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## MELCHIZEDEK AT QUMRAN

(abstract)

11QMelchizedek is one of the more important scrolls found in the library of the Qumran community. Although fragmentary and only a small part of what was probably a much longer scroll, column 2 preserves a vital piece of evidence for the messianic hopes of ordinary Jews at the turn of the eras. In this text a mysterious Melchizedek (מֶלְכִי צְדָק) takes centre stage in the drama of the end-times. The text has received much scholarly comment, though most have probably misinterpreted it by reading it through a dualistic lens. Melchizedek takes the role of Israel's God in Isaiah 61:2 'the year of the LORD's favour' becomes 'the year of Melchizedek's favour' and Melchizedek wreaks God's vengeance. The 'God' (אֱלֹהִים) of Psalm 82:1 is also identified as Melchizedek. This does *not* mean Melchizedek is an 'angel' in the normal, twentieth-century understanding of that word in a purely spiritual, non-physical sense. Rather, Melchizedek's 'divine' identity must be understood as a witness to the much older biblical notion of divine kingship.

Melchizedek is very much the human king and priest of Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 as much as a heavenly, divine figure. His appearance takes place at the Day of Atonement of an eschatological jubilee. He brings spiritual (forgiveness) *and* material release to God's people. The Day of Atonement setting is important because on this day Israel's high priest enters the holy of holies and, thereby, goes beyond space and time, back to the reality 'before creation' (of Genesis 1:2). The text therefore illustrates very nicely the way in which in the late Second Temple period temple theology and messianic expectations were inextricably connected. It is unlikely that Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61 at the start of his ministry (according to Luke 4) and his interest in Psalm 110 which describes a sacral kingship 'after the cause (or 'order') of Melchizedek' was unconnected to the hopes expressed in 11QMelch. Even if Jesus had not read this Qumran text, it witnesses to the ideas which surely nurtured his own self-understanding and mission.

Melchizedek here and elsewhere must also be understood as a figure that represents a particular political theology: he is a king who is also a priest, something which the Sinaitic, Mosaic covenant prohibits. The presence of this text in the Qumran library may reflect an early stage in the community's developing messianic thinking, before they insisted on the separation of royal and priestly offices. Jesus apparently took an interest in Psalm 110 because, as one from the royal house of David, he believed he was also called to fulfil a priestly office.