

Essene Concepts

By Craig Paardekooper

Atonement

“And concerning what Scripture says, “In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property” (Lev 25:13)...the interpretation is that it applies to the Last Days and concerns the captives, just as Isaiah said: “To proclaim the jubilee to the captives” (Isa 61:1)...and whose teachers have been hidden and kept secret, even from the inheritance of Melchizedek, for...and they are the inheritance of Melchizedek, who will return them to what is rightfully theirs. He will proclaim to them the jubilee, thereby releasing them from the debt of all their sins. This word will thus come in the first week of the jubilee period that follows nine jubilee periods. Then the “Day of Atonement” shall follow at the end of the tenth jubilee period, when he shall atone for all the Sons of Light and the people who are predestined to Melchizedek.” (11QMelch 2:1–8)

Bergsma, John. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 20). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

This quotation shows that the Essenes believed that **in the Last Days** the people will be released from **the debt of all their sins**. This **Day of Atonement** will occur at the end of the 10th jubilee of the period in which the author is writing. The author is writing in the 500 year period from 500 B.C. till 0 B.C. This 500 year period consists of 10 jubilee periods each of 50 years, and the prophecy is **placing the date of atonement at the end of the 10th jubilee - at 0 B.C.** – at the time of the birth of Christ.

This agrees with another Essene belief that there would be an **Age of Grace** from 0 B.C. till 2000 A.D., which would succeed the Age of Torah from 2000 B.C. till 0 B.C.

See ages-of-the-world.pdf (howbad.info)

The Atonement will release people from the “debt of all their sins.” Furthermore, they will be freed not just from earthly slavery but from bondage to the Devil.

“Therefore Melchizedek will thoroughly prosecute the vengeance required by God’s statutes. In that day he will deliver them from the power of Belial, and from the power of all the spirits predestined to him.” (11QMelch 2:13)

Bergsma, John. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 21). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Son of God

A messianic prophecy found among the Scrolls and dated to the reign of Herod the Great (37 B.C.–4 B.C.), or shortly before the birth of Jesus says :

“Great will he be called and he will be designated by his name. He will be called son of God, and they will call him Son of the Most High....His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all his paths in truth. He will judge the earth in truth and all will make peace. The sword will cease from the earth, and all the provinces will pay him homage. The great God is his strength, he will wage war for him; he will place the peoples in his hand and cast them all away before him. His rule will be an eternal rule.121: ” (4Q246 9–2:9)

Bergsma, John. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 23). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Preparing the Way for the Lord

A voice cries in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

Either John identifies himself with this verse or others identify him with it in all four Gospels.

Unsurprisingly, the Qumran community also adopted this verse as central to their identity. When describing the repentant ones of Israel who founded their community, the Community Rule says:

“When such men as these come to be in Israel, conforming to these doctrines, they shall separate from the session of perverse men to go to the wilderness, there to prepare the way of truth, as it is written, “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). (1QS 8:12–14)

Bergsma, John. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 34). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Instructors should teach initiates -

“the Mysteries in this way amid the men of the Community so they can walk blamelessly together in everything that has been revealed to them. This is the time for, making ready the path to the desert, (Isaiah 40: 3) and he will teach them all the discoveries[ci] so at that time they will fulfill God’s will and refuse fellowship with those who still walk in unrighteousness.

Johnson, Ken . The New Covenant of Damascus (p. 74). Kindle Edition.

Baptism

In this passage from the 18th chapter of the Testament of Levi we see many elements of the scene where Jesus is baptized by John in the New Testament –

“6 The heavens shall be opened, And from the temple of glory shall come upon him sanctification, With the Father’s voice as from Abraham to Isaac. 7 And the glory of the Most High shall be uttered over him, And the spirit of understanding and sanctification shall rest upon him in the water.

8 For he shall give the majesty of the Lord to His sons in truth for evermore ; And there shall none succeed him for all generations for ever.” Testament of Levi, Chapter 18

- The heavens are opened
- The voice of the Father
- The descent of the spirit
- He is in the water

Holy Spirit

John claimed that he was preparing the way for one who was to come after him, who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16).

