especially but not exclusively the central parts (cols X–XVII) were composed by the founder and leader of the group, the Teacher of Righteousness. What is more significant for our discussion is that these autobiographical writings were strongly influenced by the Servant passages of Isaiah 40-55, including that of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53.³¹

Inserted into the scroll of the Thanksgiving Hymns are the fragmentary remains of the ‘Self Glorification Hymn’, in which the narrator audaciously declares “Who is like me among the angels? Who could measure the [flow] of my lips, who am the beloved of the King, a companion to the holy [ones], none can compare...” (4QHe).³² In another fragment, the narrator claims to be sitting on a throne of power in the angelic

²⁹ For my explanation of this replacement, see Ben-Daniel, *The Essenes of Arbel and Jerusalem*, 121-170.

³⁰ The best secondary sources are the relevant writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria. Josephus was a uniquely well-informed secondary source because he stayed as a guest with an Essene community when he was 16 (c. 54-55 CE; cf. *Life* 10-11).

³¹ Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*, 269-272, esp. 271, also Michael O. Wise, *The First Messiah: Investigating the Saviour Before Christ*, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999; 290.

³² Israel Knohl, *The Messiah Before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000; 76.

council, where he shall be reckoned with the angels and dwells in their holy council (4Q491 frg.11, col. 1).³³

Blenkinsopp summarizes the composition as follows: “This text, reconstructed out of several fragments, is a first person address of a teacher who, though at one time despised and shunned, now claims to enjoy divine or quasi-divine status in the company of the angelic hosts”.³⁴ This ‘exaltation hymn’ exists in two recensions,³⁵ and is set in a communal hymn of thanksgiving to God, which is remarkable for having a more joyful tone than the other hymns in the *Hodayot* corpus (1QHa). As noted by Israel Knohl, “The tone of these hymns is essentially different from the tone that prevails elsewhere in the *Hodayot*. The vast majority of the hymns are imbued with a heavy sense of guilt; that is, the assumption of most is that only divine grace can liberate the individual from his sinful, guilt-ridden condition. In these two particular hymns, however, guilt seems completely absent”.³⁶

However, like the other thanksgiving hymns, the teacher’s ‘exaltation hymn’ is peppered with allusions to the Servant passages in Isaiah 40-55, especially when it describes his experience of humiliation and suffering using the same verbal roots as in Isaiah 53: “[My] desi[re] is not of the flesh, [for] everything precious to me is in the glory of the holy [hab]itation. [W]ho has been accounted despicable like, yet who like me in my glory? Who is [.....] [W]ho has born[e all] afflictions like me? [Who] compares to me in [enduri]ng evil?” (4Q491 frg.11, col.1:7-9).³⁷ Although atonement is not explicitly mentioned, the thanksgiving hymn following the first recension of the exaltation hymn calls for the community to celebrate the blessings of salvation in the present moment (4QHa frg. 7, col. 2:4-7), and not in anticipation of a future time (cf. 1QHa 11:22-23).³⁸

The insertion of the ‘exaltation hymn’ into a thanksgiving hymn at the end of the scroll of Thanksgiving Hymns (*Hodayot*) indicates communal liturgical use, praising God for his blessings and memorializing the heavenly exaltation of this individual. In his discussion of attribution, John Collins makes the following observation: “In 4QH, this hymn comes at the end of the community hymns. The Self-Exaltation Hymn could be read as a capstone of the *Hodayot*, expressing the final vindication and exaltation of the persona of the other hymns”.³⁹

There is no consensus on the identity of the exalted individual in the ‘exaltation hymn’, although the text affirms he is a teacher and arguments for identifying him with the Teacher of Righteousness, the leader and founder of the ‘new covenant’

³³ Israel Knohl, ‘The Suffering Servant: from Isaiah to the Dead Sea Scrolls’, *Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination. Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*. Eds. Deborah Green and Laura Lieber, Oxford: OUP, 2009; 97.

³⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*, 272

³⁵ First version 4QHe; 4QHa frg 7; 1QHa col 26; and version 2: 4Q491 frg.11, col. 1.

³⁶ Knohl, ‘The Suffering Servant’, 96.

³⁷ Knohl, ‘The Suffering Servant’, 97.

³⁸ As noted by Knohl, *The Messiah Before Jesus*, 85.

