

LEVITICAL MESSIAHOLOGY IN LATE JUDAISM: ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE

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I. BACKGROUND

The apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature of the intertestamental period bears witness to a striking development in Jewish messianic expectation—namely, the emergence of the idea that the Messiah, or at least one of the eschatological figures associated with the coming of the end, would be a priestly member of the tribe of Levi. This Levitical messianology represents a radical departure from traditional thought but is quite understandable against the background of the historical situation. Or, to speak in figurative terms, the stream of messianic thought wanders somewhat from its usual course during this period, but this diversion of the stream can be understood when one takes into account the topography of the times.

Three points in particular should be noted about this background. First, ever since the return from exile the high priesthood had been the most significant office in Israel, an office that combined both religious and political authority. In the post-exilic nation Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the Davidic governor stand together as “the two anointed ones who stand by the LORD of the whole earth” (Zech 4:14). The term that the RSV translates as “anointed” is not a derivation of *māšah* but is *b^enē-hayyishār* (“sons of oil”). Even if *māšah* had been used here it would not be proper to see in this an explicit messianic reference. The point, though, is that from the reconstitution of the nation of Israel the role of the high priest was an important one. And after the Davidic hopes that Zerubbabel had inspired had died with him,¹ the high priest alone remained as the de facto head of the Jewish nation.² The hymn of praise to the line of Aaron in Sir 45:6-26 is clear evidence of the esteem in which the high priesthood was held in the Ptolemaic period. And although the high priest and his followers were largely responsible for the Hellenizing crisis in the mid-second century B.C., for three and a half centuries before the Maccabees the nation of Israel had been under the rule of a member of the line of Aaron, not of David. The impact of this on messianic expectation should not be underestimated.

Second, although many of the priests were among the first to adopt Hellenistic customs (e.g. 2 Macc 4:11-17), nevertheless the resistance to the Hellenization of Judaism was led by members of the priestly ranks, the family of Mattathias.

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¹We have no sure information concerning the end of Zerubbabel's career. Ezra 6:14 excludes his name from the list of those who completed the building of the temple, and so perhaps he had died or was removed from office by this time. Both he himself and the messianic hopes that he kindled (Hag 2:21-22; Zechariah 4) seem to have passed quietly from the scene.

²See, e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 11.317 where, when Alexander wanted soldiers and provisions from Israel as a sign of loyalty, he presented his demands to the high priest.

Because of the later division between the Pharisees and Sadducees this is sometimes overlooked. Finkelstein is wrong, for example, to emphasize the role of the Hasidim to the extent that he sees the Maccabean revolt as a popular lay rebellion against an entrenched priestly aristocracy.³ His analysis has a certain validity, but it should be remembered that it was a group of faithful priests that rallied Israel in one of its darkest hours and saved the nation. This conjunction of the ideals of the faithful priest and the warrior-deliverer is another important factor in the background to the belief in a Levitical Messiah.

The third factor to be taken into account here is the impact that was made on popular opinion by the Hasmonaean rule, a time of peace and prosperity unequalled since the time of Solomon.⁴ Of course before the Hasmonaean empire could have any impact on popular messianic conception the question of its legitimacy had to be settled.⁵ It seems that objections were raised against the Hasmonaean high priests both because they were not of the line of Zadok⁶ and because they combined secular government with the office of the high priest.⁷ A word of explanation is necessary with respect to this second objection. It is true that in the Persian and Greek periods the high priest had wielded political power. But to accept him as a de facto ruler who did not bear any political title during a period of foreign domination was one thing; to agree to the high priest's assuming the title of leader (1 Macc 14:41) at a time of political independence when other forms of government were open to them was quite another.

It appears that the Hasmonaeans themselves supplied Biblical justification for their dynasty by an appeal to the precedent of Melchizedek, the "priest of the Most High God" (Gen 14:18) who also combined the offices of king⁸ and priest. The clearest evidence of this is found in *As. Mos.* 6:1:

Then there shall be raised up unto them kings bearing rule, and they shall call

³L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Social Background of Their Faith* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1940) 3.

⁴Or at least since the days of Jeroboam II, though his reign did not make as much of an impact on later tradition.

⁵For a full discussion of the Jewish opposition to the Hasmonaeans see J. A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) 64-89.

⁶Those Hasidim who were prepared to trust Alcimus despite his friendship with the Seleucids on the sole ground that he was of the Zadokite line (1 Macc 7:12-14; 2 Macc 14:7) had their counterparts in later times. The fiercely pro-Zadokite Qumran sect may well have broken with the Hasmonaeans on this issue. (Jonathan is the most likely identification of the "wicked priest"; see G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* [Middlesex: Penguin, 1962] 57.) The issue of the legitimacy of Hyrcanus' high priesthood also appears to lie behind his break with the Pharisees (Josephus *Ant.* 13.288-292), since it is the high priesthood that they asked him to give up.

⁷This of course is part of the issue in the Pharisees' break with Hyrcanus. It is also reflected in the harsh criticism of the Hasmonaean priest-kings in *As. Mos.* 6:1 and is probably the issue behind the compromise of 1 Macc 14:41: The people gave provisional agreement to Simon's ruler-priesthood but reserved the final decision until a qualified prophet should arise.

⁸There is no evidence that any Hasmonaean proclaimed himself king before the short-lived reign of Aristobulus (104 B.C.), the son of John Hyrcanus (Josephus *Ant.* 13.301). But the appeal to Melchizedek undoubtedly prepared the way for this development.

themselves *priests of the Most High God*; they shall assuredly work iniquity in the Holy of Holies (*italics mine*).

