

THE HUBRIS OF THE ANTICHRIST IN A FRAGMENT FROM QUMRAN

by DAVID FLUSSER*

In a lecture at Harvard University in December 1972, J.T. Milik spoke about an Aramaic fragment from Qumran. Later, Y.A. Fitzmyer¹ published part of this fragmentary text and summarized the contents of its beginning and end. He saw the importance of the new Dead Sea text for understanding the New Testament. Our differing interpretation will show that he was right, but the points of contact between the text and the New Testament are not those which Fitzmyer tried to find.

The fragment is from Qumran Cave IV and the manuscript dating from the last third of the first century C.E. was identified as Pseudo-Danielic (4Q psDan A^a or Dan^d 209) – though Daniel is not expressly named in it. This identification would be correct if the man described as falling before the throne, and addressing the enthroned king would be Daniel. This is probable but not sure, even if it is clear from the English summary that the description of the reign of the “people of God” at the end of the fragment comes from Daniel 7.

Like the setting of the passage in this fragment we suppose that the king had a dream or a vision. This dream is interpreted to the king by his seer, probably Daniel who tells him that the world will be visited by evil to come. In this context a “king

* Professor David Flusser is Professor of Judaism of the Second Temple period, and early Christianity, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

1. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies*, 20 (1973), pp. 391-4; see also Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls; Qumran in Perspective*, London, 1977, pp. 73-4. I would like to express my appreciation to Joseph Naveh for his kind assistance.

of Assyria” and “Egypt” are named. Here begins the published section of the fragment:

וְרַב לְהוּדָה עַל אֶרֶעָה] 7
בְּרַךְ מַלְכָא כְּלָא שְׁלָם יַעֲבֹדוּן וְכְלָא יִשְׁמְשׁוּן	8
לָהּ וְהוּא בְרַ אַל רַבָּא יִתְקַרָּא וּבִשְׁמָהּ יִתְכַנְּהּ	9
בְּרַהּ דִּי אַל יִתְאַמְר וּבְרַ עֲלִיּוֹן יִקְרוּנָהּ כְּזִיקִיא	1
דִּי חֲזוּתָא כֵּן מַלְכוּתָהּ תְּהוּהּ שְׁנִינָן יִמְלֹכֵן עַל	2
אַרְעָא וְכְלָא יִדְשׁוּן עִם לְעָם יְרוּשׁ וּמְדִינָהּ לְמַדְיָנָהּ	3
<i>vacat</i> עַד יְקוּם עִם אַל וְכְלָא יִנּוּחַ מִן חֲרַב	4

“...he shall be great on earth... [all] will worship² and all will serve [him]...great ...he shall be called³ and by his name he shall be designated.⁴ He shall be named⁵ son of God and they shall call him son of the Most High. Like a shooting star of a vision, so shall be their kingdom. They shall reign for some years on the earth and trample everything. One nation shall trample on another nation and one province on another province – until the people of God shall rise and all will desist from the sword.” The reign of the people of God will be everlasting; its paths will be in truth and all will have peace; there will be no more wars and all the cities will submit to the people of God. For the Great God is with them and He will now subject all enemies to the people of God.

This is the content of the fragment which was only partially published until now.⁶ The text is an interesting contribution to our knowledge of the Jewish apocalyptic literature. The wicked rule of the last empire of the heathen is described here. They “shall trample everything. One nation shall trample on another nation and one province on another province.” This is a common place in apocalypics.⁷ In the third Sibyl (635-6) we read already that “king captures king and takes his land, and nations ravage nations, and rulers (ravage) people.” Also Jesus, speaking about the last troubles, says: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Mt. 24:7, Mk. 13:8, Lk. 21:10). The same idea is later expressed in IV Esdras 13:31: “And they will plot to attack one another, city against city, locality against locality, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom.” But this wicked rule will be shortlived and it will last “until the people of God, ‘Israel’, shall rise and all will desist from the sword.” The end of the fragment describes the all-embracing peaceful realm of Israel and its virtues.

2. We decided to read יַעֲבֹדוּן as a Hebraism meaning worship and not according to the usual Aramaic definition “they will make.”

