

What Do We Learn from The Dead Sea Scrolls About Our Own Covenant with God?

Did the people of Qumran have a Statement of Principals? What does it say about the covenant they made before God? What can we learn from the Dead Sea Scrolls about our own covenant with God in our day?

(From notes originally composed 8 Sep 2019)

Introduction:

King Benjamin in Book of Mormon took the names of all those who entered into the covenant (Mosiah 6:1) and later taught the people that they might hear and know the commandments to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made. Ammon was among those who took this covenant.

Yea, they [Ammon and his bretheren] did mourn for their [Alma's people's] departure... Now they would have gladly joined with them, for they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments. [Ammon's covenant would have taken place with King Benjamin] (see Mosiah 21:31)

And now since the coming of Ammon, king Limhi had also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments. (ibid)

Take note that the covenant king Limi and his people had taken at this time was not baptism. (ibid verse 33)

The following are notes and observations I made while studying the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Daniel offered a prayer for a covenant of God with his people in his day. In it we see a plea and prayer exposing past sins of the people and petitioning forgiveness from the Lord. This pattern is consistent with what we see in other places in scripture.

“And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly and have rebelled, even by departing from your precepts and from your judgments. Neither have we listened unto your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.” (Daniel 9:4-6)

See also Ezekiel 36:16-38. As also with Josiah (2 Chron 34:31-32), King Benjamin (Mosiah 1), and others. Including, as we will explore here, the people of Qumran.

Let's take a look at some of the language we see from the people at Qumran in the Dead Sea Scrolls as it may relate to us in our day.

The two translations that I use below are:

- The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated, Second Edition, by Florentino Garcia Martinez (hereafter abbreviated as TDSST)
- Dead Sea Scrolls, A New Translation, by Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., & Edward Cook (hereafter abbreviated as DSSNT)

Scroll 1QS from cave 1 is called The Rule of the Community (or "Charter"). This work "is supposed to have governed a community living at Qumran... Yet it seems that something more is going on in this writing than simply chartering a club". (DSSNT pg 123)

1QS 1:16-18

TDSST pg 3

And all those who enter in the Rule of the Community shall establish a covenant before God in order to carry out all that he commands and in order not to stray from following him for any fear, dread grief or agony (that might occur) during the dominion of Belial.

DSSNT pg 127

All who enter the Yahad's Rule shall be initiated into the Covenant before God, agreeing to act according to all that He has commanded and not to backslide because of any fear, terror, or persecution that may occur during the time of Belial's dominion.

Notes:

1 Ne 13:21-29 declares that "covenants" have been removed from the Bible. Here the Community in Qumran is clearly open about a covenant they have before God.

1QS 1:22-26

TDDST pg 3

And the levites shall recite the sins of the children of Israel, all their blameworthy transgressions and their sins during the dominion of Belial. [And all] those who enter the covenant shall confess after them and they shall say:
<<We have acted sinfully,
[we have transgressed,
we have sinned, we have acted irreverently,
we and our fathers before us,
inasmuch as we walk
[in the opposite direction to the precepts] of truth and justice
[...] his judgment upon us and upon our fathers;

DSSNT pg 127

The Levites in turn shall rehearse the wicked acts of the children of Israel, all their guilty transgressions and sins committed during the dominion of Belial. All the initiates into the Covenant are to respond by confessing, <<We have been wicked, transgressed, and [sin]ned. We have been wicked - we and our fathers before us - walking [in rebellion to the laws] of truth and righteousness, [wherefore God] has judged us, both we and our fathers.

Notes:

Compare this to the typical Evangelical Christian prayer where we acknowledge our sinful nature to God before asking for forgiveness and asking Christ to save us. See Mosiah 4:2.