We’ve seen that the Qumran community likewise expected one or more messiahs to appear shortly, and the wicked would be judged by fire (1QS 4:13), while the righteous would be cleansed by the Holy Spirit (1QS 4:21).

For the Essenes, God’s glory was surrounded by “the fire of the great Spirit of perfect holiness” (4Q405). No other Jewish sect put such emphasis on a soon-to-come judgment and the role of the Holy Spirit.

The Qumran Scrolls emphasize the radical difference between the “Spirit of Truth,” which is essentially the same as God’s Spirit or the Holy Spirit, and the “spirit of falsehood.” The Community Rule promises that God will purify the repentant ones by the Spirit of Truth:

By His truth God shall then purify all human deeds....Like purifying waters, He shall sprinkle each with a Spirit of Truth, effectual against all the abominations of lying and sullyng by an unclean spirit. Thereby He shall give the upright insight into the knowledge of the Most High and the wisdom of the angels, making wise those following the perfect way. (1QS 4:21–23)

Bergsma, John. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 46). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Outside of the Scrolls, the term “Spirit of Truth” occurs only in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, an apocryphal work with many similarities to the Scrolls and Essene theology, and in the Gospel of John.

At the Last Supper, Jesus says:

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. (John 14:16–17; see also John 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6)

The First Letter of John contrasts this Spirit of Truth with the “spirit of falsehood” we know from Qumran:

We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1 John 4:6)

The Qumranites believed that the Holy Spirit moved through their community, making their ritual washings efficacious:

For only through the spirit pervading God’s true society can there be atonement for a man’s ways, all of his iniquities; thus only can he gaze upon the light of life and so be joined to His truth by His holy spirit, purified from all iniquity. Through an upright and humble attitude his sin may be covered, and by humbling himself before all God’s laws his flesh can be made clean. Only thus can he really receive the purifying waters and be purged by the cleansing flow. (1QS 3:6–9)

Bergsma, John. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 57). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

“Only by the Spirit’s true counsel of God can a man’s path, together with his iniquities, be atoned for so that he can see the Light of Life. By following the Holy Spirit of the Community, in truth, he is cleansed of all his iniquities. Once his spirit becomes upright and humble, his sin is atoned. When his soul accepts all the laws of God, his flesh will be cleansed by the sprinkling of cleansing waters because he is made holy by the waters of repentance. Then he will be able to perfect his walk in the ordinances of God, as He had decreed, concerning the appointed times of his assemblies and not turn aside to the right or to the left, nor twist even one of His ways. This is the true atonement that is pleasing to God by which he enters the covenant of the everlasting Community.”

Signs of the Messiah

[the hea]vens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones.

Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourselves in His service!

All you hopeful in (your) heart, will you not find the Lord in this?

For the Lord will consider the pious (hasidim) and call the righteous by name.

Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power.

And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom.

He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent]

And f[or] ever I will cleav[ve to the h]opeful and in His mercy . . .

And the fr[uit . . .] will not be delayed for anyone.

*And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as [He . . .]
For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor
. . . He will lead the uprooted and knowledge . . . and smoke (?)*

Messianic Apocalypse 4Q521

This text was published in *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 1992 titled [The Messiah at Qumran.](#)

[A Cosmic Messiah Who "Makes Live the Dead" Among the Dead Sea Scrolls Fragments \(4Q521\) – TaborBlog \(jamestabor.com\)](#)

- First, the text speaks of a single Messiah figure who will rule heaven and earth.
- Second, it mentions in the clearest language the expectation of the resurrection of the dead during the time of this Messiah.
- Third, it contains an exact verbal parallel with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke for identifying of the signs of the Messiah.

Line 11 of this text also contains another highly striking feature. Indeed, it appears to be the closest and most direct linguistic parallel to a New Testament text that we have yet discovered. The line reads:

*For he will heal the wounded, resurrect the dead,
and proclaim glad tidings to the poor.*

In both Matthew and Luke we read of a deputation that John the Baptist sends to Jesus while John is imprisoned. John's disciples ask Jesus, "Are you the coming one, or do we look for another?" The story is thus tightly framed around the question of *messianic identity*: what will the signs of the true Messiah be? Jesus answers:

*Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, **the dead are raised up, the poor have the glad tidings preached to them** (Luke 7:22-23 and Matthew 11:4-5).*

The phrase at the end of line 11, about "proclaiming glad tidings to the poor" is a direct quotation from Isaiah 61:1, which tells of an "anointed one" (i.e., messiah) who will work various signs before the Day of the Lord. This passage is quite important in the Gospel of Luke. In fact, he highlights it as the inauguration of the Messianic mission of Jesus. According to Luke, it is this very verse from Isaiah which Jesus reads and claims to fulfil in his home town synagogue of Nazareth.

