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## The Dead Sea Scrolls and Preterism

*Kurt Simmons*

In this article, we look at the Dead Sea Scrolls and find that they are essentially preterist, in that their authors held many of the same end-time beliefs, involving the same actors and events, and looked for their fulfillment in the same time-frame as Preterists today.

### **What are the Dead Sea Scrolls?**

The term “Dead Sea Scrolls” describes a collection of texts found in eleven caves near Qumran in the northwest area of the Dead Sea. This group of texts represents approximately 800 original documents, dating from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 70. A small portion of the texts may possibly date back to the third century. However, the bulk of the texts date to the first century

B.C., *i.e.*, the late Hasmonean or early Herodian era.<sup>1</sup>

“Dead Sea Scrolls” is also sometimes used to describe a larger body of texts, which are of a separate provenance than the Qumran caves, including texts found at Masada and in ten caves used by refugees of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (A.D. 132-135). Texts from the Bar Kokhba refuge caves, which were excavated in 1960-61, include letters to and from Simon Bar Kokhba, the leader of the revolt, and various military, legal, administrative, and personal and financial

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<sup>1</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1962, Penguin Press), pp. 12-14

records, as well as religious and Biblical texts, including a scroll of the Twelve Minor Prophets. Excavations at Masada (1963-65) produced fragments of seven Biblical texts, including Genesis, two copies of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and two copies of the Psalms. Biblical texts from Masada and the Bar Kokhba refuge caves match the traditional Masoretic text, which serves as the basis of modern Hebrew Bibles. Prior to their discovery, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts in our possession were the Aleppo Codex (circa A.D. 920) and the Leningrad Codex (circa A.D. 1008), both traditional, Masoretic texts. The discoveries at Masada and the Bar Kokhba caves therefore authenticate the text of modern Hebrew Bibles, pushing back the date of manuscript witness one thousand years to New Testament times. This is by far the most important contribution the Scrolls have made. But there are other things we can learn from the Scrolls as well.

### **The Qumran Scrolls & Community**

The scrolls at Qumran were discovered in 1947 by a young Bedouin shepherd. By 1949 officials of the Jordanian government had identified the cave where the scrolls were found. Hundreds of fragments and seven more scrolls were recovered. Between 1951 and 1956, ten more caves were discovered, which yielded thousands and thousands of fragments and several additional scrolls. The texts recovered represented three types of material: 1) books from the Old Testament canon; 2) various Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical works; and 3) sectarian texts reflecting the traditions and dogma of the sectaries of Qumran. Ruins of the settlement known as Khirbet Qumran in the vicinity of the caves were also excavated, and the view quickly came to prevail that the caves and site at Qumran were interconnected.

Preliminary studies concluded that the scrolls were produced or belonged to the ascetic sect known as the Essenes, mentioned by Josephus, Philo, and Pliny the Elder. In the years following, this thesis was developed at length, and now represents the generally accepted view of scholars and archaeologists. Three points of contact support this conclusion: 1) the scroll known as the "Community Rule," which regulated the religious life of the community in conjunction with the Old Testament, describes a monastic community where men lived in celibacy and all property was held in common.

This accords with descriptions of the Essenes left by Josephus, Philo, and Pliny. 2) The location of Qumran conforms with Pliny's description of the Essene community, which he placed between Jericho and Engaddi:<sup>2</sup>

*"Lying on the west of Asphaltites [viz., the Dead Sea], and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Esseni, a people that live apart from the world, and marvellous beyond all others throughout the whole earth, for they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others. Below this people was formerly the town of Engadda, second only to Hierosolyma [Jerusalem] in the fertility of its soil and its groves of palm-trees; now, like it, it is another heap of ashes. Next to it we come to Masada, a fortress on a rock, not far from Lake Asphaltites. Thus much concerning Judæa."*  
*Natural History Book 5, chapter 17*

3) Finally, chronological events alluded to in the Qumran writings correspond with Jewish history and the first mention of the Essenes by Josephus.

### **Probable Origin of the Essenes: Judas Maccabeus and the Hassidim**

The Essenes are first mentioned by Josephus during the inter-testamental period, in the time of the kingdom of the Greeks. Alexander the Great conquered Palestine in 332 B.C. Following Alexander's death in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his generals, and Judea came under the dominion of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, seated in Egypt. Although required to pay taxes, the Jews enjoyed considerable autonomy and continued to be ruled by the High Priest and Sanhedrin. A large population of Jews also lived in Alexandria, Egypt, where they enjoyed equal rights as citizens and were allowed to observe

<sup>2</sup>Engaddi was pillaged and burned by the *Sicarii* in excursions from Masada during the war with Rome. Josephus, *Wars*, 4.7.2

their religion without fear or molestation. It was during Ptolemaic control of Palestine that the Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint was completed under Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.). Even so, Greek domination of Palestine brought significant demographic changes; the Greek cities of Gaza, Askelon, Joppa, Sycothopolis, Ptolemais, were founded or grew up; Samaria was given the Hellenized name Sabaste; and the Transjordan city of Rabath-Ammon was re-founded as Philadelphia. Judea was therefore surrounded by Greek culture and civilization.

In 200 B.C., the Seleucid Dynasty, seated in Syria, was able to wrest control of the Holy Land from the Ptolemeys. As part of a program to solidify control of his kingdom, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (171-164 B.C.) undertook a formal Hellenizing program; local peoples were required to abandon their ancestral gods and to worship Olympian Zeus.<sup>3</sup> Antiochus' Hellenization campaign was met with enthusiasm by the Jew's ruling elite, including the High Priest Jason, and two of his successors, who abandoned the law, and adopted various facets of Greeks culture; some going even so far as to surgically reverse the circumcision of their genitals so they could exercise naked in the gymnasium in the manner of the Greeks. To eradicate all vestiges of Judaism, Antiochus caused the temple in Jerusalem to be polluted with swine's blood and a statue of Olympian Zeus erected. Keeping the law of Moses was made a capital offense; women who circumcised their sons were crucified with their children hung about their necks. At length, armed resistance broke out; a revolt was instigated by a priest named Matthias, whose son, Judas Maccabeus, against all expectation, defeated Antiochus, gained autonomy for Judea, and purified and rededicated the temple. Judas was helped in his revolt by a group known as the Assideans or Hassidim:

*"Then came there unto him a company of Assideans, who were mighty men of Israel, even all such as were voluntarily devoted to the law" (I Macc. 2:42).*

It is believed that the Hassidim were the immediate forerunners of the Essenes.

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<sup>3</sup> I Macc. 1:41, 42

### **Essenes Resistance to Usurpation of the Zadokite Priesthood**

Writings from Qumran indicate the sect was eventually forced to sojourn in Damascus and withdraw into the desert due to a conflict with the politico-religious leadership of mainstream Judaism. Scholars interpret this, at least in part, to opposition by Essenes and traditionalist Jews to the usurpation of the High Priesthood by non-Zadokite priests.