³⁹ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010; 158.

group appear to be the most convincing.⁴⁰ Blenkinsopp concludes his investigation as follows:

“Like the Servant [*of Isaiah 40-55*], he is both teacher and prophet, his mission encounters opposition and persecution, and he inspires disciples to follow him. The rest is much less assured, but if we are hearing the Teacher’s voice in the hymns, at least those designated Teacher Hymns, and in the exaltation poem, the parallelism will be strengthened. The speaker refers frequently to himself as God’s servant, he exhibits an intense prophetic self-consciousness, he has been favored by God from the womb, and his ear has been opened to divine revelations. He is taught by God and can therefore support others by his teaching. All of this replicates what is said of the Servant of the Lord in the Isaianic *Ebedlieder*. Not least important, the pattern of abasement followed by exaltation, which is thematic in the panegyric on the Servant in Isaiah 53 and is only hinted at in scattered passages in the hymns, comes to more explicit expression in the exaltation poem”.⁴¹

There seems little doubt that the Teacher and his disciples are describing their shared experience in terms that are modelled on the Servant passages in Isaiah 40-55, and especially on the account of the suffering of the Servant in Isaiah 53. Although the atoning value of the Teacher’s suffering and death is not explicitly mentioned in these texts,⁴² we should not overlook a credible link between this liturgical composition and the admission ceremony for new members of the Essene community, in which the following assurance of atonement was given to the penitent and obedient candidates:

“For it is through a spirit of true counsel with regard to the ways of man that all his iniquities shall be wiped out so that he may look on the light of life. It is through a holy spirit uniting him to his truth that he shall be purified from all his iniquities. It is through a spirit of uprightness and humility that his sin shall be wiped out. And it is through the submission of his soul to all the statutes of God that his flesh shall be purified, by being sprinkled with waters for purification and made holy by waters for cleansing. Let him therefore, order his steps that he may walk perfectly in all the ways of God in accordance with that which he commanded at the times (when he made known) his decrees, without turning to the right or left, and without going against any one of all his commandments. Then he will be accepted through soothing atonement before God, and it will be for him a covenant of the eternal community” (1QS 3:6-12).⁴³

This promise of individual atonement is anticipated by two statements in the Community Rule (1QS) expressing a plan to establish communities that will replace the temple as a means of atonement in Israel:

“When these [*constituting a council of 15 selected members*] exist in Israel in accordance with all these rules as a foundation of the spirit of holiness in eternal truth, to make expiation for the guilt of transgression and the unfaithfulness of sin, and that the land may be accepted without the flesh of burnt-offerings and without the fat of sacrifice – and the proper offering of the lips is like a soothing (odour) of righteousness, and perfection of way like an acceptable freewill offering—at that time the men of the community shall separate themselves as a holy house for Aaron, that they may be united as a holy of holies,

⁴⁰ For the debate on this see Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 155-159.

⁴¹ Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*, 284-285; note that he calls the ‘exaltation hymn’ a ‘poem’.

⁴² Blenkinsopp makes the point that the text is ‘lacunous’ and the wording that is preserved does get close to that of Isaiah 53:3-5,11-12 (*Opening the Sealed Book*, 279).

⁴³ Translation by Michael Knibb, *The Qumran Community*, Cambridge: CUP, 1987; 90-91.

and as a house of community for Israel, for those who walk in perfection” (1QS 9:3-6; cf. 8:5-10).⁴⁴

It is clear then that, a century before the time of Jesus, there existed in Israel, amongst the Essenes, a means of atonement that was independent of the sacrificial rites of the Jerusalem temple. Since the latter passages (1QS 9:3-6; cf. 8:5-10) appear to represent a plan for the future return of the Essenes to the Land of Israel, it is fair to assume the plan concerns both of the main Essene factions (*Yachad* and *Peleg*) and all the male communities, not just those who settled at Qumran.

Returning to the Teacher’s exaltation hymn and corresponding thanksgiving hymn, it would seem reasonable to tie its composition and performance to the annual admission ceremony, and to connect, in this way, the extraordinary personal experience of the Teacher of Righteousness, both the humiliation and the exaltation, to the atonement experienced by the members, individually and collectively, and to the plan to become an atonement for the people and land of Israel. In this postulated annual liturgical recital of the ‘exaltation hymn’, the Teacher of Righteousness would be commemorated as the initiator of a continual process of atonement for his people and land, brought about by his life of humiliation, suffering, death and finally exaltation.

