

24.10

Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Many scholars have noticed interesting connections between Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The latter documents apparently were preserved by Jews who were contemporaries of Jesus in a remote desert community called Qumran.

The scrolls make much of the figure of Melchizedek (see Gen. 14:18–20), as does Hebrews (see 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1–17). This probably is because the community that preserved these scrolls remained enamored of priestly and liturgical theology even though they no longer accepted the legitimacy of the priesthood associated with the current temple in Jerusalem. The same could be said of the Christian writer who authored Hebrews.

The Qumran sectarians also made much use of the “new covenant” passage in Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Heb. 8), and they took a harsh stance toward apostasy (cf. Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 12:16–17).

The most intriguing connection between Hebrews and Qumran, however, may have to do with messianic expectation. The Qumran sectarians were expecting two messiahs: one a priestly messiah, the other a royal messiah. The book of Hebrews presents Jesus both as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek and as a royal messiah who rules the universe from a throne in heaven (1:3, 8, 13; 2:5, 7, 9; 4:16; 7:1–2; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2, 28).

We have no way to know whether the author of Hebrews knew about the community at Qumran or whether he was familiar with their teachings. But it is interesting that Hebrews has so many contact points with their writings and, in particular, that it presents Jesus as the fulfillment of their dual expectation: he is both the priestly messiah and the royal messiah (see 10:12–13).