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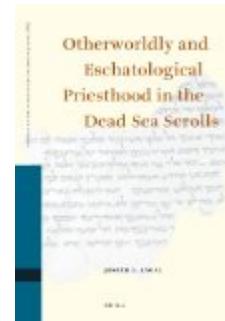
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joseph L. Angel. *Otherworldly and Eschatological Priesthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. xiii + 380 pp. \$179.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-18145-8.

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Priests in Heaven, the Eschaton, and Qumran

This study began as Joseph L. Angel's 2008 dissertation at New York University, under the tutelage of Lawrence Schiffman. Angel takes up interesting issues of priesthood within Dead Sea Scrolls that have not received a full-scale systematic inquiry heretofore, namely, the frequently encountered images of an angelic (or "otherworldly") priesthood and an eschatological priesthood. His turn toward these nonhistorical priestly imaginings of the ancient scroll writers is motivated not just by curiosity but also by his awareness of the thorniness of trying to derive any secure data about historical and social priestly realities of the authors' community or communities. He writes that "the present study therefore largely abandons such historical inquiry in favor of investigation of the imagined constructs of priesthood in the Scrolls corpus" (p. 15). Acknowledgement of uncertainties is always commendable, and in chapter 1 Angel notes that the varied explanations of the religious and social origins of the authors of the scrolls have "highlighted the gaps in our knowledge regarding the variety of groups in Second Temple period Judaism" and "underscored the need to broaden our perspective regarding Qumran origins beyond the confining borders of the Essene hypothesis" (p. 8). As the book proceeds, it is clear that the study does not depend on or promote a certain viewpoint of these matters.

The book is well written and its organization is systematic and logical. It consists of eight chapters divided into an introduction (chapter 1) followed by two sections of three and four chapters respectively. In the first

section, Angel studies "otherworldly priesthood traditions" as they appear first in nonsectarian texts, then in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice where they are most prominent, and finally in sectarian texts. Angel is aware of the difficulties associated with dividing the scrolls into these three categories; his division is more heuristic than ideological. The second section treats the numerous "images of eschatological priesthood" in sectarian texts (to which they are limited). Angel looks at the priestly messiah (and similar) figures. He considers the roots of the Qumranic ideas of priesthood, with chapter 6 focusing on the historical and sociological context of "messianic and eschatological priesthood" in the Second Temple era, and chapter 7 looking for these ideas in other Israelite/Jewish literature. The last chapter summarizes and draws conclusions regarding "the nature of the Qumran community and broader segments of Second Temple Judaism" (p. 20).

In chapter 2, Angel surveys seven nonsectarian (not sharing seemingly strictly Qumranic identification markers) texts for their ideas of otherworldly priesthood, the oldest of which is the Book of Watchers. While not explicitly calling watchers or humans priests, Angel, following previous scholars, convincingly shows that there is a good deal of priestly terminology surrounding the characters and actions of watchers and the human figure Enoch. Attention is then turned to Jubilees, Aramaic Levi, 4Q Visions of Amran, the Qumran Ben Sira fragments, 4QInstructions, and 4QApocryphon of Levi. The survey makes two major points well: among groups of third- to first-century BCE Jews,

there was “widespread popularity” of ideas about angels serving in a celestial priesthood; and of the human priesthood (Jerusalem) reflecting the glory of the otherworldly priesthood, through priestly radiance, brilliant lights, and exalted and separated status of priests as intermediaries between God and the righteous community (p. 82).

The third chapter deals exclusively with the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice manuscripts, which contain the “most extensive” material regarding otherworldly priesthood of any Qumran document (p. 83). Angel concludes that while the provenance of the text is unclear (sectarian? pre-sectarian?), it is reasonably clear that the text was important and influential, and “reflects the religious views/practice of the Qumran community at the date of the documents” (p. 87). These liturgical fragments reveal a great deal about the author’s (and community’s) imaginative symbolism that links a celestial priesthood with its counterpart in the community. Again, this chapter does not provide close readings of texts or new interpretations, but it does provide a sound exploration of the ways the liturgy imagines the angelic priesthood and how heavenly and mundane realms were linked in the minds of the authors. Angel spends some time on the debate about how the community may have thought about its participation in the celestial realm. This is to me a matter of religious imagination-experience. It may well differ in individual experience and would, in any case, be beyond our grasp from this distance.

Angel deals with four texts in chapter 4, all of which have been designated as Qumranic sectarian compositions: Rule of Benedictions (1QSb), 4QSongs of the Sage, the Self-Glorification Hymn (4Q491 11 I, 4Q427 7, 1QHa 25:34-27:3, 4Q471b+4Q431 I), and 11QMelchizedek. His nearly sixty pages of analysis and survey convincingly show that when it comes to conceptions of a celestial priesthood these compositions have much in common with the broader range of (mostly older) texts surveyed in chapter 2, including common imagery and terminology. What is most significant about these sectarian texts, which are mostly liturgical, is that there is a heightened sense of participation by the righteous community with/in the celestial realm. Angel argues that the recitation of these texts “is designed to bring about transport to the imaginal realm of the cosmic temple, where earthly ‘priests’ celebrate with the angels” and the “Qumranites participated in the mysteries of God’s knowledge and thus became enlightened like the angels” (pp. 165-166).

