CHAPTER 14

Prophecy, False Prophecy, and War in the Dead Sea Scrolls

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1 The Apocalyptic War

My themes for this essay on war and prophecy among writers of the Qumran sect, can profitably be explored by approaching them through the doorway of Qumranic apocalypticism.\(^1\) The apocalyptic mindset and resulting writings preserved at Qumran are well known.\(^2\) Qumran apocalyptists believed strongly that the events of history, a continuous battle between the evil forces of earth and heaven with the forces of good led by Israel's God, would soon result in a divinely determined game-ending war, which would bring about the vanquishing of evil powers and the triumph of the forces of Israel's God and his final judgment on nations and individuals. Qumran covenanters placed themselves on the stage as participants in the final act of a divine drama, the \textit{end of days} (אחרית הימים), a term that was popular in scrolls from Qumran.\(^3\) But

\* I am not sure if our friend Marty Abegg knows more about the Dead Sea Scrolls or about rock n' roll music, but I am sure that if we all wrote about Bob Dylan, or Allison Kraus, or The Who or a hundred other musicians, he would be just as pleased with this volume. I am most grateful for the many ways he has enriched my life with a wonderful friendship since 1986 (or is that 1896?).


2 For a full discussion of apocalyptic thought and literature at Qumran, see John J. Collins \textit{Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls} (London: Routledge, 1997) and Lorenzo DiTommaso, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Parts I and II)” in \textit{Currents in Biblical Research} 5 (2007): 235–286, 367–432. DiTommaso states that “one relatively firm consensus...is that the Qumran community was a millenarian movement with an apocalyptic ideology” (Part II, 393).

how did the Qumran covenanters know this future? How did they make their claims? Who was their prophetic messenger(s)? Qumran authors claim that knowledge of this divine plan comes via special revelations (apocalypses)⁴ from the divine realm to the faithful community of Israel, perhaps especially through their True Teacher (מורה צדק),⁵ who likely lived in the second half of the second century BCE, though they speak of these revelations using a variety of terminology.

In fact, the war and conflict of the Yaḥad was multi-fold. In several of their apocalyptic writings they refer to their enemies as the Kittim, a sobriquet standing for a variety of foreign invaders or occupying powers, who are always outsiders, even if they are understood as being used by the God of Israel for his purposes.⁶ In the rhetoric of these scrolls, the Kittim are labeled only by a title, a substitute name, almost a generic designation of Enemy. Kittim can stand for any foreign enemy, whether distant or threatening (no matter how distant), or even an unrealistic enemy. Though the authors knew the national names of such powerful rulers and armies, they chose to label them with a different name, foreign and negative. This label of their own rhetorical making allows, within the context of the community, the sect to imagine a kind of control over the powerful armies of their day. We find this same kind of rhetorical power practiced in the numerous compositions where Qumran authors give their enemies epithets and titles, such as The Wicked Priest, The Liar or Spreader of Lies rather than referring to them by name. As Matthew Collins has argued, using such titles (negative and positive) functions to label deviants and outsiders and to affirm communal ideals.⁷ This also serves as a reminder that the Yaḥad was not in a position of power or authority whereby its membership could physically go to war against the Kittim,

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⁴ The use here of “apocalypses” is not limited to a literary genre. I refer to any claim of a revelation of knowledge through divine communication.


⁶ In the surviving documents produced by the Qumran community, 46 times the gentilic Kittim (כתיים or כתיאים) is employed, mostly within six different compositions, namely, The War Scroll (1QM, 4Q491, 4Q492, 4Q496), Pesher Psalms (1Q16), Pesher Isaiah (4Q61), Pesher Nahum (4Q69), Pesher Apocalypse of Weeks (4Q247, a small scrap, possibly a non-sectarian composition) and the Sefer ha-Milhamah or Scroll of the War (4Q285+1Q14). This data is from Martin G. Abegg, Jr., James E. Bowley, and Edward M. Cook, The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance. Vol i: The Non-Biblical Scrolls from Qumran (Leiden: Brill, 2003).