Note how in Daniel 9 he prays “we do not present our supplications before you for our righteousnesses” (Daniel 9:18). Moses put it even better, “Not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart, do you go to possess their land, but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God does drive them out from before you; and that he may perform the word which the Lord swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord your God gives you not this good land to possess it for your righteousness, for you are a stiffnecked people.” (Deut 9:5. See also Ezekiel 36:21-23)

1QS 2:11-15

{The priests (high priesthood) blesses. The levites (lower priesthood) curses.}

TDDST pg 4

And the priests and the levites shall continue, saying:
<<Cursed by the idols which his heart reveres
whoever enters this covenant
leaving his guilty obstacle in front of himself to fall over
it.
When he hears the words of this covenant,
he will congratulate himself in his heart, saying:
'I will have peace,
in spite of my walking in the stubbornness of my heart'.
However, his spirit will be obliterated,
the dry with the moist, mercilessly.
May God's anger and the wrath of his verdicts
consume him for everlasting destruction.

DSSNT pg 128

Then the priests and Levites shall go on to declare,
<<Damned be anyone initiated with unrepentant heart,
who enters this Covenant, then sets up the stumbling
block of his sin, so turning apostate. It shall come to
pass, when he hears the words of this Covenant, that
he shall bless himself in his heart, saying 'Peace be with
me, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart'
(Deut. 29:18-19). Surrounded by abundant water, his
spirit shall nevertheless expire thirsty, without
forgiveness. God's anger and zeal for His
commandments shall burn against him for eternal
destruction.

Notes:

Note how seriously they take the covenant they have entered into.

1QS Col 3:17-25

TDSST pg 6

He created man to rule the world and placed within
him two spirits so that he would walk with them until
the moment of his visitation: they are the spirits of
truth and of deceit. In the hand of the Prince of Lights
is dominion over all the sons of justice; they walk on
paths of light. And in the hand of the Angel of Darkness
is total dominion over the sons of deceit; they walk on
paths of darkness. Due to the Angel of Darkness all the
sons of justice stray, and all their sins, their iniquities,
their failings and their mutinous deeds are under his
dominion in compliance with the mysteries of God,
until his moment; and all their punishments and their
periods of grief are caused by the dominion of his
enmity; and all the spirits of their lot cause the sons of

DSSNT pg 129

He created humankind to rule over the world,
appointing for them two spirits in which to walk until
the time ordained for His visitation. These are the
spirits of truth and falsehood. Upright character and
fate originate with the Habitation of Light; perverse,
with the Fountain of Darkness. The authority of the
Prince of Light extends to the governance of all
righteous people; therefore, they walk in the paths of
light. Correspondingly, the authority of the Angel of
Darkness embraces the governance of all wicked
people, so they walk in the paths of darkness.
The authority of the Angel of Darkness further extends
to the corruption of all the righteous. All their sins,
iniquities, shameful and rebellious deeds are at his
prompting, a situation God in His mysteries allows to

light to fall. However, the God of Israel and the angel of his truth assist all the sons of light.

continue until His era dawns. Moreover, all the afflictions of the righteous, and every trial in its season, occur because of this Angel's diabolic rule. All the spirits allied with him share but a single resolve: to cause the Sons of light to stumble.

Yet the God of Israel (and the Angel of His Truth) assist all the Sons of Light.

Notes:

Compare with 1 Cor 2:11-14, Mosiah 16:5, Alma 41:11.

1QS Col 5:24-6:2

TDSST pg 9

Each should reproach his fellow in truth, in meekness and in compassionate love for the man. No-one should speak to his brother in anger or muttering, or with a hard [neck or with passionate] spiteful intent and he should not detest him [in the stubbornness] of his heart, but instead reproach him that day so as not to incur a sin for his fault. And in addition, no-one should raise a matter against his fellow in front of the Many unless it is with reproof in the presence of witnesses. In this way shall they behave...

DSSNT pg 133

Each man is to reprove his fellow in truth, humility, and loving-kindness. He should not speak to him in anger, with grumbling, with a [stiff] neck or with a wickedly [zealous] spirit. He must not hate him because of his own [uncircumcised] heart. Most assuredly he is to rebuke him on the day of the infraction so that he does not continue in sin. Also, no man is to bring a charge against his fellow before the general membership unless he has previously rebuked that man before witnesses. By these rules they are to govern themselves...

