
Angel’s book is a revised version of his 2008 dissertation at New York University (directed by Lawrence Schiffman). It consists of eight chapters, the first of which is an introduction to the project and the last a summary with conclusions. The remaining six chapters present the heart of the argument and are arranged in two parts. The first treats “Otherworldly Priesthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls” and the second “Eschatological Priesthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls.” The book ends with a lengthy bibliography (311–50) and indices of modern authors and ancient sources.

In the introduction Angel deals with the history of scholarship on the topics of priesthood and Qumran community origins. Here he traces the “Essene hypothesis” and the notion that the Qumran community originated in opposition to the Hasmonaean usurpation of the high priesthood. The objections raised to that scenario encourage one to look beyond the confines of the Essene hypothesis. For example, a number of experts have maintained that the Qumran group broke off in some sense from a parent group and it is widely agreed that key texts in the corpus are composite. Consequently, he uses the term “Qumran community” for “a social movement in a constant state of historical and ideological development” (11). He sets as his goal not to search for historical realities in the unhistorical texts found in the Qumran area but to examine the image of the priesthood presented in the texts—“the imagined constructs of priesthood in the Scrolls corpus. The primary objective will be to study these constructs and discover the theological notions implied by them” (15) and thus also to make clearer the character of the authors as expressed in the texts. The distinction between sectarian and non-sectarian texts proves an important one for him.

The first part of the book looks at those texts that “envision angels as priests serving in the celestial temple or human priests as akin to angels” (18). What is the theological meaning of the idea of this otherworldly priesthood for the Qumran texts and what does it have to do with broader parts of Second Temple Judaism? He answers the question by comparing non-sectarian and sectarian presentations of this “otherworldly” priesthood. The second chapter (the first in Part One) deals with the material in non-sectarian texts (e.g., the Book of the Watchers, Jubilees, Aramaic Levi, 4Q541), and the third chapter turns to possibly sectarian texts (e.g., Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice). The non-sectarian texts present angels as priests and priests as otherworldly in some sense. One important theme here is glory: the brilliance emanating from priests or their vestments is an “eruption” of the heavenly to the earth, thus tying them together. Such priests bring enlightenment through wisdom. In the possibly sectarian texts the distinction between the heavenly and earthly temples is not entirely erased though there is a partially realized eschatology.
The certainly sectarian works are the subject of Chapter Four (1QSb, 4Q510–511, the Self-Glorification Hymn [from an exalted priest], 11QMelchizedek). While the sectarian texts share much with the others, they are distinct in two ways: first, other than 11QMelchizedek, they are liturgical compositions; reciting them was meant to transport one to the “imaginal realm of the cosmic temple” where earthly and heavenly priests celebrate together (165). The Qumranites applied otherworldly priestly traditions to themselves. Second, the otherworldly priesthood is associated with imagery of light, while in the sectarian texts the group is presented as having unique access to the divine knowledge they share with the angels.

In Part Two Angel turns to the eschatological priesthood as presented in the scrolls. He does not want to harmonize or systematize the teachings into a consistent whole but prefers to let the texts speak for themselves. He deals with the priestly messiah texts, often finding that the role of the priesthood is modeled on present realities in the community. Among the motifs that arise in the texts are the teaching function of the priest and a linear view of history in which the arrival of the end of the present age is marked by the appearance of a priestly messiah who will teach law (as titles such as התורה הדרש indicate). The texts reflect frustrations with the current priesthood and situation at the Jerusalem temple along with a desire to return to a purified temple with a proper priesthood in the future. The priestly messianism in the scrolls is a creative adaptation of non-sectarian traditions that have a strong basis in scriptural exegesis.

The second chapter in Part Two is devoted to the historical roots of the ideas about the eschatological priesthood. Naturally, they are found first in the Hebrew Bible. He also traces the shift in the Second Temple period to priestly and scribal authority (with the centrality of Torah) and the charges of moral and ritual impurity for which the priests were criticized. Moral criticisms come especially in the proto-sectarian texts, while in the Qumran texts both types are found, though Angel thinks that issues of ritual impurity were central reasons for the withdrawal of the group from the temple community. They developed the ideas of themselves as a temple (and of future temples) and their members as virtual priests under these circumstances of separation. The texts do not suggest a concern with any hereditary illegitimacy of the Jerusalem priests. The final chapter in Part Two analyzes the traditional roots of the eschatological priesthood. Here he discusses the “magnetic” qualities of the priesthood, that is, the ideal picture of the priest attracts various traits otherwise associated with, say, kings and wise men. Ben Sira, Arabic Levi, and Jubilees come in for consideration here. This phenomenon is related to the rise of priestly power in Second Temple times and the Qumran texts with their priestly messianism reflect this view of priesthood. Angel argues that 4Q541 frg. 9 is the only nonsectarian, pre-Qumran text that refers to an eschatological priest, thus showing that the notion existed beforehand. He also examines the evidence about Levi and the Levites in the scrolls. Generally, the Qumran community did not compose traditions about Levi but inherited them. Some scrolls