3. Or: “he shall call himself.”

4. Or: he shall designate himself.”

5. Or: he shall name himself.”

6. In reproducing the content of the beginning and the end of the fragment we have used Fitzmyer.

7. A similar phrase appears already in Is. 19:2.

For the interpretation of the whole fragment, it is important to note that with the words “until the people of God shall rise” a new line begins. These words are not written immediately at the beginning of the line. This is an indication that a new item is being introduced: had the author spoken previously about the eschatological evils, now he describes the happiness under the sway of the people of God. But even without this external indicator, it is clear from the content that before referring to the appearance of the people of God, the author speaks about the distress which shall come on the earth, about future wars and battles, and about the chaotic rule of a wicked kingdom. Thus the man, described in the fragment can be only the king or the leader of this horrible kingdom. “All will worship and all will serve him” and “he shall be great on earth.” This is the same image as in Rev. 13:8 (cf. 13:12) – where the first Beast is mentioned: “And all who dwell on earth will worship it.”

But we learn more about this apocalyptic leader or king: not only will all serve him but also, “they shall call him the son of the Most High.” This will be evidently his claim and he will demand from others to acclaim him with this title. From the Aramaic wording, it is not clear if he shall be called, designated and named son of God by others or whether he will call, designate and name himself son of God, but the difference between the two interpretations is minimal, if others “shall call him son of the Most High” they will do it at his behest. It should not be forgotten that our text does not state anywhere that the person mentioned will be the son of the Most High. It only affirms that others “shall call him son of the Most High” or possibly that he will therefore name himself such. In any case, our fragment is important evidence for a Jewish tradition about the superhuman hubris of the Antichrist.

The discovery is not surprising *per se*. A similar tradition appears in II Thes. 2:1-12. It is here that we read about “the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (II Thes. 2:3-4). It is practically certain that the concepts behind the whole passage are Jewish and the new fragment from Qumran confirms this assumption. According to this Epistle (2:7) the “man of lawlessness” will be revealed at his appointed time, because “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” The term “mysteries of iniquity” appears twice⁸ in a fragment of the sectarian “Book of Mysteries” from Qumran in a dualistic connotation: when the wickedness will be banished and righteousness revealed, then “all the adherents of mysteries of iniquity will no longer exist.” It has been noted previously⁹ that the “mysteries of iniquity” are

8. The text was published by Roland de Vaux in *Revue Biblique* 56 (1949), pp. 605-9 and by J.T. Milik in *Discoveries in the Judean Desert I, Qumran Cave I*, Oxford, 1955, pp. 102-105. In Col. I:7 the correct reading was *ובל תמכר רוי פשע*. In the definitive edition the last word was read *פלא*, and the whole designation was translated: “qui détiennent les mystères merveilleux.” This interpretation does not fit the spirit of the Hebrew language, and is not in accordance with the use of *תמך* in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

9. See J.T. Milik in *Qumran Cave I*, p. 104 who also correctly adduces IQM 14:9. “Mysteries of iniquity” appear also in 1QH 5:36.

parallel to the “mystery of lawlessness” in II Thes. 2:7. The idea of Antichrist is surely Jewish and pre-Christian¹⁰ and the fertile ground for its growth were evidently Jewish apocalyptic circles whose *Weltanschauung* tended to the dualism of good and evil: the Antichrist is a human exponent of the Satanic forces of evil. Thus we can suppose that the dualistic frame of the Dead Sea sect fostered the development of these motifs.¹¹ But even if the “mystery of lawlessness” in the passage about the Antichrist in II Thes. has a counterpart in the writings of the Dead Sea sect, we cannot affirm that the specific motif of the Antichrist’s claim to be God or the son of God as is found both in II Thes. and in the Qumran fragment originated within the Dead Sea sect or even in the broader movement from which the sect had emerged. Furthermore, it is impossible to know if the apocalypse, of which only a fragment was preserved in Qumran, was conceived by a member of the sect.

An interesting parallel to the fragment from Qumran is the description of the Antichrist in the early Christian part of the Ascension of Isaiah (4:2-16).¹² It is based upon various motifs: the Antichrist is Belial incarnated and at the same time he performs matricide, i.e. Nero. He shall persecute the plantation, sowed by the twelve apostles of the well-beloved and one of the twelve shall be delivered into his hands — a hint to the martyrdom of Peter under Nero. He will be a worker of miracles. “He will act and speak in the same manner as the well-beloved [Christ] and will say: I am the Lord and no one came before me! And all men in this world will believe him, and they will sacrifice to him and serve him, saying: He is the Lord and besides him there is no other” (4:6-8). These are the same motifs as those of the fragment from Qumran, and they cannot be fully explained by a supposed dependence on II Thes. Therefore it is not unreasonable to presume that in the description of the Antichrist in the Ascension of Isaiah similar Jewish traditions are embedded as those which surface in our fragment from Qumran.