Notes:

Be of one heart, and regard one another with charity. Measure your words before giving voice to them, and consider the hearts of others. Study to learn how to respect your brothers and sisters and to come together by precept, reason and persuasion rather than sharply disputing and wrongly condemning each other, causing anger.

1QS 6:18-20

{Specific rules laid out in the Community}

TDSST pg 10

And if the lot results in him joining the foundations of the Community according to the priests and the majority of the men of the covenant, his wealth and his belongings will also be included at the hands of the Inspector of the belongings of the Many.

DSSNT pg 134

If it be ordained, in the opinion of the priests and the majority of the men of their Covenant, then he shall be initiated further into the secret teaching of the Yahad. They shall also take steps to incorporate his property, putting it under the authority of the Overseer together with that of the general membership, and keeping an account of it - but it shall not yet be disbursed along with that of the general membership.

Notes:

Reminds me of the curious incident in Acts when a covenant is established authoritatively, approved by the Lord, but then violated by those who take upon them the covenant. See Acts 5:1-10 story of Ananias, with Sapphira his wife.

And this passage:

"One of the Irvingites once quoted this passage whilst under the influence of a spirit, and then said, "I confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." And yet these prophecies failed, their messiah did not come, and the great things spoken of by them have fallen to the ground. What is the matter here? Did not the Apostle speak the truth? Certainly he did — but he spoke to a people who were under the penalty of death the moment they embraced Christianity; and no one without a knowledge of the fact would confess it and expose themselves to death, and this was consequently given as a criterion to the church or churches to which John wrote. But the Devil on a certain occasion cried out, "I know you, who you are, the Holy One of God!" Here was a frank acknowledgment under other circumstances that "Jesus had come in the flesh." On another occasion the Devil said, "Paul we know, and Jesus we know" — of course, "come in the flesh." No man nor sect of men without the regular constituted authorities, the Priesthood, and discerning of spirits can tell true from false spirits. This power they possessed in the apostles' day, but it has departed from the world for ages." (From editorial by Joseph Smith Jr. published in the Times and Seasons, 1 April 1842, entitled "Try the Spirits")

Genizah A 8:14-21

TDSST pg 38

And what Moses says: Dt 9:5 Not for your justice, or for the uprightness of your heart are you going to possess these nations, but because he loved your fathers and keeps the oath... And in my hatred for the builders of the wall his anger is kindled. And like this judgement will be that of all who reject God's precepts and forsake them and move aside in the stubbornness of their heart. This is the word which Jeremiah spoke to Baruch, son of Neriah, and Elishah to Giezi his servant. All the men who entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus

DSSNT pg 59 (including interjected quotes from Genizah B)

But as Moses said (B adds: to Israel), "It is not for your righteousness or the integrity of your heart that you are going to dispossess these nations, but because He loved your ancestors and because He has kept his promise" (Deut. 9:5, 7:8). Such is the verdict on the captivity of Israel, those who turn away from the usages of the common people. Because God loved the ancients who bore witness (B adds: to the people) following Him, so too He loves those who follow them, for to such truly belongs the covenant of the fathers. But against His enemies, the Shoddy-Wall-Builders, His anger burns. (B reads differently: But He hates and despises the Shoddy-Wall-Builders and His anger burns hot against them and all who follow them.) So there is one fate for everyone who rejects the commandments of God and abandons them to follow their own willful heart. This is the word that Jeremiah spoke to Baruch son of Neriah, and Elisha to Gehazi his servant.

Notes:

Again, not for you, but because of the covenant (see again Daniel 9:18 and Deut 9:5). Note God's hatred for the builders of the wall. Are these the Deuteronomists who reject God's precepts and forsake them and move aside in the stubbornness of their heart?

