

A CONNECTION BETWEEN שמונה עשרה AND ברכת המזון

The following גמרא presents a rule of composition that may have been followed in composing both ברכת המזון and the ברכות of שמונה עשרה:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מט' עמ' א'—תנו רבנן: מהו חותם בבנין ירושלים? רבי יוסי ברבי יהודה אומר: מושיע ישראל. מושיע ישראל אין, בנין ירושלים לא? אלא אימא: אף מושיע ישראל. רבה בר רב הונא איקלע לבי ריש גלותא, פתח בחדא וסיים בתרתי. אמר רב חסדא: גבורתא למחתם בתרתאי! והתניא, רבי אומר: אין חותמין בשתיים! גופא, רבי אומר: אין חותמין בשתיים. איתיביה לוי לרבי: על הארץ ועל המזון! ארץ דמפקא מזון. על הארץ ועל הפירות! ארץ דמפקא פירות; מקדש ישראל והזמנים! ישראל דקדשינהו לזמנים; מקדש ישראל וראשי חדשים! ישראל דקדשינהו לראשי חדשים; מקדש השבת וישראל והזמנים! חוץ מזו. ומאי שנא? הכא, חדא היא, התם, תרתאי, כל חדא וחדא באפי נפשה. וטעמא מאי אין חותמין בשתיים, לפי שאין עושין מצות חבילות חבילות. מאי הוי עלה? אמר רב ששת: פתח ברחם על עמך ישראל חותם במושיע ישראל, פתח ברחם על ירושלים, חותם בבונה ירושלים. ורב נחמן אמר: אפילו פתח ברחם על ישראל חותם בבונה ירושלים, משום שנאמר: (תהלים קמ"ז) בונה ירושלים ה' נדחי ישראל יכנס, אימתי בונה ירושלים ה', בזמן שנדחי ישראל יכנס.

This גמרא stands for the rule that a ברכה such as תקע בשופר גדול which ends with the words: בונה ירושלים must precede a ברכה such as מקבץ נדחי עמו ישראל. Why were the three ברכות of על הצדיקים and ולמלשינים, השיבה שופטינו and ברכות placed between the ברכות of תקע בשופר גדול and בונה ירושלים? Professor David Flusser in his book *יהדות בית שני*— may provide an answer¹:

תגליתו של ספראי² חשובה להבנת מיקומה של ברכת המינים בתוך תפלת העמידה. אם נקבל את הנחותיו, הרי בפני הבית בקש אדם מישראל בתפלת העמידה של חול שה' יענק לו דעת, שישב אותו אליו בתשובה, שישלח לו את הטאותיו ויציל אותו מפורענויות. כן התפלל שה' ירפא מחלותיו ויברך את השנה הזאת לטובה. אחר כך בא לבסוף גוש של חמש ברכות, הנוגעת לכלל ישראל, שהראשונה והאחרונה מהן מבטאות את שתי התקוות האסכטולוגיות החשובות ביותר: את הציפייה לקיבוץ גלויות ולבנין ירושלים. מובן למה באות שתי הבקשות לישועת ישראל באחרית הימים אחרי שורת בקשות אישיות של המתפלל, ולמה הוא מסיים את כל בקשותיו בבקשה שה' ישמע את תפילתו שנאמרה זה

1. page 96.

2. An excerpt from Professor Safrai's paper was included in Newsletter 3-35. In summary, Safrai postulates that during the time of the בית שני, only the middle 12 ברכות of שמונה עשרה were recited on weekdays.

עתה. מובן גם שהמקום הטבעי היחיד, אשר היה מתאים לשלב בו את שלוש הברכות הפוליטיות' היה בין שני הברכות שגם עניינן היה כלל ישראל. כך קרא שאותן שלוש הברכות, אשר לדעתנו עניינן העיקרי שלוש האסכולות, הצדוקית, האסיית, והפרושית, נמצאות בין הברכה על קיבוץ גליות לבין הברכה על בניין ירושלים.

