There are indications in the complete Qumran Isaiah scroll (1QIsa) that some passages of Isaiah were understood messianically by the Essene community which produced the scroll which were not necessarily so understood by the keepers of the Massoretic tradition. For example, we may translate portions of chapter fifty-one from the scroll,

4 Attend to me, my people,
   and give ear to me, my nation,
for TORA will go forth from me,
   and MY JUDGMENT I will establish as a light for peoples.

5 Near is MY RIGHTEOUSNESS;
   MY DELIVERANCE has gone forth,
and his arms will rule the peoples.
In him the coastlands trust,
   and for his arm they wait.

6 ... but MY SALVATION shall be forever,
   and MY JUSTICE will never be confounded.

8 ... but MY JUSTICE shall be forever,
   and MY SALVATION to the ages.

The only significant textual variants from the MT in the portions here translated are the three italicized pronouns. In the MT, these are all first person singular pronouns: “... my arms will rule the peoples. In me the coastlands trust, and for my arm they wait.” In the MT the antecedent of these pronouns is understood to be the Lord. In the scroll the consistency of the pronouns in the third person singular precludes the possibility of accidental error, so we must seek another antecedent. This can be none other than MY DELIVERANCE (נושא), with which “his arms” (יְרוּם, mistranscribed יְרוּם, “my arms” in the American Schools edition) is in direct parallelism. Hence DELIVERANCE is personified as the agent of the Lord—the Deliverer who will rule for the Lord. BARTHELEMY notes this personification, and says; “Le passage a sans doute été appliqué
spontanément au Messie" 1). Since MY DELIVERANCE is parallel to TORAH (תורה), MY JUDGMENT (משפט), MY RIGHTEOUSNESS (צדק), MY SALVATION (webElementProperties) and MY JUSTICE (צדק), these too are to be recognized as messianic names. Attributes and emanations of God are personified as descriptive names for the Messiah.

The use of TORAH as a messianic name recalls the work of W. D. Davies 2) in demonstrating a messianic function for Torah in rabbinic Judaism, and showing that Paul regarded Christ as performing this function for Christianity. "... Not only did the words of Jesus form a Torah for Paul, but so also did the person of Jesus. In a real sense conformity to Christ, His teaching and His life, has taken the place for Paul of conformity to the Jewish Torah. Jesus Himself—in word and deed or fact is a New Torah" 3). Thus, in orthodox Judaism and in two sectarian off-shoots of Judaism we observe the personification of the Torah with messianic attributes.

This personification was not limited to the concept of Torah, on the part of the Essenes. The same phenomenon we have seen with regard to Deliverance, Judgment, Righteousness, Salvation and Justice in Is. li 4-8. We may observe it again in Is. xlvi 10, which we translate from 1QIs 4).

MY COUNSEL shall stand,
and he shall accomplish all my purpose.

The MT reads "and I will accomplish ... ." In the scroll, however, the change of pronouns necessitates a change in antecedents, and "my counsel" (צדק) becomes the person who accomplishes all the purpose of God 4).

This places a different cast upon the entire book of Isaiah. The

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1) D. Barthélemy, "Le Grand Rouleau d'Isaïe Trouvé près de la Mer Morte", Revue Biblique, 57 (1950), p. 548, n. 2. Barthélemy treats these variants as possibly original, the MT readings being deliberate corruptions by scribes in order to erase the "prétexte aux espérances du messianisme temporel, bête noire des scribes comme du sacerdoce". This seems somewhat less than likely to us.

In addition to Barthélemy’s work on this passage, see W. H. Brownlee, “The Christ as Salvation”, United Presbyterian, Nov. 29 and Dec. 6, 1954.


3) Davies, op. cit., p. 170 f.

4) Throughout the Manual of Discipline, as Brownlee has noted, הוא is ambiguous, meaning both “counsel” and “council”. If the latter meaning was understood by the Essenes here, as seems likely, then the reference is to the “Council of the Community” (i.e., “the Community acting in Council”) as the Corporate Servant of the Lord.