The High Priesthood had been held exclusively by descendants of Zadok from the time of Solomon, who thrust Abiathar from the priesthood (I Kng. 2:26, 27; cf. 1:1-40) in fulfillment of a prophecy by God against the house of Eli (I Sam. 2:31-35). The High Priesthood passed from the sons of Zadok during the Hellenizing campaign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. However, after Judas Maccabaeus had defeated Antiochus and restored the temple, the priesthood was not returned to the sons of Zadok. Rather, following the death of Judas Maccabaeus, the High Priesthood was assumed by his brother, Jonathan Maccabaeus. Jonathan received the High Priesthood from Alexander Balas, a usurper of the Seleucid throne, who offered it to Jonathan to secure his support and alliance.<sup>4</sup> It is during the time of Jonathan Maccabaeus that Josephus first mentions the existence of the Essenes by name.<sup>5</sup> The Essenes saw the priesthood and temple services as corrupted, and therefore did not sacrifice there, but looked for the restoration of the priesthood to the sons of Zadok by the coming of the Messiah:

*"The Master shall bless the sons of Zadok the Priests, whom God has chosen to confirm his Covenant for ever, and to inquire into all His precepts in the midst of His people, and to instruct them as He commanded; who have established His Covenant on truth and watched over all His laws with righteousness and walked according to the way of His choice. May the Lord bless you from His holy Abode; may He set you as a splendid jewel in the midst of the congregation of the saints! May he renew for you the Covenant of the everlasting priesthood; may He sanctify you for the House of Holiness!"<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.2.1-3

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 13.5.9

<sup>6</sup> *Blessings* (IQSb=IQ28b), Vermes, p. 375

Other theories regarding the identity of the community at Qumran have been floated, but have not gained serious attention. Before looking at the beliefs and eschatology of the Essenes, we'll take a few moments to survey the scrolls and manuscripts found at Qumran, beginning with the Hebrew canon.

### Qumran and the Old Testament Canon

Josephus states concerning the Hebrew canon:

*“For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greek texts have,] but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life.”<sup>7</sup>*

The twenty-two books of the Hebrew canon mentioned by Josephus are the same as our thirty-nine; however, the Jews arranged and divided the books differently to match the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The typical arrangement of the Hebrew canon was a three-fold division of the “law,” the “prophets,” and the “writings.” However, the exact arrangement and division was not settled. Some lists join Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah; some separate these books, but combine I and II Samuel and I and II Kings as a single book of “the kingdoms;” some include Job and Esther among the “writings,” etc. Given this fluidity, the arrangement and division as conceived by Josephus cannot be known for certain, but the following seems reasonably likely:

### Twenty-two Books of Hebrew Canon

Books of Moses (five books)	Former & Latter Prophets (thirteen books)	Hymns & Wisdom (four books)
1. Genesis	6. Joshua	19. Job
2. Exodus	7. Judges	20. Psalms
3. Leviticus	8. Ruth	21. Proverbs/ Ecclesiastes
4. Numbers	9. I & II Samuel / I & II Kings	22. Song of Songs
5. Deuteronomy	10. I & II Chronicles	
	11. Ezra	
	12. Nehemiah	
	13. Esther	
	14. Isaiah	
	15. Jeremiah/ Lamentations	
	16. Ezekiel	
	17. Daniel	
	18. The Twelve	
	a. Hosea	
	b. Joel	
	c. Amos	
	d. Obadiah	
	e. Jonah	
	f. Micah	
	g. Nahum	
	h. Habakkuk	
	i. Zephaniah	
	j. Haggai	
	k. Zechariah	
	l. Malachi	

Fragments of all canonical books were found at Qumran, except the book of Esther. Like Masada and the Bar Kokhba caves, Masoretic-type texts were found at Qumran. However, unlike Masada and the Bar Kokhba caves where *only* Masoretic-type texts were found, the caves at Qumran also produced other text types. Manuscript types or

<sup>7</sup> *Against Apion, 1.8; Whiston ed.*

families are defined by the variant readings that occur over time by the error or omission of copyists. An error made by a scribe is copied and perpetuated by those coming after him, giving birth to a manuscript family. Text-types found at Qumran include the Hebrew underlying the Septuagint (an Egyptian text-type), and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and combinations of these and others. For an account of the variant readings discovered at Qumran and possible emendations vis-à-vis the Masoretic-text, see F.F. Bruce, *Qumran and the Old Testament*, Faith and Thought 91.1 (Summer 1959), pp. 9-27.

### **Qumran and the Apocrypha**

Two Apocrypha were found at Qumran: Tobit and Ecclesiasticus (The Wisdom of Ben Sira), though some add the Epistle of Jeremiah.<sup>8</sup> The Apocrypha refer to a collection of books, which are part of the Septuagint. The books of the Apocrypha are: I Esdras, Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah, additions to Daniel (Song of the Three Children, Susanna (Daniel 13), Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14)), I-IV Maccabees, and the Prayer of Manasseh.

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures commissioned or completed by Ptolemy Philadelphus about 250 B.C. The books of the Apocrypha are considered non-canonical by the Jews; prophetic utterance terminated under the dominion of the Persians, and did not resume until the time of the Romans. The books of the Apocrypha were written in the time of the Greeks. Philo Judeaus, an Alexandrian Jew who lived in the first century A.D., never cites them, nor does any New Testament writer. Josephus consulted I Esdras and I Maccabees in composing his histories, but did not consider them canonical. Concerning the Apocrypha, Josephus states:

*“It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes, very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time.”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Vermes, 17; Craig Evans, Peter W. Flint, *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eerdmans, 1997), 5

<sup>9</sup> *Against Apion*, 1.8; Whiston ed.

Artaxerxes Longimanus reigned 465-424 B.C. The book of Malachi was written circa 444-430 B.C. Following Malachi, there were approximately 430 years of prophetic silence, broken only by the birth of Christ and John the Baptist, whose coming Malachi said would precede the nation's destruction in the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-5). The day of the Lord would be both a time of salvation and a time of wrath and judgment. The Lord would save his people from their oppressors and persecutors, and destroy his adversaries, including especially the Jews, who would be made a stool for his feet (Ps. 2:8, 9; 110:1):

*“For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leaven them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.”* Mal. 4:1-3

Other scripture and prophets specifically mentioning the destruction of Jerusalem, which corresponded with the coming of the Messiah, include Moses (Deut. 31, 32), Isaiah (Isa. 66:1-6, 15; cf. Acts 7:49), Joel (Joel 2:1-10; cf. Acts 2:17-21, 40; Rev. 9), and Zechariah (Zech. 14:1-3). The 430 years of prophetic silence following Malachi was not unfelt by the Jews, and many spurious compositions of feigned visions and revelations were produced and have come down to us in the form of Pseudepigrapha.

### **Qumran and Pseudepigrapha**

The term pseudepigrapha means “falsely ascribed;” it is used to describe the body of writings produced during the inter-testamental period, between Malachi and the gospels, which are falsely attributed to a prophet or other Biblical figure. With the exception of historical books like Maccabees, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are essentially identical, distinguished only by the former's inclusion in the Septuagint. Pseudepigrapha imitate the tone and imagery of the prophets, particularly Daniel and Ezekiel, and often contain revelations of the future salvation of Israel and the judgment of the wicked by the Messiah. Titles of the

Pseudepigrapha include the Book of Enoch, Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses, the Ascension and Vision of Isaiah, the Story of Asenath (Joseph's wife), the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and many others. A large percentage of the material discovered at Qumran may be characterized as apocryphal and pseudepigraphic. These include:

