

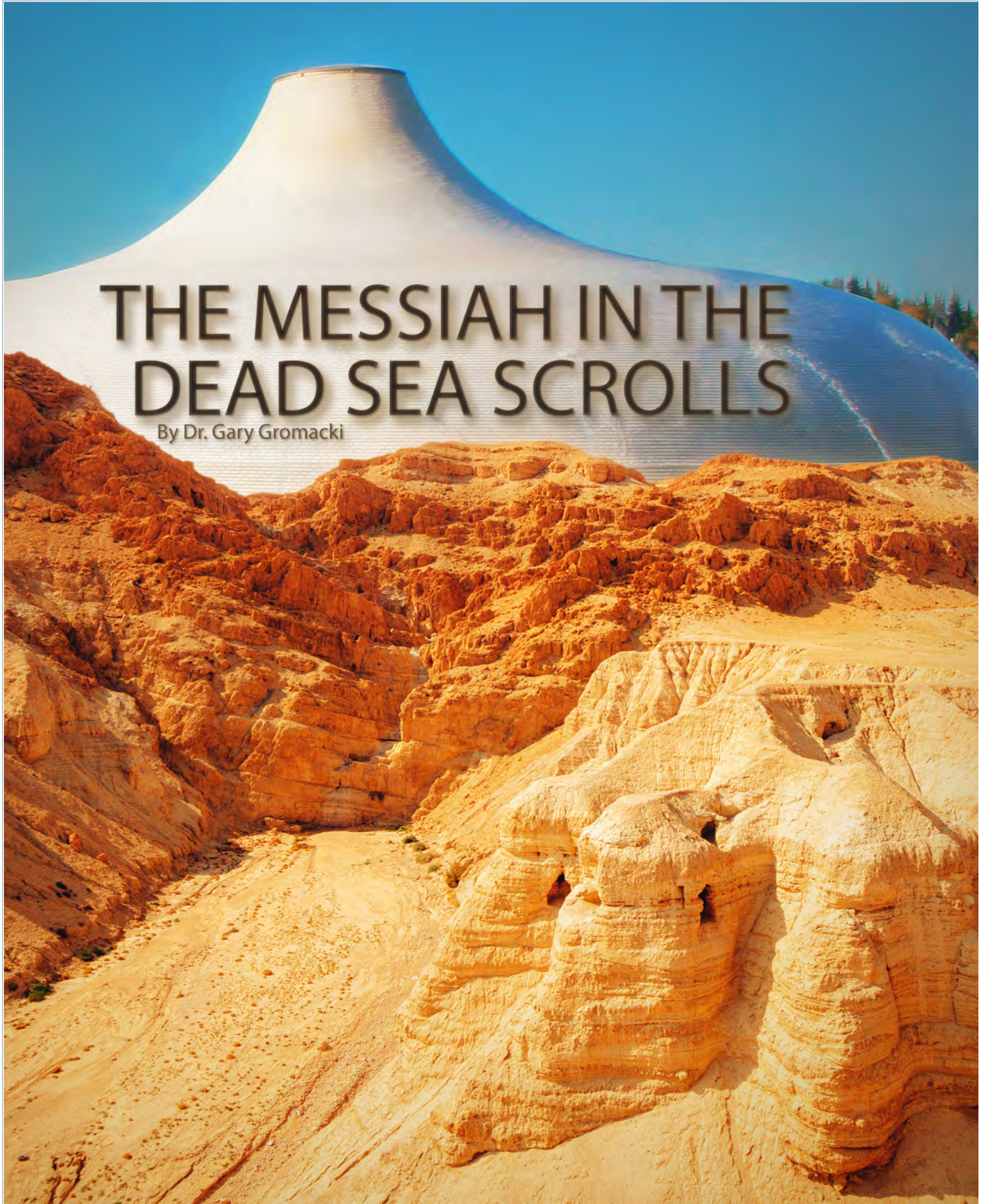


HISTORY

The Messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls

by Dr. Gary Gromacki

22





Celebrating the Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947-2022)

Seventy-five years ago, the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) were discovered in Israel, just before Israel became a nation. They were copied on leather parchment and miraculously preserved in jars found in caves near Qumran. Today, the Dead Sea Scrolls are housed in the Shrine of the Book Museum in Jerusalem.



Apocalyptic Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Apocalyptic Messianism is found when one reads the DSS. “Messianism” is the Jewish expectation of a

coming anointed king who will liberate Israel from Gentile domination. “Apocalyptic Messianism” involves the belief that a Messiah will come at the end of human history to defeat the Gentiles and reestablish the kingdom of Israel.

