

The Psalms and Qumran “Vibrant time of Psalm Composition”

The biggest news about the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Qumran community was that there was no big news. Before they were found, the oldest Hebrew texts of the Old Testament were from about 1000 A. D. The oldest complete copy in Greek, which also contains most of the Old Testament, is about 350 A.D. The ancient scrolls are in amazing agreement with what had been hand copied over the centuries. It is clear testimony that these texts, words, were considered special, holy, God’s words.

Among all the books of the Bible, the Psalms are most numerous in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which indicates their immense popularity at Qumran. But the form of the Psalter in these most ancient manuscripts is diverse and fascinating. Up to Psalm 89 or so, the scrolls contain material very much in the order used by Jews and Christians today, although there are a few variations. But from Psalm 91 onward, many of the Psalms scrolls differ radically from the Psalter as we know it.

There are no less than forty Psalms scrolls or manuscripts that incorporate Psalms, ranging in date from the mid-second century BCE to about 50-68 CE.

p 507 “The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible” Translated and with commentary
by Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint & Eugene Ulrich Harper Collins NY 1999

The Psalms are made up of five books. Psalm 90 is first in the third book. The scholars think each book was compiled and then added to the earlier ones. The implication is clear. At the time of Jesus new Psalms were being composed and passed around. There is no record of discussions among early Christian or Jewish scholars about what to include. The Psalms were popular music. They were sung in private. Their use was not restricted to the Temple. There were synagogues everywhere. From the time of the Babylonian captivity a synagogue would meet in a house or outdoors. The first special buildings are in the time of Jesus.

This has a practical implication, concerning Mary’s song “The Magnificat”, Zacharias’s “Benedictus” and Simeon’s “Nunc Dimittus”. Modern scholars believe that some anonymous liturgical poet composed them in the few years between Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. The argument is that Mary and the others could not have had the skills and learning to compose the songs. Those times were very religious, with increasing devotion and knowledge. Villages were building synagogue buildings, ritual baths, stone kosher jars.

Traveling rabbis were going around bringing the latest news, the discussions of the great scholars in Jerusalem. I have known some young men, steeped in old English liturgical phasing and chant who could extemporaneously pray in perfect ancient style. I have no doubt that there were many in Jesus' day who could have done also.

Mary and Zacharias could have meditated on their experience and composed a proper psalm of praise. Simeon might have composed his short song on the spot out of all his past knowledge. The culture valued accurate recall of spoken words, no notepads. Mary and Joseph could have come up with an accurate memory of Simeon's words to them. We must not evaluate the abilities and interest of people in far different cultures and times on the basis of our personal experiences. However, it is based on my experience that I find it hard to believe that their songs were composed by authors who left nothing else.

Mary's mother was cousin to the priest Zacharias' wife Elizabeth. It was a class stratified society. They were from the priestly class, for generations steeped in worship. It was only a century since the scholars removed women from singing in the Temple. The synagogues would not have to follow that ruling. There could have been women choirs singing the old and new psalms. Some might even have composed their own to sing.

There are other important issues. The most frequently quoted Psalm in the New Testament is Ps 110. Jesus uses it to challenge the Pharisees. The Talmudic scholars made no claim that Jesus misused this Psalm. They accepted what Jesus affirms. "He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" Mt 22:43f. Note, Jesus is not claiming David wrote the Psalm, He is saying that was the Pharisees understanding.

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<http://TheSignOfConcord.com>

S. D. G.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Psalms_Scroll

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Hebrew_Bible_canon

The Sign of Concord

add footnote to Mary and Zacharias

¹ This was a time with many new psalms. The first 89 Psalms are uniform in the Dead Sea scrolls after that there is diversity in number and order. “The general consensus seems to be that the Psalter canon had not been entirely fixed at this point” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Psalms_Scroll https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Hebrew_Bible_canon

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menahem_the_Essene

<https://israelstudycenter.com/who-was-the-first-comforter/>

WHO WAS THE FIRST COMFORTER?

In Jewish Jesus by Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg February 10, 2017

On one occasion Jesus made a curious promise to his disciples. He said: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter” (John 14:16). This implies, of course, that he himself was the first Comforter. But why did he phrase it this way?

Based on hymns found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Israel Knohl, a professor at the Hebrew University – and a guest lecturer with us here at Israel Study Center – argued that one generation before Jesus, a messianic leader arose and became known as the Teacher of Righteousness.

It is possible to identify this person with Menachem the Essene who held an advisory position in the court of King Herod. Menachem led a very dangerous life, secretly preparing for what eventually proved to be an unsuccessful revolt. His followers believed that he was the

Messiah; but he was disgraced and killed by Roman soldiers during the revolt in 4 B.C.E. (Later they understood him to be fulfillment of the suffering servant texts in Isaiah).

The Hebrew word that lies behind the above-mentioned "Comforter" is in fact Menachem (מנחם) – same as the name of the Essene leader.

It is possible that Jesus, by referring to the coming Holy Spirit as "another Comforter," was identifying himself as the true/ultimate Menachem – the Comforter of Israel; and that he was calling the Essene community to put its trust in Him. Unlike Menachem the Essene, however, he would lead a successful rebellion against all the enemies of Israel and by his resurrection overcome even sin and death.

The Temple Alfred Edersheim p 31 population of Jerusalem 600,000 (according to Tacitus)

<http://www.bible-history.com/backd2/jerusalem.html>

would indicate any population figures during the time of Jesus. The main sources available estimate a population of around 80,000 to 100,000 citizens. But hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Diaspora which numbered around 4,000,000 visited Jerusalem for the Passover and other festivals yearly with an estimated 3,000,000 people, both Jews and Gentiles, visiting Jerusalem during the Passover when the Lamb of God was lifted on a Roman cross.

According to Josephus, Hecataeus of Abdera wrote in the 4th century BC that Jerusalem "is inhabited by 120,000 men." Josephus also said that there were 2,700,000 people within the walls of Jerusalem when the Romans, under Titus, besieged it in 70 AD. Tacitus recorded Jerusalem at 600,000 men women and children. Palestine as a whole contained around 3 to 4 million inhabitants.

When the Jewish rebellion began under the emperor Nero the number of Jews increased rapidly coming from all over the world seeking protection within the high walls and fortifications of the city. Josephus records that 1,100,000 Jews perished during the siege and 97,000 were taken as captives and sold into slavery. This was about 40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

Rome had an estimated 1,200,000 inhabitants and considered the largest city with Alexandria placed second, and Antioch third. History records that there were around 100,000,000 people within the 1,500,000 square miles of the Roman Empire during the time of Christ.

¹ change