- Apocalypse Chronology
- Conquest of Egypt and Jerusalem or Acts of a Greek King
- The Triumph of the Righteous or Mysteries
- A Messianic Apocalypse
- Jubilees
- The Prayer of Enosh or Enoch
- The Book of Enoch
- An Admonition Associated with the Flood
- The Ages of Creation
- The Book of Noah
- Words of the Archangel Michael
- The Testament of Levi
- Testaments of the Patriarchs
- The Testament of Qahat
- The Testament of Amram
- The Words of Moses
- Sermon on the Exodus and Conquest of Canan
- A Moses Apocryphon
- Pseudo-Moses
- A Moses (or David) Apocryphon
- Divine Plan for the Conquest of the Holy Land
- A Joshua Apocryphon
- The Samuel Apocryphon
- A Paraphrase on Kings
- An Elisha Apocryphon
- A Zedekiah Apocryphon
- A Historico-theological Narrative based on Genesis and Exodus
- Tobit
- A Jeremiah Apocryphon
- The New Jerusalem
- Second Ezekiel
- The Prayer of Nabonidus
- Para-Daniel Writings

- The Four Kingdoms
- An Aramaic Apocalypse
- Proto-Esther
- Apocryphal Psalms

In addition to these are works not strictly of an apocryphal or pseudepigraphic nature, but which nevertheless purport to be immediate divine revelations. These include:

- The War Scroll
- The Rule of War
- The Temple Scroll

### **Visions of the End: Essenes Probable Authors of Pseudepigrapha**

Most of the texts above are fragmentary, but the sheer amount of prophetic-apocryphal-pseudepigraphical material convinces us that the Essenes took these documents very seriously, and probably received them as canonical or divinely authoritative.<sup>10</sup> For example, the Damascus Document, which gives the history of the sect and sets forth many of its basic beliefs, makes explicit reference to the book of Jubilees, indicating that it was held in high estimation.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it seems likely that the Qumran sectaries were responsible for generating many, if not most, of the Pseudepigrapha themselves.

Almost all apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts date to the time the Essenes began about 200 B.C.<sup>12</sup> Apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works hold themselves out as prophetic visions and revelations. It was expressly foretold that the prophetic silence, which followed Malachi, would terminate in preparation of the Messiah. God would send "Elijah the prophet" before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Joel prophesied that the nation's "sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). Messiah himself would be a Prophet, a second Moses (Deut. 18:15-18). Belief that they were living in the end times therefore required that the Essenes possess the prophetic spirit

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<sup>10</sup> Vermes believes that the Essenes' notion of the Hebrew canon was hazy and open-ended. Vermes, p. 16

<sup>11</sup> *Damascus Document* X.10, XVI.5; Vermes, pp. 137, 139

<sup>12</sup> Vermes, p. 13

among their members. It is a matter of record that the Essenes were interested in prophecy and claimed the power to prophesy. Three of the four Essenes mentioned by name by Josephus were associated with prophecy.<sup>13</sup> Regarding Essenes and prophecy, Josephus states:

*“There are those also among them who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets; and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.”*<sup>14</sup>

The situation was therefore roughly analogous to the era of the Crusades, Joachim of Fiore, and the Franciscans, when men’s eschatological expectations whipped them into ecstatic states, producing a variety of new visions and revelations about the end. Finally, Some of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts espouse doctrines indicative of the Essenes: Mainstream Judaism used a lunar calendar of 354 days to the year; the Essenes used a solar calendar of 364 days. The Book of Enoch, Jubilees, an Apocryphal Psalm, the Temple Scroll, and various other works recovered at Qumran, including the Genesis Commentaries, assume a solar calendar.

### **The New Covenant and the Essenes**

God’s relationship with his people has always been defined by covenant. God had covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through Moses, God instituted the Old Covenant at Sinai; God pledged to bless and to protect the children of Israel, and to give them the land in Canaan, if they would obey his law. This covenant was renewed by circumcision under Joshua after entering the land (Jos. 5:2-9), then again by oath shortly before Joshua’s death (Jos. 24:25). However, after the death of Joshua, Israel’s history was one of continuous unfaithfulness and apostasy. God answered the Jews faithlessness by delivering the Israelites into the hands of their enemies, redeeming and receiving them again when they turned to him in repentance. Under the kings, the situation differed little, and the nation continued to rebel against God and his law. God thus carried the northern kingdom into captivity by the Assyrians

<sup>13</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.11.2; 15.10.5; 17.13.3

<sup>14</sup> *Wars*, 2.8.12

and the southern kingdom into Chaldea by the Babylonians. However, for the sake of his remnant and his promise to redeem the world, God revived the nation and restored the captivity to Palestine so Christ could come into the world and die upon Roman cross. Then, the nation would be destroyed entirely forever.

The weakness of the Old Testament lay in its nationalism: men were inducted into the covenant community by birth and circumcision at eight days of age, not by the mature choice and conversion of individuals indicative of the New Testament. Thus, on the eve of carrying away the Jewish nation into captivity in Babylon, God foretold the time when he would institute a New Covenant, based upon inward conversion of the individual members. The Essenes saw the realization of this New Covenant in themselves:

*“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah...this shall be the covenant I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jer. 31:31-34*

Jeremiah’s promised New Testament was eschatological: “After those days” equals “the latter days” (cf. Jer. 48:47; 49:6, 39; Joel 2:28). According to the book of Daniel, the “end of days” appears to have begun with the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Daniel said the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes would be at the “time of the end” (Dan. 8:17), “in the last end of the indignation” (Dan. 8:19), “in the latter time” of the Jew’s kingdom “when the transgressors are come to the full” (Dan. 8:23). From the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes until the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus was about 240 years. Thus, when Daniel refers to the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes as the “time of the end,” it is clear that this merely marks the beginning of the end, when the shadows of the Jewish nation began to lengthen in anticipation of its sun set and perpetual night. The latter days would not fully arrive until the appearance of John the Baptist. However, we have the benefit of hindsight, which the Essenes did not. The sect of the Essenes began during the revolt of Judas Maccabeus against Antiochus Epiphanes, and it is under Jonathan Maccabeus, who succeeded Judas, that they are first reported

by name. It would therefore have been natural for the Essenes to see themselves as living in the “last days” and therefore putative heirs of the New Covenant.

### Strictures of the Essene New Covenant

Unlike the New Testament and gospel of Jesus Christ where there is a complete break with the rituals of the Mosaic law and an end of the temple, priesthood, feasts and sacrifices, which were types and shadows pointing to the cross of Christ (Col. 2:16, 17; Heb. 10:1), the Essenes conceived of the New Testament as a continuation of the Law of Moses, purified of error and supplemented with various additions and improvements. In a word, the Essenes shared many of the same misconceptions of their fellow Jews about the law, failing to see the provisional nature of national Israel and its institutions. Some of the more prominent identifying features of the New Testament according to the Essenes include:

- **A Solar Calendar** – Under the Mosaic law, the Jews used a lunar calendar where the beginning of the month corresponded with the new moon (Cf. Num. 10:10; Ps. 81:3). However the Essenes used a solar calendar, with the result their feasts would not have corresponded with those of mainstream Judaism, since they were regulated by different monthly cycles. For example, for mainstream Judaism, Passover occurred at the full moon on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month (Ex. 12:1, 3, 6). But with the Essenes, Passover would have occurred the fourteenth day of the calendar month irrespective of the phase of the moon. Moreover, sacrifices and feasts associated with the first day of the month and the new moon, which occurred simultaneously under the law of Moses (I Sam. 20:5, 6, 29; II Kng. 4:23; Amos 8:5), occurred separately with the Essenes, and therefore required an additional burnt offering: *“On the first day of each month you shall offer a holocaust to YHWH...additional to the burnt offering for the new moon.”*

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*“On the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sacred rest, announced by trumpet blast, a holy gathering. You shall offer a holocaust...in addition to the perpetual holocaust and the holocaust of the new moon.”<sup>15</sup>*