הדיון³ בשתי הברכות, זו של קיבוץ גליות וזו של ירושלים, הבאות לפני שלוש הברכות הפוליטיות' שלנו ואחריהן, היה, בין השאר, רצוי כדי להדגיש שדווקא שתי הברכות הללו הן היחידות בתפלת העמידה, המביעות באופן מובהק את תקוות ישראל לאחרית הימים. לשאר הברכות של תפלת העמידה אין משמעות אסכולוגיות, אם כי הערנה לישועה גרמה לכך שמוטיבים אסכולוגיים חדרו גם לברכות אחרות.

Professor Flusser explains what he believes to be the theme of each of the ברכות of על הצדיקים and ולמלשינים, השיבה שופטינו:

מן' האמור עד עכשו ניתן להסיק שהברכה "השיבה שופטינו" הקודמת לברכת המינים, היתה כנראה מופנית נגד ההלכה המוטעית של הצדוקים, ו"ברכת הצדיקים", הבאה אחרי ברכת המינים, תפקידה היה, ללא ספק להעלות קרנה של עדת הפרושים. ומה שנוגע לברכה אמצעית, היא ברכת המינים, כבר ראינו שהיא תוקפת את הפורשים למיניהם; החומר שהבאנו מצביע על כך, שבכמה פעם מופנית בין השאר נגד האסיים. לעובדה שאותן שלש ברכות, הבאות זו לאחר זו של תפלת העמידה, עניינן נוגע כמסתבר לאותן שלוש האסכולות המרכזיות של יהדות בית שני-לצדוקים, לאסיים ולפרושים-יש השלכות מעבר לנושא מחקרנו המצומצם. . . אישור נוסף לכך, ששלוש הברכות הללו הוכנסו גם יחד לתוך התפלה בתקופה מהתקופות - ובעקיפין גם אישור לכך שהן דנות בשלוש ה"אסכולות"-מהווה מיקומן בתפלת העמידה. הן נמצאות בין הברכות שחימותיהן הן: "מקבץ נדחי עמו ישראל", "בונה ירושלים"; ולא במקרה שתי החתימות הללו - בסדר הפוך - הן פסוק מספר תהילים (קמז, ב'): "בונה ירושלים ה', נדחי ישראל יכנס". ואם נוציא את שלוש הברכות הללו, ייסגר הפער. מזמן הצבעתי על כך, שהתקווה לבנין ירושלים ולקיבוץ גליות היו התקוות העיקריות ביהדות, החל מחורבן בית ראשון, כשירושלים נחרבה ועם הלך לגולה ולא חזר ברובו ארצה, עד היום הזה. הואיל ואבדה הסבירות ששתי הציפיות האלה יתגשמו בזמן הזה, נתקבל יותר ויותר הרושם - ואת כבר בימי פרס ומדי - שירושלים תבנה בכל הדרה והגלויות יתקבצו בארצן רק באחרית הימים.

Professor Flusser's argument that the מינים in the ברכה of ולמלשינים were the Essenes fits the chronology of Jewish History. Judaism faced a threat from the Essenes in a much earlier period than the time when Judaism faced a threat from Christianity.

3. page 94.

4. page 93

TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

'א תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מט' עמ' א'-Our Rabbis taught: How does one conclude the blessing of the building of Jerusalem? R. Jose son of R. Judah says: Saviour of Israel. 'Saviour of Israel' and not 'Builder of Jerusalem'? Say rather, 'Saviour of Israel' also. Rabbah b. Bar Hanah was once at the house of the Exilarch. He mentioned one at the beginning of the third blessing and both at the end. R. Hisda said: Is it a superior way to conclude with two? And has it not been taught: Rabbi says that we do not conclude with two? The above rule was stated explicitly: Rabbi says that we do not conclude with two. In objection to this Levi pointed out to Rabbi that we say 'for the land and for the food'? It means, he replied: a land that produces food. But we say, 'for the land and for the fruits'? It means, a land that produces fruits. But we say, 'Who sanctifies Israel and the appointed seasons'? It means, Israel who sanctify the seasons. But we say, Who sanctifies Israel and New Moons? It means, Israel who sanctify New Moons. But we say, Who sanctifies the Sabbath, Israel and the seasons? This is the exception. Why then should it be different? In this case it is one act, in the other two, each distinct and separate. And what is the reason for not concluding with two? Because we do not make religious ceremonies into bundles. How do we decide the matter? R. Shesheth says: If one opens with 'Have mercy on Thy people Israel' he concludes with 'Saviour of Israel'; If he opens with 'Have mercy on Jerusalem', he concludes with 'Who builds Jerusalem'. R. Nahman, however, said: Even if one opens with 'Have mercy on Israel', he concludes with 'Who builds Jerusalem', because it says. The Lord does build up Jerusalem. He gathers together the dispersed of Israel, as if to say: When does God build Jerusalem? After He gathers the dispersed of Israel.