One is left wondering whether the ‘exaltation hymn’ was written by the Teacher before his death, or composed by a close disciple shortly afterwards.⁴⁵ Whatever the case, the Teacher is represented as the origin of a collective act of atonement through his imitation of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, in a way that was totally independent of the temple institution. The annual commemoration of the Teacher’s life, and its continual imitation by Essene members, through penitence and observation of the laws, ensured that the Teacher’s legacy of atonement was perpetuated in time and extended throughout the Land of Israel. However, there is no explicit identification of the Teacher with the role of the anointed high priest, who is to make atonement for Israel, and is one of the two Messiahs expected to arise at the end of days.⁴⁶ Whereas the Teacher was a catalyst for atonement in a period of withdrawal from the temple institution, the messianic high priest ‘of Aaron’ was expected to perform atonement for the people of Israel within the setting of a restored and purified temple.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Translation by Knibb, *Qumran Community*, 138.

⁴⁵ Cf. John Collins, who considers the ‘attractive possibility’, proposed originally by Michael Wise, that “this hymn may have been put on the teacher’s lips after his death, in celebration of his triumphant exaltation”, *The Scepter and the Star*, 158.

⁴⁶ I.e. the high priestly ‘Messiah of Aaron’ and the royal ‘Messiah of Israel’ who appear in several sectarian writings. The position taken here differs from that of Israel Knohl, who presents the figure of the Teacher as a Messiah, in his *The Messiah Before Jesus*.

⁴⁷ On page 13 of this book, *The Messiah Before Jesus*, Knohl describes the condition of the Thanksgiving Scroll when it was rediscovered: parts were folded and other parts were torn into pieces. He then asks “How are we to understand this mixture of preservation and destruction?” Our findings suggest that the cause of the dispute may have been the realization that the Teacher’s exaltation hymn, and the collection of thanksgiving hymns, had prompted a new development (catastrophic from the traditional point of view), implicit in the Parables of Enoch, that the expected Messiah will have no need of the temple institution (see the text below). The Parables of Enoch, we

Israel Knohl notes “there is nothing elsewhere in the Dead Sea Scrolls resembling the claim for divine status and superiority over the angels reflected in this [*exaltation*] hymn”,⁴⁸ although there is one notable parallel from the same period, and from a similar, though not identical, Essene setting: the heavenly exaltation of the central messianic figure in the Parables of Enoch (*1En* 37–71) corresponds closely to that of the Teacher in the exaltation hymn. In this text, however, the exalted figure is not only enthroned in heaven, above the angels, but is also identified as the Messiah Son of Man, the chosen and righteous one who will come to save the righteous and judge the wicked.

In contrast to the high priestly Messiah of Aaron who will make atonement within the temple institution, this Messiah ‘Son of Man’ has no need of a temple ‘built with human hands’ (cf. Heb 9:11-12), for in accordance with Isaiah 53 the atonement will be accomplished through his suffering, death and resurrection.⁴⁹ At precisely this point, the Parables of Enoch takes a huge step in the development of messianic ‘doctrine’—perhaps the single most important step in the preparation for a suffering Messiah—and paves way for the mission of Jesus Christ. This development not only marks the birth of the concept of a suffering Messiah, but also indicates a complete loss of confidence and hope in the restoration and purification of the temple institution at any point in the future. Basing himself on the example of the Teacher in the *Hodayot* and the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the author of the Parables of Enoch seems to have understood that the coming Messiah would not need an earthly temple in order to make atonement, for his temple is the one that surrounds the throne of God in heaven. So, to be accurate, from the date he finished writing this prophecy, around 1 BCE, the idea of a suffering, dying, and rising Messiah Son of Man was indeed known to Judaism.⁵⁰

It only remains to say that these considerations are entirely consistent with our discovery of the existence of a late second temple Essene community at Mount Arbel, in the Arbel cave village near the Sea of Galilee, where the author of the Parables of Enoch lived and where, shortly after this messianic prophecy was written, the young Jesus of Nazareth was a guest of the community.

John Ben-Daniel,
Jerusalem, 2024

propose, was written by an author in the community at Mt. Arbel, which was a rival faction of Essenes. No fragments of this prophecy have been found at Qumran, suggesting it was never accepted by that community.

⁴⁸ Knohl, ‘The Suffering Servant’, 97, who cites a similar observation by John Collins.

⁴⁹ One major reason why the author of the Parables does not need to elaborate on the suffering Servant paradigm is because it was already familiar to his community, through its representation of the life of the Teacher of Righteousness. In this context, just the mention of the titles ‘chosen and righteous one’ would be sufficient to call to mind the Servant texts in Isaiah 40-55, and especially that of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 52-53.

⁵⁰ Since new Essene members took a vow to not reveal their teachings to outsiders, it is not surprising that the Parables of Enoch had a restricted audience, and was, to begin with, not widely known outside the Essene movement.