- **Pentecontad Calendar** – The liturgical calendar of the Essenes, as witnessed by the Temple Scroll, divided the year into seven fifty-day periods, marked by agricultural feasts. The Mosaic law enjoined the Jews to keep the feast of Pentecost on the fiftieth day numbered from the offering of the wave sheaf of the barley harvest on “morrow after the Sabbath” following Passover (Lev. 23:9-21). The “sheaf of the firstfruits” represented the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week following Passover. Fifty days later, the Holy Ghost fell upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5), marking the beginning of the harvest of souls into the kingdom of God by obedience to the gospel of Christ. In addition to the feast of the Wave Sheaf (barley harvest) and Pentecost (wheat harvest), the Essenes had a festival of New Wine (grape harvest), and New Oil (olive harvest).
- **Zadokite Priesthood and Rededicated Temple** – During the period remaining until the new age associated with the Messiah, the Essenes rejected the validity of the Jerusalem temple and sacrifices, and considered it desecrated by the non-Zadokite priesthood and various profanations: For example, we read:

*“During all those years Belial shall be unleashed against Israel, as He spoke by the hand of Isaiah, son of Amoz, saying, ‘Terror and the pit and snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the land’ [Isa. 14:7]. Interpreted, these are the three nets of Belial with which Levi son of Jacob said that he catches Israel by setting them up as three kinds of righteousness. The first is fornication, the second is riches, and the third is profanation of the Temple. Whoever*

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<sup>15</sup> Temple Scroll (11 QT=11Q19, 20, 4Q36a), Vermes, pp. 193, 198

*escapes the first is caught in the second, and whoever saves himself from the second is caught in the third [Isa. 24:18]...[They] shall be caught in fornication twice by taking a second wife while the first is alive...Moreover, they profane the Temple because they do not observe the distinction between clean and unclean in accordance with the Law, but lie with a woman who sees her blood discharge. And each man marries the daughter of his brother or sister.”<sup>16</sup>*

Thus, until the new age, the Essenes saw their covenant community as the true temple and the member’s lives and prayers took the places of usual sacrifices. For example, there were two ritual times of prayer, which were intended to take the place of the morning and evening sacrifice.<sup>17</sup> In the new age, all the errors of mainstream Judaism would be set right and acceptable service in the temple would resume.

- **Baptism and Communal Meal** – Josephus reports that the Essenes practiced ritual ablutions (immersions) twice daily before the sect’s common meals. Baptism (immersion) was also practiced as part of the initiation rite into the community. The fact Josephus mentions baptism as a rite of initiation indicates it was peculiar to the sect and not practiced by mainstream Judaism vis-à-vis proselytes as is sometimes alleged.<sup>18</sup>

### The Essenes as the Last Remnant

The Essenes believed that the history of God’s people and covenant was marked by stubbornness, rebellion, and apostasy. The “Heavenly Watchers” sinned by marrying women; their sons, the giants, sinned, bringing on the flood. The children of Noah sinned, as did the children of Jacob in Egypt. The first generation of those that came out of Egypt sinned in refusing to enter the land and so perished in the wilderness. After the children of Israel entered the land, from the death of Eleazar

and Joshua, until Zadok, knowledge of the law was sealed. Because they did not know the law, even David committed fornication by taking more than one wife:

*“Concerning the prince it is written, He shall not multiply wives to himself (Deut. 17:17); but David had not read the sealed book of the Law which was in the ark (of the Covenant), for it was not opened in Israel from the death of Eleazar and Joshua, and the elders who worshipped Ashtoreth. It was hidden and was not revealed until the coming of Zadok.”<sup>19</sup>*

Because of Israel’s wilfulness and rebellion, the nation went into captivity in Babylon; however God preserved a remnant:

*“For when they were unfaithful and forsook Him, He hid His face from Israel and His Sanctuary and delivered them up to the sword. But remembering the Covenant of the forefathers, He left a remnant to Israel and did not deliver it up to be destroyed. And in the age of wrath, three hundred and ninety years [circa 196 B.C.] after He had given them into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, He visited them, and He caused a plant root to spring from Israel and Aaron to inherit His Land and to prosper on the good things of His earth.”<sup>20</sup>*

For the first twenty years of its existence, the remnant groped about, then God raised up a leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, to direct them:

*“And they perceived their iniquity and recognized that they were guilty men, yet for twenty years they were like blind men groping for the way. And God observed their deeds, that they sought Him with a whole heart, and He raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart”<sup>21</sup>*

God made a New Covenant with this remnant. The Essenes believed their rules of community life and interpretation of the law, which was revealed through the Teacher of Righteousness

<sup>16</sup> Damascus Document (CD 4Q265-73, 5Q12, 6Q15), IV.10-20; V.1-5; Vermes, p. 130, 131

<sup>17</sup> Ibid,

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, Wars, 2.8.7

<sup>19</sup> Damascus Document (CD 4Q265-73, 5Q12, 6Q15), V.5; Vermes, p. 130

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, I.5; Vermes, p. 127

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, I.10, Vermes, p. 127

when the sect went into exile in Damascus, constituted Jeremiah's "new covenant":

*"None of those brought into the Covenant shall enter the Temple to light His altar in vain...They shall take care to act according to the exact interpretation of the Law during the age of wickedness. They shall separate from the sons of the Pit, and shall keep away from the unclean riches of wickedness acquired by vow or anathema or from the Temple treasure; they shall not rob the poor of His people, to make of widows their prey and of the fatherless their victim. They shall distinguish between clean and unclean, and shall proclaim the difference between holy and profane. They shall keep the Sabbath day according to its exact interpretation, and the feasts and day of Fasting according to the finding of the members of the New Covenant in the land of Damascus."<sup>22</sup>*

The "age of wickedness" refers to the time remaining until the great eschatological crisis, when God would defeat the "sons of the Pit," viz., mainstream Jews who rejected the New Covenant according to Essenism. The Essenes, like Jesus, Stephen, and the apostles, thus saw that the "end" entailed the destruction of God's enemies among the Jews. It was for this reason, and because of the corruption of the priesthood and temple service, that they were charged not to sacrifice in the temple and to separate themselves from the "sons of the Pit."

During this time, men would be converted from "Israel" (the apostate mainstream Jews, allegorically equated with the northern kingdom) to the "house of Judah" (the Essenes, the faithful southern kingdom), and their sins forgiven them (Jer. 31:34). But when the age was completed, there would be no more joining the "house of Judah." The eschatological crisis would ensue, overtaking the wicked:

*"Until the age is completed, according to the number of those years, all who enter after them shall do according to that interpretation of the Law in which the first men were instructed. According to the Covenant which God made with the forefathers, forgiving their sins, so shall he forgive their sins also. But when the age is completed, according to the number of those*

*years, there shall be no more joining the house of Judah."*

### The Eschatology of the Essenes

The Essenes have been called an "apocalyptic sect." The very essence of Essenism entailed an imminent expectation of the end. Their writings reveal a people who understood they were living in the last times, and earnestly sought to piece together a picture of things to come based upon the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. For us on this side of the eschaton, who possess the complete New Testament, the picture is infinitely clearer, like a "face to face" reflection in a glass. But to those living between the second century B.C. and the Jewish war with Rome in A.D. 66-70, the image provided by the Old Testament was veiled and reflected the purpose of God but darkly (I Cor. 13:9-13; II Cor. 3:13-16). Thus, while the Essenes were wrong in many of their expectations, we must recall that most Jews, including even the disciples, were mistaken in their conceptions of what the kingdom of the God would be and how it would come about.