Professor David Flusser-page 96-The discovery of Safrai is an important aid to understanding the placement of the Bracha of Minim within Shemona Esrei. If his premise is correct, we can conclude that at the time of the Second Temple the following represents the order of a person's requests within the Brachot of Shemona Esrei: that G-d bestow upon him knowledge, assist the person to do Teshuvah, forgive the person's sins and save him from catastrophes. The person then asks for a cure for his ailments and for a plentiful year. Following those requests the person recited a combination of five Brachot which contained requests for all the Jewish people; the first and last of which represented the two most important eschatological requests; i.e. hoping for the return of all the exiles and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim. It is understandable why the two requests for the salvation of the Jewish people follow the person's requests for his personal needs and why the person completes that section of Shemona Esrei with a last request that G-d listen to his prayers. It is also understandable why the appropriate place to insert the 'political' Brachot is between the two other Brachot that include requests for all the Jewish people. In our opinion that is how the three Brachot that are Brachot dealing with three political schools, the School of the Tzedukkim, the Essenes and the Perushim found themselves between the

Brachot that concern the gathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Professor David Flusser-page 94-The placement on the two Brachot, concerning the gathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, surrounding the three 'political' Brachot, among other things, was meant to emphasize that these two Brachot, are the only Brachot in Shemona Esrei that represent the hope of the Jewish people for the days in the future. The theme of no other Bracha in Shemona Esrei was meant to be eschatological. However, over time, the yearning for the Final redemption caused eschatological themes to seep into other Brachots.

Professor David Flusser-page 93-From what has been discussed up to this point, we can conclude that the Bracha of Hasheiva Shoftainu that precedes the Bracha of the Minim was authored as a response to the erroneous Halachic positions of the Tzedukkim and that the role of the Bracha of Al Hatzadikkim that comes after the Bracha of the Minim was without a doubt to enhance the position of the Perushim. Concerning the Bracha that is in the middle, the Bracha of the Minim, we already saw that its theme is a response to the enemies of the Perushim. The sources that we have brought forth clearly demonstrate that the Bracha was composed to be a response to the Essenes. The upshot is that these three Brachot which follow each other in Shemona Esrei represented the three central political schools of the Second Temple period; the Tzedukkim, the Essenes and the Perushim. There is an additional implication concerning the topic of our research. It confirms additionally that these three Brachot were inserted simultaneously into Shemona Esrei-and indirectly confirms that the theme of these three Brachot are the three schools-and explains their placement in Shemona Esrei. These three Brachot are found between the Bracha that ends: Mikabetz Nidchei Amo Yisroel and Boneh Yerushalayim; and not coincidentally these two Bracha endings are presented in an order that is opposite the order the words are presented in the verse: (Tehillim 127, 2): Boneh Yerushalayim Hashem, Nidchei Yisroel YiChaneis. If we remove the three political Brachot, the gap will close. Awhile ago I pointed out that the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem were the main yearnings in Judaism starting from the destruction of the First Temple, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people went into exile and most of them failed to return even until the present. Once hope was lost that those two expectations would materialize in their time, the thought became more and more acceptable-already in the time that Persia conquered Babylonia-that Jerusalem would be rebuilt in all its glory and the exiled would return only at the end of days.

SUPPLEMENT

THE ESSENES

RECLAIMING THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran

LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN

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JEWISH SECTS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

In this historical setting, we first meet, in the writings of Josephus, the three major sects of the period -- Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The group that collected the Dead Sea Scrolls also arose at that time, being yet another response to these events. Though scant direct information exists about most of these sects, the Dead Sea sectarians have left us their ancient library, which is now reshaping our understanding of all of the groups of Second Temple Judaism.

