CHAPTER FOUR

OTHERWORLDLY PRIESTHOOD IN SECTARIAN WRITINGS

In chapter three, we observed the centrality of the symbol of the imaginal temple and its priesthood in SSS, and, by extension, for the Qumranites. The experience of sacred liturgical time implied by that text brought about a partially realized eschatology whereby human worshippers escaped linear historical existence and became like the angels. This temporal transformation was paralleled by a spatial one. The homology between humans and angels allowed for joint action occurring across the boundary of physical space in the archetypal image of the temple. Although no traversal between heaven and earth or vice versa is expressed in the language of SSS, the opportunity of communion is nonetheless implied by the parallel descriptions of the heavenly and earthly worshippers. Whether or not SSS was composed by a member of the Qumran community, the religious mechanism implied by that text may be said to have been adopted by the Qumranites.

The present chapter turns to notions of otherworldly priesthood in documents of certain sectarian provenance. How do these compare and contrast with those of SSS and the texts discussed in chapter two? What theological notions are implied by sectarian depictions of otherworldly priesthood and what do they suggest about the nature of the Qumran community? Four texts will be treated: the Rule of Benedictions, 4QS Songs of the Sage, the “Self-Glorification Hymn,” and 11QMelchizedek. In addition, one text of unknown provenance, 4Q Unidentified Fragments C (4Q468b), will be treated within the larger discussion of 11QMelchizedek.

THE RULE OF BENEDICTIONS (1QSb)

The sectarian text best known for touching on the notion of otherworldly priesthood is the Rule of Benedictions, or 1QSb. The document consists of a list of very fragmentary blessings addressed to various groups and individuals within the community which were to be recited by the משללי.
It has long been noted that this composition should be interpreted in light of the fact that it was originally preceded on the same scroll by the Rule of the Community (1QS) and the Rule of the Congregation (1QSa). All three works are written in the same hand, which may be dated paleographically to the first quarter of the first century BCE. According to the prevailing view, the Rule of the Community (also known as the Manual of Discipline) represents the “manual” of rules and regulations according to which the pre-messianic community at Qumran lived, while the Rule of the Congregation, at least in its present form, is an eschatological rule describing the life and conduct of the Qumran community envisioned for the impending messianic age. As Schiffman characterizes it, the Rule of the Congregation is a “kind of mirror image of the society described in the Manual of Discipline.”

Thus, the Rule of Benedictions, which directly follows the Rule of the Congregation on the 1QS/Sa/Sb scroll, may be seen as a set of “eschatological benedictions of the present age, which the sect believed would be recited at the dawn of the eschaton.” In support of this claim, scholars have noted the text’s inclusion of a blessing for the Prince of the Congregation, one of the future eschatological leaders of the community (cf. CD 7:20–21; 4QpIsa\(^a\) 5–6 3; 1QM 5:1). Furthermore, whereas the annual covenantal renewal ceremony of the Rule of the Community (1QS 2) includes both blessings and curses against the enemies of God, 1QSB (also closely patterned on the priestly blessing of Numbers 6) lacks curses. This probably indicates that from the point of view of the Rule of Benedictions, God’s enemies have already perished in the eschatological battle between the forces of light and dark-

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2 Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community*, 75. Cf. M. Abegg Jr., “1QSB and the Elusive High Priest,” in Emanuel, 3–16, who claims that 1QSB is the “full text (and thus no accidental appendix) of the blessings associated with the yearly renewal ceremony in 1QS 1–III, and that the eschatological High Priest is he who is faithfully serving when—in the imagery of 1QSa—the Royal Messiah (the Prince) arrives to take his seat at the banquet table before the faithful. Until then the blessings of 1QSB faithfully reflect the present priest (you) and while looking forward to the coming Prince (him).”