Messianic Prophecies in *Testimonia* or *Messianic Anthology* (4Q175)

The *Testimonia* or *Messianic Anthology* (4Q175) is a short DSS document discovered in Cave 4 near Qumran dated to the early first century B.C. Several Messianic prophecies are quoted in this Dead Sea Scroll: (1) Numbers 24:17 – “A star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel”; (2) Deuteronomy 18:15 – “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren. I will put my words into his mouth and he shall tell them all that I command him.” These verses quoted in the *Testimonia* show that the community at Qumran was interested in Messianic prophecies.

When Yeshua was born, wise men from the East saw a star in the sky. Possibly, they learned of this Messianic prophecy from the Diaspora Jews who were taken to Babylon. The wise men traveled to Bethlehem and gave gifts to Yeshua (Matthew 2:1-11). Yeshua was a prophet like Moses. He rebuked the Jewish rulers for not knowing these Messianic prophecies that He claimed were about Him (John 5:40-47).

The Messiah or Messiahs in the Damascus Document (CD)

The community at Qumran believed in the coming of a Messiah. The question is this: Did they believe in the coming of more than one Messiah? DSS scholars differ on this issue. Here are the references to the Messiah in the *Damascus Document* (CD):
CD 12:23–13:1 – “Those who follow these statutes in the age of wickedness until the coming of the Messiah of Aaron and Israel shall form groups of at least ten men, by thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.”¹

CD 14:19 – “[until the coming of the Messia]h of Aaron and of Israel will pardon their iniquity”²

The *Damascus Document* seems to indicate that the Qumran community was looking for one Messiah who would be of Aaron (the priest) and of Israel (the people’s king). They planned on organizing groups of men in anticipation of the coming Messiah. They looked for a Messiah who would take away their sins. They also looked for a Messiah who would lead them into battle and defeat their enemies.

The assumption that the Qumran sect looked for one Messiah was challenged by DSS scholars with the discovery of a plural reference to Messiahs in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS 9:11).

Geza Vermes gives this English translation of the Hebrew DSS in *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*: “They shall depart from none of the counsels of the Law to walk in all

¹ Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (The Penguin Press, 1997), p. 141.

² *Ibid.*, p. 143.



the stubbornness of their hearts, but shall be ruled by the primitive precepts in which the men of the community were first instructed until there shall come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.”³

The Works of the Messiah Listed in the *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521)

The *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521) is a Dead Sea Scroll which consists of eleven fragments, and the script is dated to 100 B.C. The term “Messiah” is used in this text without the addition of Aaron or Israel. The scroll incorporates Psalm 146:6-7 and Isaiah 61:1 and shows the characteristics of the anticipated Jewish Messiah.

Geza Vermes gives this English translation of the Hebrew DSS called the *Messianic Apocalypse*:

“...[the hea]vens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones. Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourselves in His service! All you

hopeful in your heart, will you not find the Lord in this? For the Lord will consider the pious and call the righteous by name. Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power. And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent]. And f[or]ever I will clea[ve to the h]opeful and in His mercy...And the fr[uit...] will not be delayed for anyone. And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have been as...For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor.”⁴

In the synagogue in Nazareth, Yeshua read Isaiah 61:1-2a: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the ac-

ceptable year of the LORD” (Lk. 4:18-19). Yeshua then told the Jews in the synagogue, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21). He was claiming to be the Messiah predicted in Isaiah 61:1. Some of the same characteristics of the Messiah listed in the *Messianic Apocalypse* are found not only in Isaiah 61:1 but also in Luke 4: liberating the captives, restoring sight to the blind, and bringing good news to the poor. Yeshua liberated the captives when He performed exorcisms on those who were demonized (Mt. 8:28-33; 17:14-20; Mk. 1:21-27; 15:21-28; Lk. 4:31-36). He gave sight to the blind (Mt. 9:27-31; Mk. 8:22-26; Lk. 18:35-43; Jn. 9:1-12). He also preached the good news to the poor (Mt. 5–7).

The *Messianic Apocalypse* mentions that the Messiah would “straighten the bent.” This work of Messiah is not found in Isaiah 61, but it is found in Psalm 146:8. Luke 13:10-17 records how Yeshua healed a woman who was bent over and could not raise herself up. The Dead Sea Scrolls do not mention Yeshua, and the Qumran

³ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴ Ibid., p. 391-392.