Both Josephus⁹ and the Talmud¹⁰ described Hyrcanus with this same Melchizedekan phrase, "priest of the Most High God." By means of this appeal to Biblical precedent the Hasmonaean rule was made legitimate in the eyes of the people, at least until such time as a prophet would arise (1 Macc 14:41). This being accomplished, the way was clear for the Hasmonaean rule to serve as a model for messianic speculation.

Thus by the late second century B.C. Israel had witnessed the prominence of the high priest during three hundred fifty years of foreign domination, the role of the priestly warriors in delivering Israel from oppression and from the threat to their faith, and the glories of the Hasmonaean empire under the rule of its leader-priests. It is against this background that we must see the development of the belief in a Levitical Messiah, to a more careful study of which we must now turn.

II. A SURVEY OF THE RELEVANT PASSAGES

The passages that are most important for our study are *1 Enoch* 90:6-42; 91:12-17; 1 Macc 14:4-15; *Jub.* 23:26-31; 31:13-20; *T. Levi* 8:11-17; 18:2-14; and various Qumran texts.

1. *1 Enoch*. Two passages in *1 Enoch* are at least tangentially relevant to our purposes here. In both 90:6-12 and 91:12-17 the Maccabean period is seen as the turning point of the ages, ushering in the age of bliss—though there is no Levitical messianism here and, in fact, the role of any Messiah is quite subdued. The first of these passages is imbedded in one of Enoch's dream visions in which the fortunes of Israel from the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. to the end of the age are in the hands of a series of seventy shepherds. These shepherds are probably to be seen as angelic guardians of Israel rather than as Gentile nations,¹¹ and the whole vision is influenced strongly by the seventy weeks of Dan 9:24 ff.¹² These seventy shepherds are divided into four groups. The shepherds began their pasturing of the sheep when the Lord "forsook their house and their tower" (*1 Enoch* 89:56—i.e., in 587 B.C.), and the first group of twelve shepherds covers the period of the exile. Then the next group of twenty-three shepherds¹³ represents the period of Persian domination, when the temple was rebuilt in spite of local opposition (89:72-73) and when a worldwide dispersion took place (89:75). Then the shepherding of Israel passes into the hands of other shepherds (90:1), undoubtedly Alexander the Great and the Greek rulers who followed him. In this period the sheep suffer at the hands of "dogs and eagles and kites" (90:2-4).

⁹Josephus *Ant.* 16.163: "Hyrcanus, the priest of Almighty God."

¹⁰Cf. *Roš. Haš.* 18b: "When the government of the Hasmonaeans became strong and defeated them, they ordained that they should mention the name of God even on bonds, and they used to write thus: 'In the year So-and-so of Johanan [i.e., John Hyrcanus], high priest to the Most High God.'"

¹¹See the note to *1 Enoch* 89:59 in *APOT*, 2. 255, where it is pointed out that Gentiles are generally represented by beasts; cf. *1 Enoch* 89:68.

¹²Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* (2d ed.; London: Lutterworth, 1947) 60.

¹³The number is obtained by subtracting the twelve shepherds of *1 Enoch* 89:72 from the thirty-five of 90:1.

The fourth group of twelve shepherds, which covers the period from the end of the Greek domination to the beginning of the messianic age, is the period that most concerns us here. Whereas the sheep of Israel had been blinded under the rule of the shepherds (89:74), in this period lambs are born who "begin to open their eyes and to see" (90:6). These lambs begin to sprout horns, and one in particular sprouts a "great horn" over which the ravens and eagles have no power. Finally "a great sword was given to the sheep" (90:19), and the sheep defeat and disperse all the beasts of the earth and the birds of heaven. This ushers in the judgment (90:20-27), the construction of a new temple (90:28-29), the restoration of Israel (90:30-32), the resurrection (90:33), the establishment of an age of peace and righteousness (90:35-36), and then after all this the entrance of a messianic figure who is represented both as a white bull and a lamb.¹⁴

There is some discussion as to the date of this passage and the identification of the various symbols. Charles interpreted the "lambs" as a reference to the Hasi-dim and the "great horn" as Judas Maccabeus.¹⁵ Since the horn is still fighting at the time of writing, the passage must have been written prior to 161 B.C. in his view. Torrey on the other hand followed Schürer and others in identifying the great horn with Hyrcanus.¹⁶ Because of the cataclysmic nature of the coming of the messianic age in this passage, however—as opposed to the gradual and immanent messianic age that appears in later pro-Hasmonaean material—we accept the position that this Enoch material is early, stemming from the early part of the Maccabean period.

Thus for our author the awakening of Israel that took place under the military leadership of the Maccabees is the event that ushers in the messianic age. A similar concept is found in the apocalypse of weeks (*1 Enoch* 93:1-14; 91:12-17). Here the whole history of Israel beginning with the time of Enoch is divided into ten weeks. Various events in Israel's history are easily recognizable in this periodization. The Babylonian exile occupies the sixth week (93:8). In the post-exilic period, which occupies the seventh week, "an apostate generation" arises (93:9). But the eighth week is an age both of righteousness and of the sword: "And after that there shall be another, the eighth week, that of righteousness; and a sword shall be given to it that a righteous judgment may be executed on the oppressors, and sinners shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous" (91:12). All commentators are agreed that the righteous ones who execute judgment on the oppressors are the company of the faithful led by the Maccabees. The ninth week is a period of universal judgment, in which "the world shall be written down for destruction" (91:14), and then the tenth week ushers in a new heaven and "many weeks without number" of goodness and righteousness. Again, the Maccabean revolt is seen as the bridge to the messianic age.