For our purposes, a sect can be defined as a religious ideology that may develop the characteristics of a political party in order to defend its way of life. The way the term is generally used in the study of ancient Judaism differs from its usual usage in religious studies, wherein "sect" commonly denotes a group that has somehow split from a mainstream movement. Thus, in the Second Temple period, we refer to all Jewish groups as sects, regardless of size or importance.

Competing sects each sought adherents among the people. Although all were Jewish and regarded the Torah as the ultimate source of Jewish law, each had a different approach or interpretation of Jewish law and considered other groups' approaches illegitimate. The various sects also held differing views on such theological questions as the nature of God's revelation, the free will of human beings, and reward and punishment. They also took different stands on how much acculturation or assimilation to Hellenism they were willing to tolerate.

The greatest conflict arose over the most important symbol of Jewish life -- the Temple itself. When one group would brand as illegitimate sacrifices made by the priestly caste in charge of sacrifices or would accuse them of conducting services improperly, fierce intersectarian conflict would erupt. The Pharisees and Sadducees each sought to control the temporal powers that gave one sect or another the right to determine how the priests would minister in the Temple.

Sadducees and Pharisees were the major participants in the Jewish religious and political

affairs of Greco-Roman Palestine. In fact, the gradual transfer of influence and power from the priestly Sadducees to the learned Pharisees went hand in hand with the transition from Temple to Torah that characterized the Judaism of this period.

At the same time, a number of sects with apocalyptic or ascetic tendencies also contributed to the texture of Palestinian Judaism. Some of these sects played a crucial role in creating the backdrop against which Christianity arose. Others encouraged the messianic visions that twice led the Jews into revolt against Rome. Still others served as the locus for the development of mystical ideas that would eventually penetrate rabbinic Judaism. Each of these groups was characterized by its adherents' extreme dedication to its own interpretation of the Torah and the associated teachings it had received.

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ESSENES

The Essenes, a sect noted for its piety and distinctive theology, were known in Greek as *Essenoi* or *Essaioi*. Although numerous suggestions have been made about the etymology of the name, none has achieved scholarly consensus. The most recent theory, and also the most probable, holds that the name was borrowed from a group of devotees of the cult of Artemis in Asia Minor, whose demeanor and dress somewhat resembled those of the group in Judaea.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, most scholars have identified the Qumran sect with the Essenes. In fact, the only information we have about the group is gleaned from Greek sources, primarily Philo, Josephus, and Pliny the Elder. The term "Essene" does not appear in any of the Qumran scrolls.

According to the testimony of Philo and Josephus, there were about four thousand Essenes -- scattered in communities throughout Palestine -- although there is some evidence that they avoided the larger cities. The Roman author Pliny identifies an Essene settlement between Jericho and Ein Gedi on the western shore of the Dead Sea. For those scholars identifying the Essenes of Philo and Josephus with the Dead Sea sect, that location -- in the vicinity of Qumran -- has been regarded as decisive proof of their claims. As we shall soon see, identification of the sect is a much more complex issue.

ESSENE PRACTICES

Essene children were educated in the ways of the Essene community, but only adult males could enter the sect. The community was organized under officials to whom obedience was required. A court of one hundred could expel from the community any members who transgressed.

Aspiring members received three items -- a hatchet, a loin-cloth, and a white garment --

and had to undergo a detailed initiation process that included a year of probation. They were then eligible for the ritual ablutions. After that stage, candidates had to undergo a further two years of probation, after which they had to swear an oath -- the only oath the Essenes permitted. In the final stages of their initiation, the candidates bound themselves by oath to be pious toward God, just to men, and honest with their fellow Essenes, and to properly transmit the teachings; to be kept secret were the names of the angels. The initiates were then allowed to participate in the sect's communal meals and were considered fullfledged members.

The Essenes practiced community of property. Upon admission, new members turned their property over to the group, whose elected officials administered it for the benefit of all. Hence, all members shared wealth equally, with no distinctions between rich and poor.

Members earned income for the group through various occupations, including agriculture and crafts. The Essenes avoided commerce and the manufacture of weapons. All earnings were turned over to officials, who distributed funds to buy necessities and to take care of older or ill members of the community. Not only did the Essenes provide aid for their own members, but they also dispensed charity throughout the country. Special officers in each town took care of traveling members.

