The study of prophets and prophecy in the Qumran texts is complex, but significant in its own right as well as in the greater context of the Second Temple period. Focusing on one particular avenue, my study reaffirms and further highlights the dramatic difference between ancient Israelite prophets and associated prophetic texts on the one hand and the proposed evidences of prophets and prophecy in the Qumran sectarian texts on the other. Specifically, I caution against claiming “prophets” and “prophecy” at Qumran without major qualifications, preferring to use other terms that more accurately describe their identity. Despite a recent trend to see the Teacher of Righteousness as a prophet figure for the community, I do not view the Teacher’s Spirit-based interpretation and application of earlier prophetic texts as synonymous with being a prophet or pronouncing prophecy. I am therefore arguing for greater delineation and nuance in modern descriptions of inspired activity at Qumran (and elsewhere for that matter, although I do not herein deal with evidence from the broader late Second Temple period). The community’s own view of their Teacher and

---

1 I have used the term “ancient” in this study to designate the Israelite prophets cited in the Hebrew Scriptures, realizing that the Qumran community may not have considered them exactly ancient. However, I wanted to clarify the distinction between earlier Israelite prophets and later individuals in the Qumran community itself.

2 See, for example, the seemingly conflicting views of William M. Schniedewind, The Word of God in Transition, From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period, JSOTS 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 128: “In post-biblical literature ‘prophecy’ came to mean the inspired interpretation of texts;” and L. Stephen Cook, On the “Cessation of Prophecy” in Ancient Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 80: “Contrary to what has been claimed, the Teacher’s Spirit-inspired speech does not necessarily indicate that he (or the community) considered his function to be on par with that of the ancient prophets.” Some of this conflict is a matter of interpretation, and some of it resides in the difference, emphasized by Schniedewind, between the terms “prophet” and “prophecy.” My views are more in line with Cook’s claims, and this paper seeks to further demonstrate why modern readers of the Qumran texts should not consider the Teacher of Righteousness a prophet.

other community members should not be blurred with modern inclinations and interpretations of religious activity at Qumran.4 Thus, the Teacher is best understood as a religious leader possessing divinely inspired insights and direction, but not as a prophet.5

Any discussion of prophets and prophecy at Qumran is clearly definition dependent. Defining “prophet” and “prophecy” in the First or Second Temple periods is fraught with challenges, and attempts to explain these terms and the concepts they represent have resulted in a variety of proposals.6 For my purposes, a prophet, broadly defined, is an individual who considered him- or herself called by God to proclaim God’s will and word to a group or community (i.e., followers who recognized the individual as a prophet, even if their society as a whole did not), in the name of God, as revealed by God to the prophet.

---


While I am unaware of any claim that anyone besides the Teacher of Righteousness may have functioned prophetically at Qumran, I will reiterate in what follows that my perspective applies to the Teacher and everyone else in the community. For brief overview comments on community leadership titles found in the Qumran texts, see James H. Charlesworth, “Community Organization,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls,* vol. 2., ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 134–135.


6 See the publications cited in the previous three notes. Cook, for example, in *On the “Cessation of Prophecy,”* 174–175, cites some factors to consider when defining prophecy. Interestingly, a number of studies on prophets and prophecy do not provide a definition for these terms. I assume this is due to the challenge of succinctly doing so. See the attempt to provide new definitions of prophecy and related phenomena in Lester L. Grabbe, “Prophetic and Apocalyptic: Time for New Definitions—and New Thinking,” in *Knowing the End from the Beginning, The Prophetic, Apocalyptic, and Their Relationship,* ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak. (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 107–133, especially his comment, “This paper mentioned the need for new definitions. This [is] a difficult issue, however, and I have no new definitions to offer at this point. What I have done is try to introduce new thinking” (127).