In addition, in this passage as in the previous one the messianic age is brought in by cosmic and cataclysmic events. The judgment extends to angels as well

¹⁴C. C. Torrey, *The Apocryphal Literature* (New Haven: Yale University, 1945) 111 ff., attempted to find two Messiahs here, but it seems evident from v 38—"the first among them [i.e., the white bull] became a lamb"—that only one Messiah is in view.

¹⁵APOT, 2. 170-171.

¹⁶Torrey, *Apocryphal*, 113; E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (tr. S. Taylor and P. Christie; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 2. 66.

(91:15), and the messianic age begins only after the destruction of heaven (91:16) and earth (91:14).

What conclusions can be drawn that are relevant to our discussion? First, the Maccabean revolt is seen as the event that ushers in the fulfillment of prophetic promises. Second, this age is established only after a series of cataclysmic events with cosmic significance. And finally, although the Maccabean age is given eschatological significance in Enoch there is little interest in working a Messiah into the scheme. In the dream vision he appears only after everything has been accomplished, and in the apocalypse of weeks there is no messianic figure at all. In particular, though there is an interest in the renewal of the temple (90:28-29; 91:13) there is no hint of Levitical messianology.

2. *1 Maccabees*. While *1 Maccabees* is by no means an apocalyptic work, the ode to Simon the high priest in 14:4-15 cannot be overlooked. The passage begins with the statement, "The land had peace as long as Simon lived," and then goes on to describe Simon's rule as a time of glory and prosperity, where Simon subdues foreign kings (vv 5-7, 13), shows concern for the poor, defends the Law and establishes righteousness (v 14), glorifies the temple (v 15) and enjoys a world-wide reputation (v 10).

All of this is strongly reminiscent of the OT messianic ideal, not only in its broad contours but also in its details. Although the psalm was probably written in Hebrew,¹⁷ the Greek translation echoes the LXX language of messianic passages at a number of points, no doubt reflecting similarities that were already present in the Hebrew original. For example, compare 1 Macc 14:8 with Zech 8:12; 1 Macc 14:8 with Ezek 34:27; 1 Macc 14:12 with Mic 4:4. The only significant difference in these pairs of passages is in the tenses of the verbs: What was future in the prophetic writings can be spoken of as having already taken place in the Hasmonaeen era. Though these are the most striking messianic echoes, others are present as well.¹⁸

Now the author of *1 Maccabees* was well aware of Simon's sad end (16:16), and so it is not correct to say that he saw Simon as the "Messiah" in any apocalyptic or eschatological sense. Rather he viewed the messianic age as a this-worldly phenomenon, a gradual and immanent historical process that was inaugurated by the high priests of the Hasmonaeen line. In Goldstein's words:

The abundant echoes of prophecies in the poem here are intended to suggest to the Jewish reader that the age of fulfilment of the prophecies of Israel's glory had begun in the years of Simon's rule.¹⁹

¹⁷See *APOT*, 1. 61; B. M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University, 1957) 134.

¹⁸For example, v 9 echoes Zech 8:4. For more extensive lists of OT parallels see *APOT*, 1. 117-118; Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, 490-492.

¹⁹Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, 490. Though Josephus was not at all interested in messianic speculation (F. J. Foakes-Jackson went so far as to say that Messiahs were "dreaded by Josephus"; *Josephus and the Jews* [London: SPCK, 1930] 90), his summation of the career of John Hyrcanus reflects a similar appreciation of the glories of the Hasmonaeans: "But when Hyrcanus had put an end to this sedition [i.e. the Pharisees], he after that lived happily, and administered the government in the best manner for thirty-one years, and then died, leaving behind him five sons. He was esteemed by God worthy of three privileges—the government of his nation, the dignity of the high priesthood, and prophecy; for God was with him, and enabled him to know futurities" (*Ant.* 13.299-300).

3. *Jubilees*. This midrash of Genesis picks up a number of the themes that have been noted to this point and augments them with some sort of messianic role for the tribe of Levi. Before looking at this, however, it is necessary first to discuss the date and provenance of the work. As Charles has pointed out, there are a number of characteristics in *Jubilees* that later come to be associated with the Pharisees.²⁰ The midrashic nature of the whole work is of course similar to later Pharisaic exegetical patterns. The prominence of angels (*Jub.* 1:25, 27; 2:1, 18; etc.) and the attempt to show that even the patriarchs obeyed the Law (7:3-5; cf. Num 29:2, 5; 15:1-3) are strongly reminiscent of Pharisaic emphases. The author, however, supports the Hasmonaeen dynasty, which can be seen from the fact that he emphasizes the tribe of Levi and calls Levi's descendants "priests of the Most High God" (*Jub.* 32:1), the title which, as we have seen, the Hasmonaeans claimed for themselves. In addition, we might cite the curious fact of the lacuna at 13:25, where the narrative is beginning to pick up the story of Melchizedek. It is entirely within the realm of possibility that a scribe found this passage to be too supportive of the Hasmonaeans and so omitted it.

The fact that our author supports the Hasmonaeans does not imply, however, that he is as pleased with the current situation as was the writer of 1 Macc 14:4-15. Throughout the whole work he strongly urges Israel on to greater righteousness, particularly in matters of ritual purity and calendrical observance.

Because of this combination of Pharisaic and Hasmonaeen emphases the work should be dated before the Pharisees and the Sadducees became distinct parties—that is, before the reign of John Hyrcanus.²¹ It is likely, however, that the title "priest of the Most High God" was used no earlier than in the reign of Simon. Actually Hyrcanus is the earliest Hasmonaeen to whom the title is explicitly applied in our sources. Thus we should date this work during the time of Simon or John Hyrcanus, and it may be that the reference to the subjugation of Edom in *Jub.* 38:14 places us squarely in the time of Hyrcanus, who was the first to annex Edom to Israel.²²

Turning to the eschatology of *Jubilees*, the first thing to note is the appearance again of the idea of a gradual and immanent messianic age.²³ The significant

²⁰Cf. *APOT*, 2. 8.