However, what is most noteworthy is that Isaiah 61:1 says nothing about this Anointed One raising the dead. Indeed, in the entire Hebrew Bible there is nothing about a messiah figure raising the dead. Yet, when we turn to Luke and Matthew quote, regarding the "signs of the Messiah," we find the two phrases linked: "the dead are raised up, the poor have the glad tidings preached to them," precisely as we have in our Qumran text. Luke makes more than passing use of this notion of the "resurrection of the dead" as a sign of the age of the Messiah. In the two places he quotes Isaiah 61:1 he also mentions specific cases of resurrection of the dead: as Elijah once raised the son of the widow, Jesus now raises the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 4:26; 7:11-17). This is hardly accidental, as the close juxtaposition of the texts makes clear.

It is also significant that this section is dealing with traditions shared between the community of John the Baptist and that of the early followers of Jesus.

The text provides a most direct and significant example of a common messianic hope among the followers of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Teacher of Righteousness.

Death of the Messiah and Judgement

More and more Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah. This made the ruling class (Pharisees and Sadducees) angry, and they plotted the Messiah's death. They had Jesus arrested, tried, and convicted at night because this would not have been possible during the day. We see in Acts 2 that Peter preached the Gospel and 3,000 believed. Acts 6: 7 states the vast majority of the priests accepted the Messiah. Knowing their doctrine, we can see that these would be mainly

Zadok priests (Essenes).The Testament of Levi declares that at the end of this age the priesthood will transgress against the Savior of the world, and suffer consequences –

*2 And behold, I am clear from your ungodliness and transgression, which ye shall commit in the end of the ages against the Saviour of the world, Christ, acting godlessly, deceiving Israel, and stirring up against it great evils from the Lord. 3 And ye shall deal lawlessly together with Israel, so He shall not bear with Jerusalem because of your wickedness; but **the veil of the temple shall be rent**, so as not to cover your shame. 4 And ye shall be **scattered as captives among the Gentiles**, and shall be for a reproach and for a curse there.*

Testament of Levi, Chapter 10

1 Therefore, my children, I have learnt that at the end of the ages ye will transgress against the Lord, stretching out hands to wickedness against Him; and to all the Gentiles shall ye become a scorn. 2 For our father Israel is pure from the transgressions of the chief priests who shall lay their hands upon the Saviour of the world. 3 For as the heaven is purer in the Lord's sight than the earth, so also be ye, the lights of Israel, (purer) than all the Gentiles. 4 But if ye be darkened through transgressions, what, therefore, will all the Gentiles do living in blindness

Testament of Levi, Chapter 14

*1 Therefore **the temple, which the Lord shall choose, shall be laid waste** through your uncleanness, and ye shall be captives throughout all nations.*

Testament of Levi, Chapter 15

- “stretching out the hand of wickedness against Him
- the veil of the temple will be rent,
- they will be scattered amongst the Gentiles.
- The temple shall be laid waste

In the Zadokite Work we read that the Teacher was raised up to lead the sect and " to make known to the last generations what He (i.e. God) would do to the last generation, the congregation of the evildoers ". So the purpose of the Teacher of Righteousness was to assure the people of the coming retribution , and to warn people to repent. God was passing a final judgement upon that generation.