1Q34 Frag 3 Col 2

TDSST pg 411

DSSNT pg 185

the great light for [day]-time, [and the small one for night-time...] [...] without their laws bring broken. And all of them [...] [...] and his dominion over the whole world. But the offspring of man has not understood all that you have given them as inheritance, and they have not known you, to do your word and they act more wickedly than anybody. They do not understand your powerful strength. This is why you reject them, because you do not like sin, and the wicked person will not endure before you. However you have chosen a people a people in the period of your favour, because you have remembered the covenant. You established them, isolating them for yourself in order to make them holy among all the peoples. And you have renewed your covenant with them in the vision of your glory, and in the words of your holy spirit, by the works of your hand. Your right hand has written to let them know the regulations of glory and the everlasting deeds. [... You raised up] a loyal shepherd for them [...] poor and [...]

[...] a grea[t] light for the [day]time [and a lesser light for the nighttime ...] [...] and they cannot overstep their boundaries. And all of them [...] [...] and their dominion is over all the world. But the seed of ma[n] has not understood all that You have given him as an inheritance, neither have they known You, [do]ing Your word, so they have acted more wickedly than all the rest. They did not attend to Your great power and so You rejected them because You do not take pleasure in injustice and the wicked one shall not be established before You. But in the time of Your goodwill You chose a people for Yourself, because You remembered Your covenant. So You [established] them, setting them apart from all the peoples as holy to Yourself. And You renewed Your covenant for them in a vision of Your glory and words of Your holy [spirit], by the works of Your hands and the writing of Your right hand, in order to declare to them the foundations of glory, and the eternal works. [...] for [th]em a faithful shepherd [...]wretched and p[oor]

Notes:

A loyal shepherd is raised up among them. God establishes them as a chosen people with a covenant. This passage begins with language reminiscent of temple endowment language.

1Q27 Frag 1 col 1

TDSST pg 399

And they do not know the future mystery, or understand ancient matters. And they do not know what is going to happen to them; and they will not save their souls from the future mystery. And for you this will be the sign / that this is going to happen. When those born of sin are locked up, evil will disappear in front of justice as darkness disappears in front of light. As smoke disappears, and no longer exists, so will evil disappear for ever. And justice will be revealed like a sun which regulates the world. And all those who curb the wonderful mysteries will no longer exist. And knowledge will pervade the world, and there will never be folly there. This word will undoubtedly happen, the prediction is truthful. And by this he will show you that it is irrevocable: Do not all peoples loath sin? And yet, they all walk about under its influence. Does not praise of truth come from the mouth of all nations? And yet, is there perhaps one lip or one tongue which persists with it? What people would wish to be oppressed by another more powerful than itself? Who would wish to be sinfully looted of its wealth? And yet, which is the people not to oppress its neighbour? Where is the people which has not looted another of its wealth?

DSSNT pg 176

but they did not know the secret of the way things are nor did they understand the things of old and they did not know what would come upon them, so they did not rescue themselves without the secret of the way things are. This shall be the sign that this shall come to pass: when the sources of evil are shut up and wickedness is banished in the presence of righteousness, as darkness in the presence of light, or as smoke vanishes and is no more, in the same way wickedness will vanish forever and righteousness will be manifest like the sun. The world will be made firm and all the adherents of the secrets of <sin> (MS: wonder) shall be no more. True knowledge shall fill the world and there will never be any more folly. This is all ready to happen, it is a true oracle, and by this it shall be known to you that it cannot be averted. It is true that all the peoples reject evil, yet it advances in all of them. It is true that truth is esteemed in the utterances of all the nations - yet is there any tongue or language that grasps it? What nation wants to be oppressed by another that is stronger? Or who wants his money to be stolen by a wicked man? Yet what nation is there that has not oppressed its neighbour?

Where is the people that has not robbed the wealth [of another...]

Notes:

Compare with 1 Nephi 22:22-28. The description of not only Satan being bound, but of the kingdom of God that Joseph was trying to set up before he was killed.