²¹Torrey's attempt on the basis of linguistic evidence to date it in the second half of the first century B.C. is surely wrong (*Apocryphal*, 128).

²²So *APOT*, 2. 69. H. H. Rowley's Maccabean date for *Jubilees* is too early (*Jewish Apocalyptic and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [London: Athlone, 1957] 22). The polemic in *Jubilees* is not the kind that would arise during the crisis period of the persecution of Antiochus, as Rowley suggested. Rather the debates reflect a time when Israel could enjoy the luxury of internal argumentation about calendars and purity laws.

²³It should be noted in passing that this "early Sadducean" eschatology, with its gradual, immanent and history-affirming view of the messianic era, as found in *Jubilees* and, as will be shown below, in the Testament of Levi as well, stands in sharp contrast to the cataclysmic eschatology with its pessimistic view of history that is usually associated with apocalyptic literature and is found for example in Enoch's dream vision of the seventy shepherds. Though this contrast is not often noted in discussions of the nature and characteristics of apocalyptic literature it should alert us to the fact that, as Ladd has pointed out, it is necessary to distinguish between form and content when using the term "apocalyptic." As it is commonly used "apocalyptic" has a twofold reference—to a kind of literary genre characterized by exotic symbolism, periodizations of history and so on, and to an eschatology and view of history that is found in much though not all of this literature. The blurring of this distinction has led to the unnecessary polar-

passage is 23:26-31. After a period of distress at the hands of the Gentiles, "the children shall begin to study the laws and to seek the commandments and to return to the path of righteousness" (v 26). As a result "the days shall begin to grow many and increase amongst those children of men" (v 27). Men will begin to live to the age of one thousand years, the span of time originally allotted by God (4:30). This repetition of "shall begin to" underlines the gradual nature of this age of bliss, where longevity will be accompanied by "peace and joy," "blessing and healing" (v 29), judgment on the enemies of Israel (v 30) and the absence of the works of Satan (v 29).

What connection is there between the Maccabean age and the kingdom of bliss, according to the author of Jubilees? The usual answer to this question is that the author sees the zeal for the Law displayed by the Hasidim and the Maccabees as the spark that kindles this gradual messianic age.²⁴ Martin Hengel, however, takes a different position.²⁵ He detects in Jubilees a real disappointment with the results of the Maccabean campaign and attempts to connect Jubilees closely with the rise of the Qumran community. Both had expected that the Maccabean conflict would usher in the time of salvation, but

its failure to come, the endless prolongation of the torments of war and the change in the Maccabees from being charismatic leaders of the people to being adaptable real politicians and violent *condottieri* must have been a great disappointment to them. The explanation was ready to hand: the people as a whole had not been worthy of the dawn of the time of salvation, and so it had to be purified by further judgments. Its place was therefore to be taken by the "remnant," the Essene community of salvation.²⁶

To support this position Hengel cited *Jub.* 23:21-23. He interpreted the phrase in v 21, "and those who have escaped shall not return from their wickedness to the way of righteousness," as descriptive of the period following the Maccabean victory. Thus he has to see a further judgment at the hands of the Gentiles in vv 23-25 before the messianic age can begin.²⁷

Hengel's suggestion is intriguing, but it cannot be maintained. Since the struggle in v 20 is a conflict between the righteous and the sinners within Israel it is difficult to see how Hengel can view this as the Maccabean struggle against foreign oppression. The mention of the pollution of the sanctuary (v 21) does not seem to apply to a situation after Judas' cleansing of the temple, unless this pollution is due to the presence of the non-Zadokite high priesthood. But this possi-

ization of prophetic and apocalyptic and to the disregard for the content of some NT passages because of their apocalyptic form. See G. E. Ladd, "Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?", *JBL* (1957) 94-100; "The Place of Apocalyptic in Biblical Religion," *EvQ* 30 (1958) 75-85.

²⁴Cf. *APOT*, 2. 9, 48-49; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 292.

²⁵M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 1. 226.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Davenport has attempted to solve the problems in this passage with the suggestion that Jubilees has undergone several successive redactions. He would see v 21 as an interpolation by a redactor living in the Hasmonaean period, whereas the rest of the passage (vv 14-31) comes from an admirer of the Maccabees. But the problems raised by this passage are not serious enough to require such a radical solution. See G. L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 32-46, 75.

bility runs counter to the support for the Hasmonaeans that we have noted elsewhere in Jubilees. In fact the Hasmonaeen emphasis of Jubilees in itself rules out Hengel's theory. It seems more likely, therefore, that the whole passage from vv 19-26 deals with the period of the Maccabean revolt, though not in a completely chronological fashion. Verses 19-21 look at the internal struggle within Israel (cf. 1 Macc 2:44-48), while vv 22-25 focus on the external threat of the Seleucid armies. Hengel's suggestion does remind us, however, that for the author of Jubilees the messianic age has dawned not because of the swords of the Maccabees but because of their zeal for the Law, with the result that he felt constrained to urge that this zeal continue so that the time of righteousness might continue to grow.

To this point there is nothing new in Jubilees. Our author goes on, however, to assign a quasi-messianic function to the house of Levi. The important passage in this regard is *Jub.* 31:12-17, where Isaac blesses Levi and Judah, the two sons of Jacob. There are two points to be noted.

First, the tribe of Levi is exalted over the tribe of Judah. Isaac blesses Levi first (the word "first" is repeated for emphasis), and Levi's blessing is longer and more elaborate than that of Judah. Also Levi is given the place of honor at Isaac's right hand, while Judah stands at the left.