Characteristic of the Essenes were their moderation and avoidance of luxury. They viewed income only as a means of providing the necessities of life, and that approach guided their eating and drinking habits as well as their choice of clothes. It also explains why they did not anoint themselves with oil. Indeed, they saw oil as transmitting ritual impurity. Asceticism manifested itself most strongly among those Essenes who were celibate. But it appears that in many cases celibacy may not have been absolute, but instead practiced later in life, after the individual had had children.

The Essenes' attitude toward the Jerusalem Temple was ambivalent. Whereas they accepted the notion of a central place of worship in Jerusalem, they disagreed about how the Temple authorities understood purity and sacrifices. They therefore sent voluntary offerings to the Temple but did not themselves participate in its sacrificial worship.

The Essenes began their day with prayer, after which they worked at their occupations. Later, they assembled for purification rituals and a communal meal prepared by priests and eaten while wearing special garments. After the members silently took their places, the baker and the cook distributed the food, according to the order of the diners' status. The community then returned to work, coming together once again in the evening for another meal. At sunset, they recited prayers once again. Though some of these practices were common to other Jews of the period as well, the Essenes' unique manner of practice separated them from their fellow Jews.

Ritual purity was greatly emphasized. Ablutions were required not only before communal meals but also after relieving oneself and after coming in contact with a nonmember or a

novice. Members were extremely careful about attending to natural functions modestly. They immersed often in order to maintain ritual purity and refrained from expectorating. They customarily wore white garments, regarding modesty of dress as very important. Noteworthy was their stringency in matters of Sabbath observance.

Essene teachings were recorded in books that the members were duty bound to pass on with great care. Essenes were reported to be experts on medicinal roots and the properties of stones, the healing powers of which they claimed to have derived from ancient writings.

According to Greek sources, the Essenes embraced several fundamental beliefs. One was the notion of unalterable destiny. Another was their belief in the immortality of the soul. According to Josephus, they held that only the soul survived after death. Josephus asserts that in that respect their belief was very close to that of the Pharisees.

Josephus first mentions the Essenes in his account of the reign of Jonathan the Hasmonaean (152-143 B.C.E.), when describing the religious trends of the time. He says that the Essenes participated in the war against Rome in 66-73 C.E. and that some were tortured by the Romans during the revolt. With the destruction of the country following that unsuccessful uprising, the Essenes disappeared.

Ever since the discovery of Qumran cave 1 in 1947, scholars have attempted to identify the Qumran sect with one of the groups known to have existed in Second Temple times. Those who seek to identify the sect with the Essenes tend to gloss over points of disagreement, pointing only to similarities between the two groups. Yet, important differences do exist between descriptions of the Essenes and Qumran sectarian teachings, regarding details of the initiation process and of Jewish law.

The major sects of Second Temple times participated in religious and political ferment throughout their existence. The results of that ferment would eventually determine the future of Judaism. The failure of the Great Revolt and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. settled once and for all some of the most volatile issues. The Sadducees lost their power base; the Essenes and the Dead Sea sect were physically decimated; extreme apocalypticism had been discredited. The Pharisaic approach alone was left to accommodate itself to Roman rule and post-Temple worship, in time becoming the Judaism known today. The legacy of the other sects, however, lives on in their rediscovered writings, in the sectarian teachings that influenced the medieval Karaites, and in some aspects of the new theology of Christianity.

One of the sects that disappeared was the Dead Sea sect. Now, after almost two thousand years of silence, its writings have been rediscovered. How did it fit into this picture of sectarian strife in the Second Commonwealth? And from its library what can we discover about what happened so many years ago?

Examining the origin and early history of the sect will help us to understand the forces that operated after the Maccabean Revolt and how various Jewish groups reacted to those

forces. While some sects were accommodating themselves to the new order in various ways, the Dead Sea group decided it had to leave Jerusalem altogether in order to continue its unique way of life.

CHAPTER 5

Origins and Early History

To understand the schism that gave birth to the Dead Sea sect, we need to frame it against the background of Jewish history and sectarianism in the Hellenistic period. But we now have even more specific information about the particular conflicts, mostly over sacrifices and ritual purity, that led the sectarians to break away and form a distinct group. Indeed, we will see that the origins of the sect are to be traced to the internal priestly turmoil associated with Hellenistic reform, the Maccabean Revolt, and the rise of the Hasmonaean dynasty and high priesthood.