- **Kingly & Priestly Messiah** – Some texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate belief in a single Messiah, though other documents indicate an expectation of two, a priestly Messiah and a kingly, Davidic Messiah. *"He is the Branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law to rule in Zion at the end of time."*<sup>23</sup> The source of this error seems to be Zech. 4:1-14, where the prophet depicts two olive trees/anointed ones ("sons of oil" v. 14), which refer to Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, and to Zech. 3:8 and 6:11-13, in which Joshua the High Priest is described as "THE BRANCH." "The Branch" is a Messianic term elsewhere used to describe the Davidic Messiah (Jer. 33:15; Isa. 11:1). Additionally, Psalm 110:1-4 refers to the Messiah as priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hence, the mistaken notion of kingly and priestly Messiahs is not without attestation in scripture. However, two Messiahs were not predicted, but these

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, *Damascus Document* (CD 4Q265-73, 5Q12, 6Q15) VI. 10-20, Vermes, p. 132

<sup>23</sup> *Florilegium or Midrash on the Last Days* (4Q174) L10, Vermes, p. 494.

two offices would merge in Christ, who would be both king and priest. The prophecies may also indicate that Christ would possess both Davidic and Aaronic blood. Elizabeth, Mary's kinsman, was of the daughters of Aaron (Lk. 1:5), indicating an affinity between the Davidic and Aaronic lines and that these two families had somewhere touched, making possible that Jesus had both kingly and priestly blood by his mother.

- **Messiah would appear in the “end of days”** – The idea of a second coming is noticeably absent in the Old Testament. The events associated with Christ's first and second comings are so closely connected in history, that the prophets treat them as a single historical event. Indeed, several of the prophets and prophetic texts (e.g., Psalm 110, Joel, Haggai, Malachi) omit reference to Christ's earthly ministry altogether, and focus instead upon his triumphal coming in wrath against his enemies, including especially the Jewish nation. Messiah would appear in the latter days, set up his kingdom, redeem his people from their enemies, and inaugurate a new age marked by his reign. Inherent in this program was a time of final judgement of the wicked and the resurrection of the dead. The eschatology of the Essenes conforms almost completely with this pattern. For the Essenes, the period remaining until the Messiah was the “age of wickedness.” Messiah would appear at the “end of days.” *“This is the Rule for the assembly of the camps during all the age of wickedness, and whoever does not hold fast to these statues shall not be fit to dwell in the land when the Messiah of Aaron and Israel shall come at the end of days.”*<sup>24</sup>
- **Forty-year Eschatological War** - The Essenes looked for a final, eschatological crisis in which the “sons of light” under the command of the “Prince of the Congregation” would defeat the “company

of darkness,” consisting of the “ungodly of the covenant” (apostate mainstream Jews) allied with Edom, Moab, Ammon, the Philistines, and the Kittim. The Prince of the Congregation is identified elsewhere with the “Branch,” or Messiah: *“The Prince of the Congregation, the Branch of David, will kill him [the king of the Kittim] by strokes and by wounds.”*<sup>25</sup> According to the War Scroll, the “exiled sons of light” would return from the “desert of the peoples” and encamp in the desert of Jerusalem. After battling the army of Belial embodied in the “ungodly of the Covenant” and their foreign allies, including the Kittim occupying Judea, the “Sons of Light” would move to Jerusalem and rededicate the temple. These events would occupy the space of seven years, with the restoration of the temple service occurring in the seventh sabbatical year. Of the remaining thirty-three years, four would be sabbatical years, leaving the war to be waged for twenty-nine years: Nine years against the sons of Shem; ten years against the sons of Ham; ten years against the sons of Japheth.<sup>26</sup> The conflict would climax with the complete defeat of the “King of the Kittim” by the assistance of heaven and the angels of God, led by the Prince of Light, who elsewhere is equated with Michael.<sup>27</sup> *“On the day when the Kittim fall, there shall be battle and terrible carnage before the God of Israel, for that shall be the day appointed from ancient times for the battle of destruction of the sons of darkness.”*<sup>28</sup> Scripture teaches, and the

<sup>25</sup> *Rule of War (4Q285, 11Q14), fr. 5, Vermes, p. 189*

<sup>26</sup> *War Scroll (1QM1, 1Q33, 4Q491-7, 4Q471) I-II.10, Vermes pp. 163-165*

<sup>27</sup> Michael was the name used of the divinity when acting as the captain of the Lord's host to save God's people (cf. Josh. 5:14; Dan. 10:13, 20, 21; 12:1). Michael is almost certainly Christ. The incarnation thus escaped the Essenes, who saw the Prince of the Congregation and Michael as two several actors.

<sup>28</sup> *War Scroll (1QM1, 1Q33, 4Q491-7, 4Q471) I.10, Vermes pp. 164*

<sup>24</sup> *Damascus Document (CD 4Q265-73, 5Q12, 6Q15) XIII.20; Vermes, p. 142*

Jews understood, that the Messiah would continue forever (Ps. 89:4; Isa. 9:7; Jn. 12:34). The forty-year war seems thus to be the period during which Messiah would defeat his enemies, inaugurating his reign, and may be derived from the probable time Joshua spent conquering the land of Canaan, and the reign of David, who ruled in Hebron seven years, and thirty-three in Jerusalem (I Kng. 2:11).

- **Kittim equated with the Romans** – The Kittim are identified in scripture as the end-time enemy of God’s people. This identification is implicit in their rise to dominion as the fourth world empire following the decline of the dominion of the Greeks. The Kittim are named by Balaam, who said a Star and Sceptre would come out of Jacob who would visit wrath upon his enemies, and destroy “Heber” by the hands of the Chittim (Kittim).

*“There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Seth...And ships shall come from the coasts of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever.” Num. 24:15-25*

Asshur refers to the land of the Assyrians bordering the Euphrates, which was the eastern-most border of the Roman Empire in the time of Christ. Eber is the root word of Hebrew; Eber was the ancestor of Abraham, the Hebrew (Gen. 11:17, 26; 14:13). Thus, Balaam’s oracle is the first explicit, end-time prophecy of the destruction of the Jewish nation by Rome. The Kittim occur in yet another telling passage:

*“For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant” (Dan. 11:30).*

It is almost universally agreed that this refers to Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his war against Ptolemy Physcon. When Antiochus had advanced to attack Ptolemy in order to possess Pelusium, he was met by

the Roman legate Gaius Popilius Laenus. Popilius handed Antiochus tablets containing the decree of the Senate, ordering him to cease his war with Ptolemy. Upon reading these, Antiochus expressed a desire to confer with his friends. Popilius drew a circle about Antiochus in the sand and bade him give his answer before he stepped from the circle. After a moment of awkward silence, Antiochus replied that he would do whatever the Romans demanded. Accordingly, a stated number of days were allowed him, within which he withdrew his army into Syria, where he attacked Jerusalem, slew forty-thousand, sold an equal number of slaves, and robbed the temple of eighteen hundred talents of gold. Since it is the Kittim (Romans) who succeeded to world dominion following the Greeks, it is they who are depicted as the fourth beast of Daniel chapter seven, whose king (the “little horn”) persecutes the saints for three and a half years, but is destroyed by the coming of the “Ancient of Days” (Christ) (Dan. 7:24-27). Such is the process by which the Essenes almost certainly would have identified the Romans as the eschatological enemy who would be destroyed by the “Prince of the Covenant.” Several passages from the scrolls serve to confirm this identification. For example, the Commentary on Nahum, which takes the prophet’s words against Nineveh as a type of God’s eschatological judgment against Jerusalem, states at verse 2:11:

*“Interpreted, this concerns Demetrius king of Greece who sought, on the counsel of those who seek smooth things, to enter Jerusalem. But God did not permit the city to be delivered into the hands of the kings of Greece, from the time of Antiochus until the coming of the rulers of the Kittim. But then she shall be trampled under their feet.”<sup>29</sup>*

After Antiochus IV Epiphanes none of the kings of Greece entered Jerusalem until the city was captured by Pompey the Great in 63 B.C. It continued under the power of the Romans after its capture by Pompey until it was destroyed in A.D. 70 by Titus. The prediction that the city would be “trampled under the feet” of the Kittim finds surprising

<sup>29</sup> Commentary on Nahum (4Q169) in loc, Vermes, p. 474

correlation in the New Testament: Jesus' Olivet Discourse and Revelation use identical language to the same purpose (Lk. 21:24; Rev. 11:2).