Second, although priestly functions are not ignored (cf. v 14) it is primarily as rulers and teachers of Israel that Isaac blesses the seed of Levi: "And they shall be judges and princes, and chiefs of all the seed of the sons of Jacob; they shall speak the word of the Lord in righteousness, and they shall judge all his judgments in righteousness, and they shall declare my ways to Jacob, and my paths to Israel" (v 15). Now it would be stretching the point somewhat to see this passage as messianic in the strict sense of the term. Yet the sons of Levi are seen as the rulers of an Israel for whom the messianic age has dawned, and they are the ones who teach Israel to observe God's ways, by means of which observance, as we have already noted (*Jub.* 23:26), the age of righteousness has been inaugurated. It seems difficult to escape the conclusion that while there is no mention of an individual Messiah here, nevertheless the tribe of Levi has been invested with a quasi-messianic role.

Alongside this novel handling of the house of Levi, however, our author presents in parallel fashion the traditional view that Judah would be "prince . . . over the sons of Jacob" (v 18). The line of Judah would accomplish the salvation of Israel (v 19) and the subjugation of the Gentile nations (v 18). There is even a possible mention of an individual Messiah-figure when Isaac says that "one of thy sons" would be prince over the sons of Jacob (v 18). It is difficult to see how both Levi and Judah could be "princes . . . of all the seed of the sons of Jacob" (vv 15, 18). The claims made for the two houses seem to be conflicting, not complementary. The probable explanation is that the real interest of the author lies in the supremacy of Levi, but because he cannot ignore the traditional role of Judah he treats them in a more or less parallel fashion without resolving the conflicts.

In summary, in Jubilees we again find the notion of a gradual and immanent messianic age. It is inaugurated not by the military might of the Maccabees, however, but by their zeal for the Law, and the priest-kings of the house of Levi are assigned a dominant and quasi-messianic role in this dawning age of peace and righteousness.

4. *Testament of Levi.* Any discussion of the Levitical messianology of the

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs is enormously complicated because of the host of unresolved critical questions that still surrounds the study of this book. Before trying to thread our way through this critical tangle in an attempt to isolate pre-Christian material it might be helpful to take the work as it stands and to list the passages that deal with the tribe of Levi, most of which have messianic overtones.

These can be divided into three categories. First, there are five passages in which Levi is clearly given a position of superiority with respect to Judah. The first of these is *T. Reub.* 6:5-12 where, although the people are jealous of the sons of Levi and seek to be exalted over them (v 5), Levi has been chosen by the Lord to be "king over all the nation" (v 11). In *T. Sim.* 5:4-6 as well Levi prevails over those in Israel who rise against him. The two passages *T. Levi* 8:11-17 and 18:2-14 will be dealt with in greater detail later. The last passage in this category is *T. Naph.* 5:3-5 where Levi and Judah outstrip the rest of their brethren, Levi becoming like the sun and Judah like the moon.

Second, there are four passages that treat Levi and Judah in a completely parallel and symmetrical fashion. All four of these passages—*T. Dan* 5:10; *T. Naph.* 8:2-3; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Jos.* 19:11—are messianic, for each of them declares that God will raise up salvation for Israel from Judah and Levi. Because of the exhortations to Israel in three of these passages to "honor Levi and Judah, for from them shall arise the salvation of Israel" (*T. Jos.* 19:11), it seems that a future salvation, and therefore a still-to-come Messiah, is in view.

Finally, there are three references that assign the priesthood to Levi and the kingdom to Judah. Two of these—*T. Jud.* 21:1-4 and *T. Iss.* 5:7—are general statements. But the third, *T. Sim.* 7:1-3, is a messianic reference:

Be not lifted up against these two tribes, for from them shall arise unto you the salvation of God. For the Lord shall raise up from Levi as it were a high priest, and from Judah as it were a king [God and man]. He shall save [all the Gentiles and] the race of Israel.

Thus if we take the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs as they now stand we find a recurrence of the idea of the exaltation of the tribe of Levi over Judah, a theme that is present in Jubilees. Also messianic and eschatological significance is again attached to the Hasmonaeen and Maccabean line in *T. Levi* 8:11-17; 18:2-14. On the other hand in a number of passages such as *T. Naph.* 8:2-3; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Jos.* 19:11 the expectation of a Messiah from Levi and Judah seems to be directed toward the future, not the present. Also, as we have noted, there is evidence of an attempt to relieve the tension between Levi and Judah, which was found in Jubilees, by assigning the priesthood to Levi and the kingdom to Judah.

It is not possible, however, to take the Testaments at face value. The interpolations in our present text from Jewish (such as the anti-Levitical polemic in *T. Levi* 10, 14-16) and Christian hands (such as the phrase "in the water" in *T. Levi* 18:7, if not the whole verse) are obvious and frequent. And fragments of an Aramaic Testament of Levi have been found among the manuscripts in the Cairo genizah that, although they are free from Christian interpolations, are considerably longer than the parallel Greek versions.²⁸ Charles held that except for a

²⁸These fragments, along with part of a twelfth-century-A.D. manuscript of a Hebrew Testament of Naphtali, can be found in Appendices 2 and 3 of R. H. Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: University Press, 1908) 239-256.

limited number of Christian interpolations that are easily identifiable the Greek version of the Testaments is a translation of a pre-Christian original. He also believed that the original version looked for a Levitical Messiah but that after the Hasmonaeen dynasty soured a revival of the traditional expectation of a Messiah from Judah led to insertions in our text relating to this expectation.²⁹