The Shrine of the Book was built as a repository for the first seven scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1946/7. The museum was built as a white dome. A central display designed to resemble a Torah scroll but containing the Isaiah scroll dominates the room.

community was not a Christian community. But it is fascinating to see that the Qumran community looked for a Messiah who could perform miracles, and Yeshua performed these very miracles during His ministry in Israel, proving to many Jews that He was the anticipated Messiah.

John the Baptist was discouraged in prison and was wondering if Yeshua was the Messiah. He sent some men to Yeshua, and they asked Him, "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Yeshua gave them this answer, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the

gospel preached to them" (Lk. 7:22). Yeshua told the messengers to inform John the Baptist that He was doing the works of the anticipated Jewish Messiah. One work that Yeshua mentioned is not found in Isaiah 61:1-2a: raising the dead. But again, the *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521) includes raising the dead among the works of the Messiah. Yeshua raised the dead on three occasions: (1) He raised the widow's son of Nain from the dead (Lk. 7:11-17); (2) He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mk. 5:21-43); and (3) He raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11). Many Jews came to believe that Yeshua was the Messiah as a result of these amazing miracles.

The Messiah as the "Son of God" in the *Apocryphon of Daniel* (4Q246)



The *Apocryphon of Daniel* (4Q246) is also called the "Aramaic Apocalypse." It contains two Messianic phrases: "Son of God" and "Son of the Most High." Various interpretations have been given by DSS scholars for these references to the Messiah: (1) Historical king – Alexander Balas (J.T. Milik), (2) the Antichrist (David Flusser), (3) an angel like Michael (F. Garcia Martinez), and (4) the Jewish people collectively (Martin Hengel). E. Puech believes that the Son of the Most High could be either the future Davidic Messiah or a historical Seleucid pretender.



Geza Vermes gives this English translation of the Hebrew DSS *Apocryphon of Daniel* (4Q246): “The son of God he will be proclaimed and the son of the Most High they will call him. Like the sparks of the vision, so will be their kingdom. They will reign for years on the earth and they will trample all.”⁵

The prophet Daniel predicted that the Messiah (the Son of Man) would come with the clouds of heaven and establish His kingdom on this earth (Dan. 7:13-14, 22, 27). The high priest Caiaphas confronted Yeshua at His trial. He said, “I put you under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Messiah, the Son of God.” Yeshua said, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” The high priest Caiaphas tore his robe and said that Yeshua was guilty of blasphemy (Mt. 26:63-65). But was Yeshua guilty of blasphemy? He claimed to be the Son of God and the Son of Man predicted by Daniel. Yeshua died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose again from the dead, proving that He is the Son of God and Messiah (Rom. 1:1-4).

The Future Reigning Messiah in *Florilegium* (4Q174)

The *Florilegium* is a short DSS found in cave 4 near Qumran. Geza Vermes gives this translation: “The Lord declares to you that He will build you a House. I will raise up your seed after

you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he shall be my son. He is the Branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law [to rule] in Zion [at the end] of time. As it is written, I will raise up the tent of David that is fallen. That is to say, the fallen tent of David is he who shall arise to save Israel.”⁶

In the unconditional Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-16), the Lord promised King David that He would establish his house, throne, and kingdom. The Lord further promised that He would be a father to His son David. The Dead Sea Scroll *Florilegium* refers to this Davidic Covenant promise. The DSS also refers to the Messiah as “the Branch of David” (see Isa. 11:1; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13). Zechariah predicted that the Branch of David would build the temple of the Lord and sit and rule on His throne and that He would be a priest on His throne. This prophecy refers to the future when Yeshua will rule the world as the Branch of David from His

throne in Jerusalem. The *Florilegium* refers to another Messianic prophecy of the raising up of the fallen tent of David (see Amos 9:11). Currently, no Davidic king sits on the throne of David ruling Israel. In the future kingdom, Yeshua the Messiah will fulfill this prophecy.

Conclusion

It is amazing to see how many places the Messiah is mentioned or referenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is even more amazing to see how Yeshua fulfills the prophecies about the Messiah found in the Hebrew Bible. The Jews in the first century were looking for a political ruler who would overthrow the Romans and give them back their freedom. Many Jews rejected Yeshua as Messiah because He came the first time to save us from our sins (Mt. 1:21). But Yeshua is coming back to sit on the throne of David and rule Israel and the world in the coming kingdom. Even so, come Yeshua.



Dr. Gromacki is the Department Chair and Professor of Bible and Theology and the Director of the Ph.D. in Bible and Theology Program at the Calvary University, Kansas City, Missouri.

⁵ Ibid., p. 577.

⁶ Ibid., p. 494.