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Messiah (14)



Coin of Simon ben Kosiba, showing the Temple with the Messianic star on the roof and the Ark of the Covenant inside (British Museum)

The Hebrew word *māšîah* means 'anointed one' and may indicate Jewish priests, prophets and kings. During the sixth century BCE, the exiled Jews in [Babylonia](#) started to hope for a special Anointed One who was to bring them home; several written prophecies were fulfilled when the Persian king [Cyrus the Great](#) did in fact allow them to return. In the second century BCE, the Jews were again suffering from repression, and the old prophecies became relevant again. Some people were looking forward to a [military leader](#) who would defeat the [Seleucid](#) Roman enemies and establish an independent Jewish kingdom; others, like the author of the *Psalms of Solomon*, stated that the Messiah was a charismatic [teacher](#) who gave the correct interpretation of Mosaic law, was to restore [Israel](#) and would judge mankind. [Jesus of Nazareth](#) was considered a Messiah; a century later, [Simon bar Kochba](#). The idea of an eschatological king has been present in Judaism ever since.

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Qumran's two Messiahs

The Dead Sea scrolls were part of a library, a simple fact that is easy to ignore. But it means that there is not one, single messianology to be found in the texts from Qumran. Instead, we must accept that there are several theories about the Messiah. In the *War scroll* the Messiah is a prophet and takes no part in the war between the 'children of light' against the 'children of darkness' (see [above](#)), although the Messiah can be identified with the 'prince of the community'. In other texts, the Messiah is a war leader (e.g., [4QFlorilegium](#) and [4Q458](#)). These are clearly conflicting messianologies.



Several texts are considered to be written by members of the sect: the *Damascus document* for example, and the *Messianic rule*. In these texts, we may expect to find the sect's own messianology. The distinguishing characteristic is that the Qumranites expected the coming of not one, but two Messiahs. This must have been an attempt to make sense of such contradictory messianic images as we have encountered up till now.

The root of this idea may be the lines of Zechariah that we already studied [above](#):

'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

[*Zechariah* 6.12-13]

This refers to prince [Zerubbabel](#) and the high-priest Joshua, but it is certain that it was understood in a messianic sense in the early

[Hasmonaean](#) period. For example, the author of the *Testaments of the twelve patriarchs* expected a priestly and a kingly ruler:

My children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves about these two tribes because from them will arise the Savior from God. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as a high-priest and from Judah someone as king. He will save all the gentiles and the tribe of Israel.

[*Testament of Simeon* 7.1-2]

To me [=Judah], God has given the kingship, and to him [=Levi], the priesthood. And He has subjected the kingship to the priesthood. To me He gave earthly matters and to Levi heavenly matters. As heaven is superior to the earth, so is God's priesthood superior to the kingdom on earth.

[*Testament of Judah* 21.2-4a]

The word 'Messiah' is not used, however. This step was taken by the sect at Qumran. Its members were looking forward to a 'Messiah of Israel' and a 'Messiah of David', who resemble the kingly and priestly descendants of Judah and Levi in the *Testaments of the twelve patriarchs*.

The first text we must study is the *Damascus document*, which is, as so often at Qumran, a combination of texts. Its first part is a kind of theological history which proves that the sect is the true Israel and that God will reward the faithful; then follows a kind of law; and a brief penal code is added as an appendix. Our first quote does not mention the Messiah, but must without any doubt be interpreted in a messianic fashion, because it alludes to [Balaam's prophecy](#).

And the star is the seeker of the law, who came to Damascus; as it is written *A star has journeyed out of Jacob and a scepter is risen out of Israel*. The scepter is the Prince of the whole congregation, and at his coming *he will break down all the sons of Seth*.

[*Damascus document* 7.18-21]

This is a very interesting text, because it not only mentions two Messiahs, but also shows that one of them is a [military leader](#) and the other a [sage](#). Moreover, the expression 'seeker of the law' usually signifies the Teacher of righteousness (the founder of the sect); the fact that this title is now used to describe one of the Messiahs suggests that the members of the Qumran sect believed that he would one day return. We will discuss this idea [below](#).

In this first quote, the word 'Messiah' is not used. But the *Damascus document* is sometimes more explicit.

[...] during the time of ungodliness until the appearance of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel [...]

[*Damascus document* 12.23-13.1]

This is the exact statement of the ordinances in which they walk until the Messiah of Aaron and Israel appears and expiates their iniquity.

[*Damascus document* 14.18-19]

Those who heed Him are the poor of the flock; they will be saved at the time of visitation. But others will be delivered up to the sword at the coming of the Messiah of Aaron and Israel.

[*Damascus document* 19.9-11]

(Similar ideas can be found in 19.33-20.1)

At least one text adds a third actor in the messianic age: the prophet. He is mentioned in the *Manual of discipline*. This text is also interesting because it uses the plural 'Messiahs of Aaron and Israel' instead of the singular 'Messiah of Aaron and Israel' of the *Damascus document*: this proves that there were indeed two (or three) Messiahs.

And they shall not depart from any counsel of the law to walk in all the stubbornness of their heart, but they shall be governed by the first ordinances in which the members of the community began their instruction, until the coming of the prophet and the anointed ones of Aaron and Israel

[*Manual of discipline* 9.9b-11]

Just like the kingly Messiah of Israel and the priestly Messiah of Aaron, the [prophet](#) is a messianic type, and it is possible to believe that the Qumran library also contained a messianology that assumed that there would be *three* Messiahs. After all, kings, priests and prophets were the only one that could be anointed ([above](#)).

The most interesting text, however, can be found in the *Messianic rule* (also called *Rule of the congregation*). It describes the table arrangement during a sacred, messianic meal. The interesting point is the hierarchy between the two Messiahs.

This is the sitting of the men of renown called to the assembly for the council of the community when God will have begotten the Messiah among them. The Priest shall enter at the head of all the congregation of Israel, then are all the chiefs of the sons of Aaron, the priests, called to the assembly, men of renown. And they shall sit before him, each according to his rank.

Afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall enter. The chiefs of the tribes of Israel shall sit before him, each according to his rank, according to their position in the camps and during their marches; then all the heads of family of the congregation, together with the wise men of the congregation, shall sit before them, each according to his rank.

And when they gather for the community table, or to drink wine, and arrange the community table and mix the wine to drink, let no man stretch out his hand over the first-fruits of bread and wine before the Priest. For it is he who shall bless the first-fruits of bread and wine, and shall first stretch out his hand over the bread. And afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall stretch out his hands over the bread. And afterwards, all the congregation of the community shall bless, each according to his rank.

[1Q28a 2.11-21]

Probably, the idea of a dual Messiahship did not disappear with the sect (which came to an end during the [war](#) between the Jews and Romans of 66-70). It is possible, but certainly not proven, that [Simon ben Kosiba](#) was recognized as the Messiah of Israel and his collaborator Eleazar of Mode'in as the Messiah of Aaron.

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