In a 1947 article Beasley-Murray took issue with this position, arguing that Charles had overestimated the Levitical messianology and underestimated the Judah messianology. Both strands, he argued, are deeply rooted in the material. He concluded:

The author looked for the appearance not of one Messiah but of two, the Davidic Messiah to function as king in the Kingdom of God, the Levitical Messiah to act as priest. The latter takes precedence over the former by reason of the exalted view of the priesthood held by the Hasidean author of the book.³⁰

More recently, however, M. de Jonge has argued persuasively that in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs we are dealing with a late second-century-A.D. Christian work that is based on pre-Christian Jewish Testaments of Levi and Naphtali. And of the passages of interest in *T. Levi* he asserted that *T. Levi* 18 is totally Christian as it now stands and that 8:12-15 is also a Christian insertion.³¹ De Jonge's thesis has been given considerable credibility by the Qumran discoveries, which have contained material from only the Testaments of Levi and Naphtali—though he has more recently modified his position to speak in terms of a Christian redaction of various Jewish sources.³²

Philonenko has taken a completely different tack, arguing that there are no Christian insertions at all and that the later redaction was done by the Essenes of Qumran: "Les Testamentes des Douze Patriarches . . . sont libres des tout interpolation chrétienne de quelque importance."³³

Because of the confusing state of our present knowledge it is difficult to know how to evaluate the evidence for a Levitical Messiah in the Testaments. The prudent course at this point seems to be to take de Jonge's 1953 position as our starting point while recognizing the possibility that there may be pre-Christian material in the other Testaments. If we do so the following points can be made. First, much of *T. Levi* 8:11-17, which glorifies the house of Levi, is pre-Christian. The passage is part of the account of Levi's selection as a priest. As he is anointed an angel announces to him several things about the priestly office, one of which is that a "new priesthood" will arise from his seed (v 14). If this passage is pre-Christian the "new priesthood" should probably be seen as that of the Hasmon-

²⁹Ibid., pp. xlvii-li.

³⁰G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Two Messiahs in the Testaments of the XII Patriarchs," *JTS* 28 (1947) 1-12. The passage cited here is taken from p. 1.

³¹M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953) 89 ff. and 45-46.

³²See "Christian Influence in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *Studies in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (ed. M. de Jonge; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 191-246; "Once More: Christian Influence in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *NouT* (1962) 311-319.

³³M. Philonenko, *Les interpolations chrétiennes des Testamentes des Douze Patriarches et les Manuscrits de Qumran* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960) 59.

aeans.³⁴ This new priesthood is to be highly exalted, receiving "every desirable thing in Israel" (v 16) and occupying the offices of "high priests, and judges, and scribes" (v 17). The passage falls short of using any explicit messianic terms to describe the seed of Levi, but it does assign an important and exalted role to Levi and his descendants.

Second, despite de Jonge's argument that *T. Levi* 18 is Christian in its entirety it seems probable that the passage reflects an original messianic description of the Hasmonaeen line. *T. Levi* 17:10-11 clearly refers to the Hellenizing crisis in post-exilic Judaism. The narrative then moves on immediately to speak of a "new priest" whom the Lord will raise up (18:2). Though later Christian redactors were interested in this "new priest" for their own reasons, the context of the passage demands that originally *T. Levi* 17 was followed by some description of the Macabaeans and Hasmonaeans. It is true that vv 5-12 have strong Christian overtones and are in all probability a later Christian insertion or redaction. But there is no specifically Christian reference in vv 1-4, and it seems quite likely that this hymn in praise of the "new priest" is pre-Christian and was originally ascribed to the Hasmonaeen line. If so, then the Hasmonaeen high priesthood is described in decidedly messianic terms: He shall "remove all darkness from under heaven" and shall produce "peace in all the earth" (v 4). Furthermore, the reference to the "star . . . in heaven as of a king" (v 2) reflects Num 24:17, a passage considered by many—including the Qumran community (4QTestim)—to be messianic. Thus it seems likely that *T. Levi* 18 is another piece of evidence that the Hasmonaeen house was seen by its supporters in messianic terms. Russell's suggestion that this is an idealized picture of a still-to-come Messiah cannot be totally discounted.³⁵ But when one takes into account the gradual and immanent eschatology of the Hasmonaeen supporters there is nothing in the passage that requires such a view.

As far as the Levi material in the other Testaments is concerned no definite conclusions can be drawn. One wonders, however, what group of Christians would have had enough interest in the Levitical priesthood to have created new material relating to Levitical messianology. We certainly do not find this interest in the Gentile Church, and the Jewish Christians of the Pseudo-Clementine literature were decidedly anti-temple. It is at least a possibility that the Levi material in the rest of the Testaments reflects earlier Jewish material even though it has been redacted by Christians at a later time. This is at least true in the case of the supremacy of Levi material, for this was a common theme in the period of late Judaism as we have seen. And as for the material that looks for future salvation to come through a priest from Levi and a king from Judah it may be that this reflects an attempt, made during the period when the Hasmonaeen dream began to decline, to unite Levitical messianology with more traditional Davidic messianology into something of a more unified expectation directed toward the future.

5. *Qumran*. When we turn to an investigation of the messianic expectation

³⁴Rowley felt that this new priesthood was Zadokite and concluded that this passage along with *T. Levi* 18 has been influenced by the Qumran viewpoint; cf. *Jewish Apocalyptic*, 20. In light of the order of the events recited in *T. Levi* 17:10-18:1, however, this interpretation does not appear to be likely.