10. See Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes* II, Leipzig, 1907, pp. 621-2; Paul Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde*, Tübingen, 1934, pp. 281-2. One of the most interesting witnesses for the Jewish concept of Antichrist is the *Assumption of Moses*, where the eschatological wicked king is described in chapter 8. In the original book it was Antiochus Epiphanes, but an interpolator of the first century C.E. put chapters 6 and 7 into the book. These chapters describe Jewish history from the pre-Maccabean period to his own period: and so Antiochus Epiphanes became the mythical wicked king, in whose existence the interpolator believed. See Jacob Licht, “Taxo or the Apocalyptic doctrine of Vengeance,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 12 (1961), pp. 95-103.

11. It is not our task to treat here the contrasting pair Malchizedek and Malkiresha in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See J.T. Milik, “Milkī-Ṣedek et Milkī-Reša, dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 23 (1971), pp. 95-144. I believe that Malchiresha is human, a figure of the Antichrist. About Malchizedek at Qumran, see my article: “Malchizedek and the Son of Man,” *Christian News from Israel*, (Jerusalem), April 1966, pp. 23-29. It is important to note that in III Sib. 63-74, the name of Belial is the name of the Antichrist. In the early Christian part of the Ascension of Isaiah (Ass. Is. 2-16) the Antichrist is Belial incarnated. Belial is the name of Satan in the Dead Sea sect, and in the writings of the broader apocalyptic trend from which the sect originated.

12. See Eugène Tisserant, ed. trans., *Ascension d’Isaïe*, Paris, 1909, pp. 115-123.

We read in the Ascension of Isaiah that the Antichrist will act and speak in the same manner as Christ. This contrasting parallelism between the Antichrist and Christ is common in Christian writings – even the Christian term Antichrist was coined in order to express the affinity and contrast between Christ and Antichrist. This contrast is also visible in the passage in II Thes. (where the name Antichrist does not appear), according to which the man of lawlessness shall be finally destroyed by the Lord, namely Jesus. This apposition also exists in a Jewish apocalypse, the Oracles of Hystaspes¹³ written before the destruction of the Second Temple. It is here that the opponent of the Antichrist is the Great Prophet, who will be killed by him, and at the end, the Antichrist himself will be overwhelmed and killed by the Great King, the Messiah. But this polarity is not necessary. Scholars agree that the figure of the Antichrist did not come into existence in order to provide an opposing figure to the Messiah.¹⁴ The figure of the Antichrist is autonomous: he is the leader or king of the heathen forces, which will assault Israel, and an actual human exponent of the outburst of the devilish powers of wickedness in the last days. The contrast of the Antichrist to the Messiah is not essential. In the Assumption of Moses,¹⁵ the Levite Taxo appears, who is prepared for martyrdom, but he is in reality not a contrasting figure to the wicked king of the end of days. The Kingdom of Heaven will be revealed by God himself – and no Messiah is mentioned there.

The apocalyptic text from Qumran is a fragment and therefore it is impossible to know, if any Messianic figure was mentioned in the last part of the work, but if such a figure appeared, it seems that its importance was not great. The content of the first part is a description of eschatological evils and of the shortlived rule of a wicked kingdom; in this part, the figure of a man appears whom all will serve, and who will be hailed as son of God. Since we know from elsewhere such depictions of wicked rulers which are followed by descriptions of the wicked realm of the last days, we cannot avoid reaching the conclusion that this person is the Antichrist. When the passage about eschatological evil and wars ends, a new beginning is marked even graphically: in a new line begins a new aspect with the words “until the people of God shall rise,” which will be the period of eternal peace and blessings. In the extant section of the description of final description, no Messiah is named and there is even not an explicit statement that the people of God will defeat the wicked kingdom and its demonic leader. The Assumption of Moses also has a similar, sudden transition from the description of distress in the end of days to that of the final salvation. After Taxo has said that he and his sons are resolved to die rather than transgress the commandments of God “for if we do this and die, our blood will be avenged before the Lord” (Ass. Mos. 9:6-7), chapter 10 which

13. I have shown in another study that the Oracles of Hystaspes are a Jewish work. See David Flusser, “Hystaspes and John of Patmos,” in *Irano-Judaica*, Shaul Shaked, ed., Jerusalem, Ben-Zvi Institute, c. 400 p., multilingual (forthcoming 1980).

14. See already Wilhelm Bousset, *The Antichrist legend; a chapter in Christian and Jewish folklore*, London, 1896, 307 p., and also Emil Schürer and Paul Volz, quoted above, fn. 10.