Forty Years

The Essene prophecies stated there would be a 40-year period between the start of the Age of Grace and the destruction of the ruling class in Israel and that this would include the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

And from the day when the Unique [only begotten] Teacher dies, to the destruction of all the warriors who followed the Liar, will be about forty years. (Damascus Document 14)

This 40-year period would be a time of “repentance and revival.” Many Pharisees, Sadducees, and common people came to faith during that time. But there were also many intense persecutions by those in positions of power. In AD 70, as predicted, the Jerusalem temple was besieged and destroyed. Three years later, Titus came to Egypt and ordered the shutdown of the Essene temple. The Essenes looked at this as a fulfillment of prophecy and willingly shut down their temple. [Johnson, Ken . The New Covenant of Damascus \(pp. 15-16\). Kindle Edition.](#)

Great Commission to the Gentiles

During the 40-year period (after the resurrection), the apostle Paul had his conversion experience. He realized the Essene order was the only group who truly understood and accepted the Messiah. They were called the “Way of the Ancients” or the “Way of the Fathers,” but most of the time, they were simply called “the Way.” Everyone knew what

the Essenes/ Christians believed. In Antioch, the followers of the Way first became known as Christians (Acts 11: 26). Paul stated it this way:

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." (Acts 24: 14 NKJV)

"However I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect." (Acts 24: 14 NIV)

The apostle Paul was prophesied to rise up and write a series of epistles (Pauline epistles) containing all the answers. It would be placed in the New Covenant canon. It would even contain a history of his life (Acts).

"One will rise up from my seed in the latter times... enlightening with new knowledge all the Gentiles... giving it to the synagogue of the Gentiles. Until the consummation of the ages, he will be in the synagogues of the Gentiles... and he will be inscribed in the holy books, both his work and his word, and he will be a chosen one of God forever." (Testament of Benjamin 11)

Summary

Central concepts of the Essene beliefs are -

- Messiah
- Son of God
- Age of Grace
- Atoning sacrifice
- Baptism
- Holy Spirit
- Signs of the Messiah
- Death of the Messiah
- Judgement on Jerusalem
- Forty years (Sign of Jonah)

These concepts are far more frequent in Essene literature than in other Judaic literature such as preserved in the Old Testament . It is therefore the case that Christianity has a close affinity with the Essene literature .

- The Essenes saw their purpose as to prepare the way for the Messiah.
- The Messiah would bring atonement for sins
- The Messiah would be Son of God.
- When the Messiah was baptized, the heavens would open, and a loud voice would speak, and the spirit would descend upon him.
- Believers are cleansed by water and by the Holy Spirit.
- The Messiah will heal the sick, raise the dead and preach good news to the poor
- The Priesthood of the Temple will "stretching out the hand of wickedness against Him.
- As a consequence the veil of the temple will be rent, they will be scattered amongst the Gentiles. And the temple shall be laid waste

Conclusion

390 years after the destruction of the first Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, there was a purported visitation from God, and the Essene community was founded. The Essenes believed they were given a special commission – to prepare the way for the Lord. They were warned to depart from Israel and go to Egypt, and remain there until the Romans took control of Judea. This was so they could avoid the tribulations imposed by the Seleucids.

On their return to Israel, they prepared the way for the Lord by making a people ready for Him – ethically, spiritually and conceptually. They were given guidance on how to live, and very specific prophecies about the coming Messiah. Preparing the way for the Lord meant creating a bridge between the Old Covenant culture and the New – their prophecies created an expectation, so the people would accept Jesus when He arrived.

So when the Messiah appeared, many followers of the Essenes became followers of the Messiah – the followers of John the Baptist became followers of Jesus.

“A voice of one calling : ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, and every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level , and the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 40 : 3-5

Simultaneously, the Romans created a vast network of straight roads across the wilderness. Straight roads meant that valleys had to be filled, mountains levelled and bridges built. And it would be along these straight highways that the gospels would spread throughout the Roman Empire.

Note :

Jesus says that John the Baptist is Elijah – and John’s appearance seems to match that of Elijah. In the Old Testament Elijah was head of a school of prophets.

Church father Hippolytus recorded the list of the ones who headed the school of the prophets. It runs down to Zachariah, then a man named Joseph, then Caiaphas tried to buy the title. No one of the Zadok order recognized Caiaphas’s authority, and since Joseph died childless, the rightful head fell back to Zachariah who was dead by that time. So, the headship of the order fell to Zachariah’s son, John the Baptist.

Johnson, Ken . The New Covenant of Damascus (p. 15). Kindle Edition.