³⁵Russell, *Method*, 314.

among the men of the covenant at Qumran we find both a continuation of the expectation of a Messiah from Levi and a development of this expectation, particularly as it relates to the more traditional messianic hope—though with some striking differences. The following are the relevant messianic texts.³⁶

(1) CD. There are four references in the Damascus covenant to the “Messiah of Aaron and Israel”—CD 9:10; 9:29; 15:4; 18:8—though the first two references are found only in MS B from the Cairo genizah, which has not yet turned up at Qumran. Earlier speculation that *mšyh* was originally pluralized³⁷ has been put to rest with the discovery of a Qumran fragment that has only the singular form.

(2) 1QS 9:11: “They shall depart from none of the counsels of the law . . . until there shall come [the] Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.” In this case there is no doubt about the plural *mšyhy*.

(3) 1QSa 2:11 ff. This passage of the messianic rule gives instructions for the final banquet at which the Messiah of Israel will be present. It is another figure, however—a priest—who is the prominent figure at this banquet. Though he is not referred to as the Messiah of Aaron he takes precedence over the Messiah of Israel:

Let no man extend his hand over the firstfruits of bread and wine before the Priest, for [it is he] who shall bless the firstfruits of bread and wine and shall be the first [to extend] his hand over the bread. Thereafter, the Messiah of Israel shall extend his hand over the bread.

(4) 1QSB. Though the term “Messiah” is not used in these Blessings there are two eschatological figures here involved: the prince of the congregation, who is described in messianic terms, and the high priest. Most commentators see in this another reference to two Messiahs.³⁸

(5) 1QM. Again there is no specific reference to either Messiah in the War scroll. But there is a reference to the prince of the congregation (5:1), and the central figure in the scroll is the high priest who conducts the liturgy during the final eschatological battle. Most commentators would see this priest as a messianic figure, though some are reluctant to see any reference to a Messiah of Israel.³⁹

(6) 4QTestim. Finally, there is the trilogy of messianic proof-texts that were discovered in Cave 4 and that seem to fit the pattern of the prophet, priest and king of 1QS 9:11. The first of these texts, a conjunction of Deut 5:28-29 and 18:18-19, refers to the “prophet like Moses,” the second refers to the kingly “star” from Jacob (Num 24:15-17), and the third is Moses’ blessing of Levi (Deut 33:8-11).

From this material it can be seen, first, that the Qumran community continued the expectation of a priestly Messiah. This is the most obvious interpretation of the phrase “Messiah of Aaron,” and this interpretation is not seriously doubt-

³⁶See E. A. Wcela, “The Messiah(s) of Qumran,” *CBQ* 26 (1964) 340-349, for a helpful summary of all messianic texts from Qumran.

³⁷Suggested by R. E. Brown, “The Messianism of Qumran,” *CBQ* 29 (1967) 54, among others.

³⁸E.g. Vermes, *Scrolls*, 206; Wcela, “Messiah(s),” 344; Brown, “Messianism,” 56-57.

³⁹Cf. Brown, “Messianism,” 59.

ed. Though Wcela tried to show that the Messiah of Israel became "the sole Messiah of the sect,"⁴⁰ it seems clear from 1QM, which should probably be dated into the first century A.D.,⁴¹ that the community continued their belief in a Levitical messianic figure down to the end of their existence as a movement.

Second, the Qumran material shows evidence of significant development in their thinking about a Levitical Messiah. As we have seen, the book of Jubilees leaves us with an unresolved question concerning the relationship of the rule of Levi and the rule of Judah. The Qumran community seems to have resolved this tension with their expectation of two Messiahs with clearly defined roles. As the leader of the liturgy and the chief interpreter of Scripture, the priestly Messiah of Aaron takes precedence over the political and militaristic function of the Davidic Messiah of Israel. The question remains of course regarding the relationship of the single Messiah of Aaron and Israel (CD) to this twofold messianism. The most satisfactory solution is that of J. T. Milik, who has suggested that the Damascus covenant was written after the community had received a great influx of Pharisaic refugees from Hyrcanus' opposition. This Pharisaic influence led to a more traditional messianism, a single Messiah who would arise from the whole community of Aaron and Israel (as the Qumran community liked to call itself).⁴²

Third, it should also be mentioned that there are important differences between the Levitical messianology of the Qumran sect and that which we have seen in other material. First, it appears that the sect was violently anti-Hasmonaeen and thus saw no messianic significance whatever to the Hasmonaeen reign. This of course is not stated explicitly. But it can be inferred from the Zadokite emphasis at Qumran, particularly the insistence that the sons of Zadok are the "keepers of the covenant and seekers of his will" (1QS 5:9). This Zadokite loyalty seems to imply that we should identify the wicked priest who persecuted the community in its early days with Jonathan, or perhaps Simon, who were the first of the Maccabean line to claim for themselves the high priesthood though they were not of Zadokite stock. Rowley's attempt to identify the wicked priest with Menelaus⁴³ seems unlikely. Why would the community continue to nurse hatred toward a priest whose regime had been repudiated by all Israel? The separatism of the Qumran sect cannot be explained in Rowley's scheme. Similarly, an attempt to identify him with one of the later Hasmonaeans like Jannaeus does not explain why the resistance to the illegitimate high priesthood of the Hasmonaeans took so long to develop. This latter suggestion is also improbable on archaeological grounds.⁴⁴ The preference of the community for the term "Aaron" rather than "Levi" might be one result of their anti-Hasmonaeen stance. Another result might be their treatment of Melchizedek as a heavenly warrior similar to Michael the archangel rather than as an earthly figure. At any rate, though the

⁴⁰Wcela, "Messiah(s)," 348.

⁴¹Cf. Vermes, *Scrolls*, 123.

⁴²Cf. J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (London: SCM, 1959) 80-93, 123-128.

