DAVID’S DEEDS IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

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I. Introduction

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls the Damascus Document has been one of the most difficult works to interpret, because it seems to lack a certain degree of coherency.1 This article tries to clarify one important sentence (CD 5:5b-6a) which has been interpreted by scholars in a variety of ways due to its ambiguity. Moreover, an attempt will be made to point out the significance of the resemblances between CD 5:5b-6a and two other Qumran sectarian documents: 4Q174 and 4QMMT.2

II. CD 5:5b-6a

CD 5:5b-6a is as follows:

ויהיו מעשו ידו מיכל בד אidente ומאשה ולא
And the works of David rose up, except for the blood (murder) of Uriah, and God left them to him.3

For the sake of clarity I have given a fairly literal translation of CD 5:5b-6a. This sentence occurs in a context which speaks of three nets

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2 In this article, the term “Qumran Community” is used several times. Recently some scholars have challenged the concept “Qumran Community.” They have suggested that the ideas prevalent in Qumran literature may well have been widespread within Judaism of the time and were in all likelihood not only characteristic of a small esoteric group living at Khirbet Qumran in isolation from their fellow Jews. In this article, the expression “Qumran Community” does not only refer to people living at Khirbet Qumran, but also to those who lived elsewhere and abided by the Qumranites’ teachings and lifestyle.

3 All translations in this article are either the author’s or follow Wise, Abegg and Cook (eds), The Dead Sea Scrolls.
in which Satan tries to catch people, that is, three ways in which he tempts them to sin: by way of fornication, riches and the profanation of the Temple (4:13-19). In 4:20-5:11, the first of these sins, fornication, is spelled out. The author of the Damascus Document criticizes "the builders of the wall," probably a reference to his group’s religious enemies, for breaking the commandments found in the Pentateuch relating to marriage and divorce: "Male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27) and "He shall not multiply wives to himself" (Deut. 17:17). However, king David had broken this very command by having several wives. The author continues by excusing David for his actions. David had dealt in ignorance, because he "had not read the sealed book of the law in the ark; for it was not opened in Israel from the day of the death of Eleazar" (CD 5:1-3 = 4Q273 5 1-3). The author clearly exculpates David by saying that he did not have access to the "sealed book of the law" and, therefore, cannot be held responsible for having taken more than one wife.

After having excused David for polygamy on the grounds of ignorance, the author makes his intriguing statement about David’s deeds: "And the works of David rose up, except for the blood (murder) of Uriah, but God left them to him" (5:5b-6a). Two questions come immediately to our mind: in what sense did the works of David rise up, and in which way did God leave them to him? Several scholars have attempted to make sense of this, at first sight, peculiar sentence. Their translations of 5:5b-6a show the diversity in interpretation:

Nevertheless the deeds of David were all excellent, except the murder of Uriah and God forgave him for that (E. Cook).
Hence the deeds of David were overlooked, except the blood of Uriah, and God allowed them to him (P. Davies).
And David’s deeds were praised, except for Uriah’s blood, and God allowed them to him (F. Garcia Martinez).

David’s most well-known wives are: Michal, king Saul’s daughter (1 Sam. 18:27), Abigail (25:39-42) and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:27). He married Abigail while being married to Ahinoam of Jezreel (1 Sam. 25:43). David had more concubines and wives in addition to these wives (2 Sam. 5:13).