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Commentary on Habakkuk is especially insightful. The commentary repeatedly states that it concerns the "final generation" and "end of days," and treats the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans as a prophetic type of God's end-time judgment against Jerusalem by the Kittim. That the Essenes were correct in interpreting Habakkuk this way is confirmed by Hab. 2:3, which states that the vision is for the time of "the end." It is also confirmed by the epistle to the Hebrews, which quotes Habakkuk to encourage Jewish believers to remain faithful in the face of persecution, because Christ would shortly come to save them from their trials, and visit unquenchable wrath upon the Jews (Heb. 10:37, 38; cf. 9:28). Essene comments upon Habakkuk 2:7-8 state:

*"Interpreted this concerns the last Priests of Jerusalem, who shall amass money and wealth by plundering the peoples. But in the last days, their riches and booty shall be delivered into the hands of the army of the Kittim."*

At verses 1:14-16, the identity of the Kittim is made unmistakable when it states that they "sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war."<sup>30</sup> This can only refer to the Romans, whom Josephus describes as sacrificing to their standards when they captured Jerusalem:

*"And now the Romans, upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings lying round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator, with the greatest acclamations of joy."<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>30</sup> *Commentary on Habakkuk (IQpHab) in loc*, Vermes, p. 481

<sup>31</sup> Josephus, *Wars*, 6.6.1; Whiston edition

Identification of the Kittim with the Romans, together with their belief that the Romans would trample Jerusalem in the "end of days" and "final generation" preceding the dawn of the Messianic age, fixes the time of the Essenes' eschatological expectation, and shows that it Preterist in nature and essence.

- **National Kingdom/Earthly Throne** – The Essenes equated the Kittim with Gog and Magog, the pagan hoard Ezekiel foretold would descend upon restored Israel at the end of days (Ezek. 38, 39). There are various interpretations of this prophecy. Not a few commentators see it in reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes. However, the mention of "David their Prince" (the Messiah) (Ezek. 37:24, 25) makes the persecution of Antiochus too early. The better view, therefore, is that Gog and Magog symbolizes the end-time persecution of the church by Nero Caesar and the Jews, which figures prominently in Daniel chapter seven and Revelation. The Essenes, however, understood Gog and Magog in terms of the Roman occupation of Judea. Thus, where Christians may be inclined to interpret the battle of Gog and Magog as a symbol of a spiritual struggle in the form of an inquisition or persecution, the Essenes viewed the battle in terms of an armed conflict typical of a nationalist kingdom and an earthly monarch, followed by the world dominion of Jerusalem over nations:

"O Zion, rejoice greatly!  
O Jerusalem, show thyself amidst  
jubilation!  
Rejoice, all you cities of Judah;  
Keep your gates ever open that the  
nations may be brought in!  
Their kings shall serve you and  
All your oppressors shall bow down  
before you;  
They shall lick the dust of your feet.  
Shout for joy, O daughters of my  
people!  
Deck yourselves with glorious jewels  
And rule over the kingdoms of the  
nations!"

Sovereignty shall be to the Lord  
And everlasting dominion to Israel.”<sup>32</sup>

It appears from history that the Essenes joined the revolt of A.D. 66-70, probably thinking that events would so unfold as to realize their eschatological expectations. The disastrous beginning of the war in which Cestius’ army was almost completely destroyed, probably served as a signal to the Essenes and many other Jews that the moment of deliverance had arrived. Josephus mentions “John the Essene,” who was made a general in the war<sup>33</sup> but who perished in the battle of Ascalon.<sup>34</sup> Josephus also relates that many of the Essenes were cruelly tortured by the Romans during the war, so that we must conclude many from the sect joined the revolt, notwithstanding their normal separation from mainstream Judaism. Unfortunately for the Essenes, their nationalistic expectations regarding the end of days and the triumph of the sons of light betrayed the sect: The site at Qumran shows signs of military destruction. The sect disappeared from history after the war, but not before bequeathing to posterity the legacy of their scrolls, hidden carefully in the caves adjacent to Qumran.

#### **Validity of the Time-factors Notwithstanding Mistaken Interpretation**

Although the Essenes were mistaken about many things relative to the time of the end, there can be small dispute that they understood the time aright. The various time-lines provided by the prophecies of the book of Daniel made unmistakable that they were living in the last days and time of the end. The succession of world empires, Daniel’s 490 prophetic years until the end, the identity of the Kittim with Rome, the apostate nature of mainstream Judaism and the priesthood all signaled that God’s purpose was reaching its appointed end. The Essenes clearly foresaw that the end would entail wrath upon Jerusalem and the Jews by the hands of Rome. However, the saints victory over Rome, which Daniel (Dan. 7:24-27) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 38, 39) also foretold, did not entail military victory in the revolt of A.D. 66-70 as the

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<sup>32</sup> *War Scroll* XII.10-15; Vermes, p. 176

<sup>33</sup> War, 2.20.4

<sup>34</sup> War, 3.2.1, 2

Essenes wrongly supposed. But rather came about in the “year-of-four-emperors” following the death of Nero, which left Rome and Italy in ruins, and brought an end to the first imperial persecution of the church. The Essenes disappeared from history; the Jewish nation was destroyed and their religion detested and vilified by all mankind; but the church went on to conquer Rome and the world.

#### **Conclusion**

Preterist interpretation of end-time events finds strong corroboration in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and helps confirm that the eschaton was wrapped up in the events which witnessed the year-of-four-emperors and the destruction of the Jewish nation in A.D. 70.

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## Questions from Our Readers

**Q:** I want just to ask about "the eating of the communion, Jesus said to His disciples that they should do it in remembrance him until He comes, my question is , is it necessary for this age church to observe this ordinance? What must be done now according to the scripture in this regard?

**A:** Yes, I believe that the Lord's Supper is still to be observed. When Paul said they should observe the Lord's death until he came, he was not implying that observance should then cease. He was merely saying that their weekly observance of the Lord's death stood as a testimony of the Jew's rejection of Christ until he came in vengeance upon the nation. However, the Lord's Supper also serves other purposes that are still valid, like reminding the church of Jesus' sacrifice, and a testimony to the world of our faith in his cross. The whole thing is similar to Jesus' commandment to preach the gospel to all the world as a testimony to them until the end came. We still preach the gospel today, even though the end of that era and the Jewish nation has come and gone.

# The Rapture Problem

Chuck Baldwin

In this column last week, I stated the salient reasons why pastors will not take a public stand on issues regarded as controversial or political. I believe every point I made are the real reasons pastors refuse to stand for much of anything--or even objectively study anything outside their comfort zone.