Chapter 5 considers what may be the most famous

idea of Qumranic eschatology, namely, the frequently cited “priestly messiah” concept, famously known from 1QS 9:11, where three figures are mentioned—“messiah of Aaron,” “messiah of Israel,” and a “prophet.” Angel, following the insights of others, begins with two crucial caveats: while there has been a flood of attention lavished on this text and the messianic ideas found in the Qumran scrolls, this attention is extremely out of proportion to the number of texts that actually talk about messiah (of any kind); and the scrolls, even in the scarce mentions of messiah that are found, witness a “diversity of messianic concepts” (p. 173). What follows is a survey of various texts that present ideas about the role of priests in the eschaton. Besides ceremonially leading the congregation in the great last war (1QM), the high priest or priests have roles of atonement, interpreting and teaching torah, and presiding over the holy congregation. These notions, of course, relate to the crucial importance and role of priesthood in the ideology of the sect (to judge from many texts), and also serve to set them apart from other contemporary eschatological literature (such as Enoch), in which priests and priesthood do not play a significant role.

In his exploration of the historical and sociological background of ideas of an eschatological priesthood in chapter 6, Angel tries to answer the question of how such ideas that are not found in earlier Israelite/Jewish tradition or history developed. He first notes the important political shifts from the Israelite to Persian to Hellenistic periods, which saw the dramatic political rise of the high priestly office, eventually uniting the office of high priest and king under the Hasmoneans. The Qumran sectarians arose as one group who was highly critical of the sacerdotal operations of the contemporary priesthood. Much of the chapter is spent on Qumranic ideas of purity/impurity and their centrality to the disputes. Angel considers 4QMMT as an example of the early stage of the dispute about the proper maintenance of the sacredness of the temple and its priests. Other later texts show a complete break with the Jerusalem establishment. This break provides the background for the “powerful religious imagination which transformed the desert settlement into a virtual temple and its inhabitants into virtual priests” that can be observed in the liturgical texts. In addition, the texts that imagine an eschatological priesthood “express the profound sectarian thirst for empowerment ... which provides the historical lens through which the expectation of a priestly messiah at Qumran must be viewed” (p. 255).

Chapter 7 is an exploration in contemporary Jewish

literature for possible roots of Qumranic ideas of an eschatological priesthood. Utilizing the idea of priest as an ideal type, Angel explores the Hebrew version of Ben Sira, Aramaic Levi Document (ALD), and Jubilees, showing how they exemplify the evolution of the growing ideological importance of priests and priesthood and exemplify “priestly magnetism” (p. 258). His conclusion, based on a fair assessment of the wide-ranging materials, is that the ideas found in such texts as ALD, Jubilees, and the Temple Scroll “provided the world of ideas which nurtured Qumranite visions of the future priest” (p. 277). According to Angel, “4Q541 9 contains the only straightforward reference to an eschatological priest in a non-sectarian and pre-Qumran text” (p. 278). From this he argues that we must see the expanded notions of the sect’s writings as ideological innovations of the sectarian writers. Angel rightfully cautions that the Qumran scrolls, even the sectarian ones, because of their diverse historical and temporal origins, do not all show the same viewpoint regarding the role of priests and Levites in an ideal temple (p. 207).

Chapters 6 and 7 in particular are somewhat hampered by the anachronistic use of “Bible” (and related terms) as a relevant category for use in understanding the aims and assumptions of the authors of these texts, falling into what Robert Kraft calls the “tyranny of the canon.”[1] For example, it is unhelpful and misleading to simply assert, “According to the Bible, the sources of the former type of impurity ...” (p. 214). Whose Bible? A Tanakh? A Protestant Bible? A Catholic Bible? These bibles, of course, have different texts that speak to matters of purity. Certainly not a Qumranic Bible, for there was no such thing. Nor was the Temple Scroll “concerned primarily with expanding and intensifying the Bible’s rubrics of *ritual* purity” (p. 222). There was no Bible to expand or intensify; there were earlier texts that functioned with various degrees of authority for various groups, some of which we have in bibles, some of

which we do not. The issues under discussion in chapter 6 are matters of purity, and Angel wisely recognizes that there are contrasting teachings found even within a single text, namely, Leviticus 17-26 versus Leviticus 1-16, and certainly this would be the case for “Bible” as a whole. Clearly Qumran authors had texts that they used as authorities, but it should not be assumed that they match the much latter collection called “Bible.” It would have been beneficial for Angel to investigate/speculate about the authoritative text quoted in Ezra 9.11-12 regarding impure marriages, which is not found in “Bible” (similarly see Nehemiah 8.14-15). Angel’s own final example, in which he notices the consonance between ideology in Qumran texts and the text of Malachi, in contrast with viewpoints in Leviticus and other earlier texts, illustrates the value of removing the category and boundaries of the term “Bible” from our study of these ancient texts (p. 292).

Overall this is a successful, needed, and useful study of the ways Qumran texts portray otherworldly priests and eschatological priests. As it turns out, these are not small, minor topics among the scrolls, which makes sense, given the many texts interested in purity matters and texts that present the righteous community as a community of priests. Furthermore, as promised, Angel has shed light not just on Qumranic ideas of celestial and future priesthood, but also on the religious ideology and social history of the community/communities of the scrolls authors. Anyone interested in the Qumran community, in the ideologies of persons who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in the lively and diverse religious identities of Jews in the Second Temple Period will benefit tremendously from this study.

Note

[1]. Robert Kraft, “Para-mania: Beside, Before and Beyond Bible Studies,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 1 (2007): 5-27.

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