⁴³Rowley, *Jewish Apocalyptic*, 25.

⁴⁴Cf. Vermes, *Scrolls*, 53 ff.

covenanters looked for a priestly Messiah they identified him in no way with the Maccabees or their successors.

This leads to the second difference. Whereas the supporters of the Hasmonaeans tended to see the coming of the messianic age as a gradual and immanent process inaugurated by the Maccabean revolt, for Qumran it was to be a sudden, violent and cataclysmic event. There is no trace here of the idea found in Jubilees that a return to the Law would gradually bring in an age of righteousness. The return to the Law was crucial for Qumran, of course, but they returned to the Law in order to prepare themselves for the cataclysmic struggle that God would initiate, not in order to usher in the messianic age themselves.

Thus the Qumran community carried on the hope for a Levitical Messiah long after this hope had died within mainstream Judaism and the emerging Pharisaic movement had renewed the traditional hope for a Davidic Messiah (*Ps. Sol.* 17). But they did so in forms that display radical differences to the Levitical messianology of Jubilees and Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

III. SYNTHESIS

We are now in a position to draw together some of the threads of our discussion and to attempt to trace the development and decline of Levitical messianology.

1. The initial impetus to this development is found in the amazing victories that were won by Judas Maccabeus and his band of priests and Hasidim over Antiochus and the threat that he posed to temple and Law. These victories stirred up eschatological fervor and gave rise to the belief, as found in *1 Enoch* 90:6-12; 91:12-13 (which was written during this period), that the Maccabean victory had inaugurated the period of eschatological fulfillment that would soon result in the coming of the new heaven and the new earth. This first stage, then, consisted of the type of futuristic eschatology usually described by the term "apocalyptic." Though it is possible that there was also speculation in these early days about the role of the priesthood in this eschatological drama, there is no direct evidence.

2. The next important stage in the development seems to have been the crisis over the legitimacy of the Hasmonaeen dynasty. It was impossible for speculation about a Levitical Messiah to develop until the question of whether it was proper for a priest to rule was resolved. The Melchizedekan precedent and the continuing successes of the Hasmonaeans seemed to satisfy most people. Attempts to reinforce the legitimacy of the Hasmonaeen rule are found in the references to the supremacy of Levi over Judah that we have noted in Jubilees and the pre-Christian portions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. One group of priests, however, evidently reacted strongly against such an idea—not against the idea of a priest taking on kingly powers but against the fact that the high priest was not of the line of Zadok. Under the leadership of a priest whom they called the Teacher of Righteousness this group withdrew to a desert community.

3. The third stage in the development appears to have taken place against the background of the peace and prosperity that marked the reigns of Simon and John Hyrcanus. This age of peace and prosperity confirmed for the supporters of the Hasmonaeans the belief that the victories of Judas and his brothers had ushered in the messianic age. But in place of a futuristic, apocalyptic eschatology these proto-Sadduceans began to talk in terms of a gradual and immanent mes-

sianic age that had already begun and would continue to grow. This "realized eschatology" is found in 1 Macc 14:4-15; *Jub.* 23:26-31.

4. At the same time the seed of Levi in general and the Hasmonaeen line in particular is spoken of in messianic terms. It does not appear that there was much expectation here of an individual priest who would appear in the future. Rather the whole Hasmonaeen line was given a messianic significance that was both for the present and would continue into the future. This Levitical messianology is found in *Jub.* 31:12-17 and probably *T. Levi* 8:11-17; 18:2 ff. The traditional belief in a Messiah from Judah persisted, however, though as we have seen from *Jub.* 31:12 ff. it was not clear how the two expectations were to be meshed.

5. The fifth stage can be identified as having taken place during the decline of the Hasmonaeen ideal, which began with Alexander Jannaeus and was complete shortly after the death of Salome Alexandra in 67 B.C. During this period anti-Levitical sentiment developed (*T. Levi* 10, 14-16; *As. Mos.* 6:1), and the Pharisaic movement revived a traditional Davidic messianology (*Ps. Sol.* 17). It is possible that the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs preserves material from the earlier part of this stage, where the messianic expectation involves a king from Judah and a priest from Levi and where the focus shifts from the present to the future. But because of the critical problems associated with the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs this can be no more than a possibility.

6. The development at Qumran seems to have run parallel to these last three stages. The Qumran community had its roots in the priestly reaction to Antiochus IV that was led by Judas Maccabeus, and so it continued the priestly orientation and Levitical messianology of that movement. But because of its rejection of the Hasmonaeans this Levitical messianology was developed with different emphases, the most striking of which was the futuristic and cataclysmic eschatology. Moreover, because their Levitical messianology was not tied to the Hasmonaeen house and because of the isolation of the community at Qumran, the hope for a priestly Messiah continued at Qumran long after the mainstream in Israel had returned to a more traditional messianic hope. Because of this the Qumran writers had time to work out some of the problems concerning the relationship of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel that had not been worked out in the other literature produced before the decline of the Hasmonaeans.

Thus the Levitical messianism of Qumran should be seen not as a development of ideas contained in Jubilees, as Hengel has argued,⁴⁵ nor as a precursor of the Testament of Levi, as Rowley has seen it.⁴⁶ The Levitical messianology of Qumran and of the proto-Sadducean literature (1 Maccabees, Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs) cannot be related in any scheme of linear development. This is not to argue that Qumran messianology developed in isolation, for fragments of many apocalyptic writings have been found at Qumran. But it is to suggest that these two views of Levitical messianology are parallel developments that sprang from a common source but diverged at an early point and developed along different lines.

⁴⁵Hengel, *Judaism*, 226. See above.

⁴⁶Rowley, *Jewish Apocalyptic*, 21.