To review, most pastors refuse to take a stand because:

1. They are success oriented and have an innate aversion to anything that is considered to be controversial. And, to them, there is nothing more controversial than politics.

2. They are afraid that if they take a controversial stand, they will lose members--and more importantly, tithes and offerings. Most churches are neck-deep in debt and are heavy-laden with staff and overhead. The thought of losing even a few giving families is enough intimidation to make sure that they do nothing to offend the people of the congregation. And since the pastor never addresses controversial issues or preaches "hard" sermons, his congregation is filled with people who harbor myriads of big-government, socialist ideas and would immediately bolt at any mention of Biblical Natural Law principles that ran counter to their leftist ideologies.

3. They have an erroneous interpretation of Romans 13 that civil government must be submitted to regardless of how evil or immoral its laws might be. This fallacious interpretation of Romans 13 (which is taught in practically every Christian school and college in America) has made them de facto slaves and worshippers of the state. As did Germany's pastors and Christians in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, America's pastors and Christians suffer from national "exceptionalism." This fallacy leads them to believe that by serving the state, they are serving God. In their minds, one cannot be "right with God" if they are not totally submissive to the state.

4. The 501c3 non-profit corporation status of the Internal Revenue Code under which the vast majority of churches throughout America operate has intimidated pastors and church leaders to the point that they will do--or not do--almost anything to stay in the good graces of the IRS. To most pastors, this means staying absolutely as far away from political issues as possible--even if those issues were moral and spiritual in nature a long time before they were considered political.

5. Most pastors are ignorant of the Biblical Natural Law principles of liberty. In the same way that many attorneys are completely ignorant of constitutional government, pastors are completely ignorant of Biblical Natural Law principles. Attorneys are not taught constitutional principles in law school, and pastors are not taught Biblical Natural Law principles in Bible school.

But there is one more reason why many pastors will not take a stand that I did not address in the aforementioned column: their belief in a pre-tribulation rapture.

The word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible. The English word "rapture" is taken from the Latin word "rapere" and means to "catch away." Theologically, it means that Christians will be caught away or taken to Heaven while they are still alive. There are several scriptural passages that Christians believe relate to this event, but the most cited is I Thessalonians 4:16, 17: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (Greek word "harpazo") together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Of course, Christians throughout the centuries have taught and believed a variety of nuances of eschatology. The various interpretations of The

Second Coming of Christ are almost limitless. There are pre-tribulational, pre-millennialists; mid-tribulational, pre-millennialists; post-tribulational, pre-millennialists; partial-rapture, pre-tribulational, pre-millennialists; post-millennialists; pre-wrath, (almost) post-millennialists; amillennialists, etc. And to each of these interpretations there is a plethora of subdivisions and schisms.

Christians have historically believed that they will be resurrected to be with Christ. However, that conviction--historically and by itself--did not prevent Christians from being engaged in whatever the political, social, or cultural battles of the time might have been. From the earliest days of Christianity, believers were politically and socially engaged in their communities and countries. During the Roman Empire, a baby was not protected by law until the father granted it official human status. Until then, babies could be legally killed or allowed to die. Christians by the thousands would go out into the streets at night and rescue babies that had been "thrown away" and left to die. During the Dark Ages, when the Bible was banned, Christians continued to widely copy and distribute the scriptures. Reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli died defending Switzerland's Protestant Reformation on the battlefield. Colonial Christians (including pastors) in great numbers participated in America's War for Independence. The great German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, joined a Nazi resistance movement. Each of these Christian believers held their individual, respective views of the Lord's coming and personal resurrection, but this did not keep them from being politically, socially, and culturally--and sometimes militarily--involved in their communities and countries.

However, with the broad acceptance of what has become known as Dispensationalism, many pastors and churches in America have almost totally removed themselves from political affairs. Except for voting (which is mostly kept private), pastors avoid politics like the plague. A few will talk in very broad and general terms about America "turning back to God," etc., but what that means specifically is seldom addressed. And if pressed for an explanation, most pastors will piously say, "God has not called me to get involved in politics." I'm not sure that God has called them to play golf either, but that doesn't

prevent a host of them from engaging regularly in that worldly activity.

Dispensationalism, as it is called today, was popularized by John Darby, C. I. Scofield, and Lewis Sperry Chafer. In more modern times, John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, Tim LaHaye, and Hal Lindsey contributed immensely to Dispensationalism's theological acceptance. The key element of Dispensationalism, as it relates to eschatology, is the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture of Christians. The idea is that the world is going to continue to get worse and worse until finally the Anti-Christ will arise as a global leader and will usher in seven years of "Great Tribulation," wherein a sizeable portion of the world's population will be destroyed. But before "The Great Tribulation" begins, Christian believers will be raptured into Heaven. Dispensationalists further believe that following the seven year Tribulation period, Christ will physically return to Jerusalem and establish a 1,000 year reign (called The Millennium) in which the Davidic Kingdom will be restored to Israel.

Now, let me state plainly that it is not my intention at this point to disparage the sincerity of faith and belief of the vast numbers of pastors and Christians who subscribe to Dispensationalism. Whether the pre-tribulation rapture is a correct Biblical interpretation or not is NOT the focus of this discussion. I find a sizeable number of pastors and Christians who subscribe to post-millennialism and other forms of eschatology to be just as disengaged from speaking out and engaging the political process as pre-tribulationists.

That being said, I believe it is an absolute fact that many pastors and Christians are using the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture to justify sitting back and doing nothing to actively resist evil and wickedness. In their minds, there is no need to be politically involved because everything is going to get worse anyway--but they are going to be raptured to Heaven before it all falls apart. I have actually had pastors say to me, "Chuck, by resisting evil government, you are fighting against God, because it is God's will that government gets worse and worse so that Jesus can come back."

The wretchedness of this kind of thinking should be obvious to any rational person. In the first

place, how arrogant are these American Christians to think that they are so special that God would have to rapture them before any real tribulation began? Think of the millions of Christians in oppressed nations throughout history--and even today--who have already been, and continue to be, IN GREAT TRIBULATION. The tribulation of Christian martyrs throughout church history is legendary. Have they never read Foxe's Book of Martyrs? Do they not know what has taken place in southern Sudan over the last 20 years? Have they not read the history of Christians in Mao's China, Amin's Uganda, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, etc. Who do they think they are? Why should Christians in America be spared what Christians throughout the world have endured and are enduring? Even if their interpretation of a pre-tribulation rapture is correct, that doesn't mean for one moment that Christians in America would not be called on to suffer great tribulation at the hands of a wicked and oppressive government--especially considering that the vast majority of pastors are doing almost nothing to resist our government from becoming wicked and oppressive. For the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture to be used as some kind of sit-back-and-do-nothing-because-a-divine-Seventh-Cavalry-is-coming-to-rescue-us attitude is the height of absurdity. Dare I say it borders on blasphemy?

Secondly, people who use the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine as an excuse to justify being disconnected from political involvement by saying things like, "Jesus is coming soon, so it doesn't matter!" are demonstrating either acute cowardice or immeasurable ignorance."

Christians throughout the millennia have looked for the return of Jesus. The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ has been held sacred by Christians of every generation for over two thousand years. That Jesus is coming soon doesn't stop us from going to school and getting an education; it doesn't stop us from going to work every day to earn a living; it doesn't stop us from planning our financial futures or saving for retirement; it doesn't stop us from teaching and training our children; it doesn't stop us from learning and exercising personal skills; it doesn't stop us from locking our doors or buying expensive alarm systems to protect us from the bad guys; and it doesn't stop these disconnected pastors from spending years trying to perfect

their golf game. Neither should it stop us from preserving the liberties and freedoms of our nation.

