Based on the scant information provided in the sectarian scrolls, we noted in chapter five that the eschatological priesthood was associated with four, or possibly five, different general roles or characteristics: (1) teaching and the proliferation of the law for the new age, (2) leadership of the eschatological military camp, (3) leadership of the reconstituted cultic community, and, possibly, (4) atonement on behalf of the people. (5) At times the priestly messiah appears alongside another figure of authority who is often identified as the lay or royal messiah. The precursors to these roles and characteristics are to be found throughout the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, in several biblical passages, we learn of the cultic, atoning, martial, and didactic/judicial functions of the priests.¹ Moreover, scriptural antecedents may be found for the notions of the division of power between lay and sacerdotal authorities (e.g., Jer 33:14–26; 1 Chr 29:22) and “anointed” priests (e.g., Lev 4:3; Dan 9:25–26).

However, as we have noted above, no biblical passage refers to a priest in the sense of a future messianic figure. We must therefore seek to supplement the traditional roots of sectarian portraits of the eschatological priesthood from elsewhere. But the evidence is slim. It is often noted that beyond the Hebrew Bible, the most fertile grounds for such an attempt are to be found in the pre-sectarian “authoritative pseudepigraphic” traditions, so popular at Qumran, which employ intricate biblical exegesis in order to portray the patriarch Levi as an ideal figure of priestly wisdom, zealotry, and purity.² These traditions appear mainly in

¹ For numerous important citations, see M. Haran, “Priests and Priesthood,” EncJud 13:1076–1080. He divides the functions of the priesthood in the Hebrew Bible into four major categories, “specifically cultic functions; mantic functions, i.e., functions concerned with the solution of mysteries of the future or the past and the making of decisions in uncertain cases through the revelation of divine will; treatment of impurities and diseases with the special ceremonies involved; and judging and teaching people.”

² See, e.g., Collins, The Scepter, 83–95; VanderKam, “Jubilees and the Priestly Messiah of Qumran,” 353–365. For the term “authoritative pseudepigraphy,” see M. Bernstein,
Jubilees and ALD, both of which were certainly of great interest to and probably even authoritative for the Qumranites.  

The Magnetic Quality of Priesthood in Second Temple Literature

In light of the magnified political and religious importance of the priesthood in the Second Temple period and the critical eyes under which it operated, it is no surprise to encounter several texts from that era reflecting a range of fervent opinions regarding the proper behavior and role of priests in society. With the support of scriptural exegesis, such texts craft ideal patterns of priestly conduct and exemplary priestly figures. In doing so, they often expand the traditional biblical portrait of the priest, which includes mostly cultic, but also judicial, instructional, and other responsibilities, and attribute to him the key social roles of external figures (such as king or sage/scribe)—a literary phenomenon which may be termed “priestly magnetism.” It is safe to assume that this literary practice reflects the value systems of the authors, as well as their polemical or apologetic reactions to their particular historical settings. The study of instances of priestly magnetism therefore serves as a good basis “for discovering which ideals were considered central to people’s world views.”

In attempting to clarify the traditional roots of priestly messianism at Qumran, it will thus be instructive to investigate the priestly magnetism of ALD and Jubilees. To be sure, the portraits of Levi in these works do not


3 Indeed, the Damascus Document cites the book of Jubilees as an authoritative source (CD 16:3–4) and quotes the “words of Levi” from an unknown Levi apocryphon similar to ALD (CD 4:15–18). See further, chapter six, n. 35.

4 See above, chapter six.


7 On this methodological assumption, see Stone, “Ideal Figures and Social Context,” 575–586. For several examples of its application, see the collection of essays in J.J. Collins and G. Nickelsburg eds., Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism (SCS 12; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980).