15. See above, fn. 10.

follows right afterwards begins with the words: “And then His kingdom will appear throughout all His creations,” the future happiness being described. What is preserved in our fragment – from the beginning of line 4 of Col. II – is a similar, poetical description of eternal peace and the subjugation of the whole of humanity to the people of God, a description which – as far as we can ascertain – depends partially on the second part of Daniel VII, the interpretation of the vision of the Son of Man. The “people of God” in our fragment corresponds to “the people of the saints of the Most High” in Daniel 7:27 – “Their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them.”

From all this we can see that even if any Messianic figure was mentioned in the lost part of the description of eschological bliss in our fragment, this Messianic person could not have had a leading function; the hero of the period of redemption is not a Messiah, but Israel, the people of God who will then be the guarantor of world peace. Thus, if any Messianic figure was mentioned in the lost part of our fragment, it is very probable that this person was not an opposing figure to the Antichrist. If we are correct, then our fragment is further evidence supporting the scholarly assumption that the origin of the concept of Antichrist did not stem from the polarity between the Messiah and his opponent.

In II Thes. 2:3-4 we read about “the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship... proclaiming himself to be God.” In our fragment we read about a person “whom all will worship and serve... He shall be named son of God and they shall call him son of the Most High.” The Aramaic can also denote that he shall call himself son of God. It does not make much difference whether the Antichrist will claim to be God or to be the son of God. No real difference between these two designations was felt by the author of the Didache when he says (Did. 16:4): “Then the world-deceiver will appear as a son of God, and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be given unto his hands and he will commit such abominations as have never been done before.” This is an early Christian text, and thus there could be grounds to assume that the mention of a son of God as world deceiver emerged to provide a contrast to Jesus, the son of God, though it would be a dubious explanation.

But there is another text, as I have shown elsewhere. It is a Jewish apocalypse, namely the Oracles of Hystaspes. It is preserved in an abridged form in Lactantius *Divinae Institutiones* and refers to two Antichrists. About the second it is said that “another king shall arise out of Syria, born from an evil spirit, the overthrower and destroyer of the human race... that king will not only be most disgraceful in himself, but he will also be a prophet of lies, and he will constitute, and call himself God and will order himself to be worshipped as the Son of God” (Lact. *Divin. Inst.* VII 17:2-4). Here we have both designations of the Antichrist, that of II Thes. and that of the fragment from Qumran: the Antichrist will, “constitute and call himself *God* and will order himself to be worshipped as the *Son of God*.” It is even possible that a similar parallelism between God and son of God exists in the text from Qumran. The beginning of line 9 of the first column is lost. We read there only:

“...[g]reat... he shall be called, and by His name shall be designated.” The words ‘by his name’ are somehow enigmatic, if we assume that the person shall be designated by his *own* name, but if we determine that the person shall be designated by the name of God, then it has been effectively defined. Fitzmyer suggests that the original text was: “He shall be called the son of the Great God” etc. This is a reasonable conjection, but then the following ‘son of God’ would be a repetition. It is therefore possible to venture that at one time the text of Qumran had read as follows:

“Great [God] he shall be called and by His name he shall be designated. He shall be named son of God and they shall call him son of the Most High.”

This makes not only better sense but the parallelism fits the practical nature of the whole text as well. If my hypothesis is correct, then there exists even a greater affinity between the Qumran fragment, and the Oracles of Hystaspes. As we have stated previously, it is written there that the Antichrist “will constitute and call himself God and will order himself to be worshipped as the Son of God.”¹⁶ Even in this Latin paraphrase of the original Greek text of the Oracles, the similarity with our fragment is evident. In both cases a similar parallelism exists. If our reconstruction of the fragment is correct, the order of the designations (God – son of God) is the same.

To sum up, we have analyzed a partially published fragment from Qumran. In it a seer, probably Daniel, interprets for the king a dream or a vision which refers to the last days. It will be a time of wars and distress. Finally a wicked kingdom will rule over the world “until the people of God shall rise and all will desist from the sword.” In the description of the political evils of the end of days, mention of a wicked ruler is included, evidently the ruler of the wicked kingdom. All will serve him and he will claim to be son of the Most High. This figure is by no means uncommon. What we read in the Qumran fragment is the *hubris* of the Antichrist as it appears as well in II Thes. The wording of our fragment resembles the Oracles of Hystaspes, an apocalypse, which is, as I have shown elsewhere, Jewish. It was composed before the destruction of the Second Temple. Scholars had already assumed that the figure of the Antichrist and his superhuman *hubris* was pre-Christian and genuinely Jewish. The fragment from Qumran is a further, decisive confirmation of this assumption.

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16. “Se ipsum constituet ac vocabit deum, se coli iubebit ut dei filium.”