I am reminded of the Old Testament king of Judah, Hezekiah. He was told by the prophet that God was going to judge his country with great oppression, but that it would not happen until after he expired, some 15 years later. Hearing that, Hezekiah said (paraphrase), "Oh goodie! At least it won't happen while I'm alive."

I ask you, what kind of father and grandfather would rather see his own children and grandchildren endure persecution and oppression than him do something in his lifetime to prevent it? What kind of uncaring, hard-hearted, pleasure-mad sorry-excuses-for-manhood are we that we would not want to sacrifice our own comfort, our own possessions, our own lives, in order to provide something better for our children and grandchildren?

These stand-for-nothing pastors do NOT know when Jesus is coming. And they do not know what kind of tribulation their children and grandchildren are going to endure at the hands of future tyrants and despots because they refused to do something that could have prevented it.

Our Christian forebears believed in the return of Christ and in personal resurrection. Whether they were pre-millennial, post-millennial, pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation, etc., they didn't allow their personal interpretation of Bible prophecy keep them from doing what was the right thing to do when it was in their power to do it. They were statesmen, leaders, and even warriors. They worked; they dug; they studied; they taught; they led; and they fought. And when needed, they risked their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Are we really more spiritual than were they? Are we really more studied? More intelligent? More dedicated? More sincere? More courageous? Or more Christ-like?

How dare this generation of spoiled, lazy, comfort-laden, cowardly, sheepish, success-motivated, passive pulpits sit in judgment on the Christian men and women of history who, regardless of their personal interpretation of eschatology, actively engaged in the social,

cultural, and, yes, political affairs of their countries--and helped bequeath to us, their posterity, a free and independent land? How dare they use the doctrine of the rapture as an excuse to justify their own indifference? And more importantly, how dare Christians tolerate such cowardice and carnality?

Thirdly, Dispensationalists allow their interpretation of Bible prophecy relating to future Israel to obfuscate the divine principles of liberty as it relates to present America. Preachers such as John Hagee have twisted the scriptures to support almost unlimited wars of aggression against Middle Eastern countries in the name of befriending Israel. In reality, unconstitutional war, nation-building, foreign interventionism, etc., is no friend to Israel, the United States, or any other country.

America's foreign policy is a global nightmare. It has made enemies where none existed. It has made it increasingly difficult for American missionaries to give the Gospel to people in foreign countries. In many countries, it has inflamed the persecution of Christians. It has greatly contributed to the economic bankruptcy of the United States. It has turned the affections of the world against us. It has turned many American Christians from peacemakers to warmongers. Under the rubric of the "war on terror," America is being turned into a giant police state. In truth, the Warfare State that has been created in this country is not a blessing to Israel (or any other country), but a curse. But the Dispensationalists' interpretation of prophecy tends to blind them to these maladies.

Yes, many pastors and Christians have a rapture problem. But the problem is not really the doctrine itself but the way it is misapplied. I know pastors of all theological and eschatological backgrounds who are actively engaged in the freedom fight; and I know pastors of all theological and eschatological backgrounds who are disengaged from the freedom fight. It's up to the man. If men want to, they can hide behind anything. And when pastors choose to hide behind the rapture, it becomes a problem for all of us.

## What must I do to be saved?

*Kurt Simmons*

Every now and then it is good to get "back to basics." There is no more basic question to Christianity than "What must I do to be saved?"

God's relationship with his people has always been defined by covenant. God made covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God instituted the Old Testament (Covenant) with the Children of Israel. And God made the New Testament, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation is received by obeying the gospel.

It is convenient to think of the gospel as a conditional bequest under a will or trust. The bequest is the free gift of the testator; but to receive it, one must comply with whatever conditions the testator imposes. If a father conditions receipt of a bequest under a will that his erring son sober up and get a job, the son must meet the conditions to receive the bequest. Although conditional, the bequest is still a gift.

So it is with the gospel of Christ. The New Testament is a Covenant of grace; we cannot and do not "earn" our salvation from sin. Salvation is the free gift of God in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But to receive the benefit of the gospel, we must obey.

If you asked "What must I do to be saved?", some well-intentioned but misinformed people would tell you to recite the "sinner's prayer": "Confessing to God that I am a sinner, and believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died for my sins on the cross and was raised for my justification, I do now receive and confess Him as my personal Savior."

Those are certainly wonderful sentiments; ones we encourage all men to embrace. Unfortunately, not one example in scripture can be cited where such a prayer was commanded or recited to receive salvation.

There are ten examples of conversion in the Book of Acts. What we find there is that men 1) Heard the gospel; 2) they Believed the gospel; 3) they were told to Repent of their sins; 4) to Confess their faith in Christ; and to be Baptized. Thus: Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, be Baptized. This pattern is repeated so many times that it is unmistakable.

- Acts 2:38 – The Pentecostians
- Acts 8:12, 16 – The Samaritans
- Acts 8:13 – Simon Magi
- Acts 8:35-39 – The Ethiopian Eunuch
- Acts 10:47 – The Household of Cornelius
- Acts 16:15 – The Household of Lydia
- Acts 16:30-33 – The Philippian Jailer
- Acts 18:8 – The Corinthians “hearing, believed, and were baptized.”
- Acts 19:5 – The Ephesians
- Acts 22:16 – St. Paul

In each and every case, baptism was administered upon the repentant believer’s confession of faith. “And they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day the Lord added unto them about three thousand souls...and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:41, 47).

A word or two is in order. In the beginning, there was only one church and one baptism. To be saved, you had to be in the church; and to be in the church you had to be baptized. Thus, baptism in Jesus’ name was an essential element of salvation.

In time, the simplicity of the gospel was corrupted and a multiplicity of churches sprung up. Men started baptizing into their own church or denomination, rather than into Christ. According to the Bible, we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27). It is Christ that saves. We join Christ in baptism, not a denomination of men.

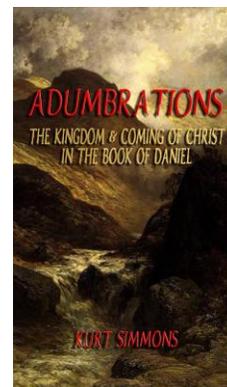
Because baptism is essential for salvation, men were baptized the “same hour of the night” in which they came to faith (Acts 16:30-33; cf. Acts

8:35-39). Baptism is a beginning, a new birth (Jn. 3:3-5). In baptism we receive remission of sins (Acts 2:38); our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16); and we are saved from sin (Mk. 16:15, 16; I Pet. 3:21). Naturally, it is not the water that saves us, but the blood of Jesus, which the repentant believer receives in baptism.

Finally, babies are not candidates for Bible baptism. Jesus said “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:15, 16). Babies do not believe, do not have sin, do not need to be saved from sin, and hence are ineligible for baptism.

Baptizing babies grew up because of Augustine, who taught that babies are under condemnation for Adam’s transgression. This is the doctrine of “original sin.” It is true, that all men inherit a fallen nature and that by nature we are at enmity with God. But guilt follows accountability. “To him that knoweth to do right and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jm. 4:17). “The son does not bear the iniquity of the father” (Ezek. 18:20). Babies are not accountable and therefore are safe from sin.

If you have not made the decision to obey the gospel of Christ and be baptized, we would encourage you with the words of Ananias to Saul: “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).



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