EVIDENCE OF THE HALAKHIC LETTER

A Qumran text, today known as the *Halakhic Letter*, demonstrates quite clearly that the root cause that led to the sectarian schism consisted of a series of disagreements about sacrificial law and ritual purity. The full name of this document is *Miq'at Ma'ase ha-Torah* (some legal rulings pertaining to the Torah). The writers of its text list more than twenty laws that describe the ways their practices differed from those prevailing in the Temple and its sacrificial worship. But even more important, the document reveals more precise information than we have previously had about the origins of the sect.

The *Halakhic Letter* begins with a statement about its own intent*:

These are some of our (legal) rulings [regarding Go]d's [Torah] which are [some of the] rulings of [the] laws which w[e hold, and a]ll of them are regarding [sacrifices] and the purity of.... (HALAKHIC LETTER B1-3)

* Information on this and all texts quoted or cited in this book is found in the Guide to Dead Sea Scrolls Texts Cited at the back of the book. All translations presented here are by the author, except for biblical texts, which for the most part follow the New Jewish Publication Society translation. *Square brackets* are used to indicate restorations made by scholars to fragmentary scroll texts. *Parentheses* are used to indicate explanatory material added to the translation.

The first sentence announces that what follows are some of "our (legal) rulings" that "we hold." Throughout the letter the authors refer to themselves in the plural. What then follows is a list of twenty-two halakhic matters over which the sectarians disagree with the addressee of the letter. For most of these, the text includes both the view of the writers as well as that of their opponents. Such phrases as "but you know" and "but we hold,"

indicate the polemical nature of the text. Later we will look at one of the document's specific laws, which demonstrates unquestionably that this group adhered to the Sadducean trend in Jewish law.

The second part of the letter returns to general principles, presenting the writers' general views on the schism now under way. The authors state:

[You know that] we have separated from the mainstream of the peo[ple and from all their impurities and] from mixing in these matters and from being involved w[ith them] regarding these matters. But you k[now that there cannot be] found in our hands dishonesty, falsehood, or evil. (*HALAKHIC LETTER C7-9*)

The writers here state that in accepting the aforementioned rulings, they had to withdraw from participation in the rituals of the majority of the people. The purpose of this document was to call on their erstwhile colleagues in Jerusalem and the Hasmonaean leader to effect a reconciliation that would allow them to return to their role in the Temple. Needless to say, reconciliation meant accepting the views this document puts forth. Accordingly, the authors make the general statement that the addressees know that the members of this dissident group are reliable and honest, meaning that the list of laws is indeed being strictly observed as stated by the authors.

At this point, the letter plainly explains its purpose:

[For indeed] we have [written] to you in order that you will investigate the Book of Moses [and] in the book[s of the P]rophets and of Davi[d..., in the deeds] of each and every generation. (*HALAKHIC LETTER C9-11*)

The sectarians have written to the addressee (now for the first time in the singular) in order that "you" will examine the words of the Torah, the Prophets, and David (presumably the biblical accounts of the Davidic monarchy), as well as the history of the generations.

The text now turns to what is to be found in those particular documents, that is, the Scriptures that the sectarians want their opponent to search. The addressee is told (again in the singular) that it has been foretold that he would turn aside from the path of righteousness and, as a result, suffer misfortune. The text of the *Halakhic Letter* then predicts that in the End of Days, the ruler will return to God. All of it is in accord with what is written in the Torah and in the Prophets. This time the authors do not mention the Writings, probably because the relevant blessings and curses do not occur there.

The text now returns to the discussion of the kings, recalling the blessings fulfilled during the time of Solomon, son of David, and the curses visited on Israel from the days of Jeroboam, son of Nebat (c. 922-901 B.C.E., son of Solomon), through the time of Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.E., last king of Judah).

Next the writers state that in their view some of the blessings and curses have already come

to pass:

And we recognize that some of the blessings and curses which are written in the B[ook of Mo]ses have come to pass, and that this is the End of Days when they will repent in Isra[el] for[ever...] and they will not backsli[de]. (*HALAKHIC LETTER C20-22*)

Here the authors reveal their belief that they are currently living on the verge of the End of Days, a notion that later became normative in Qumran messianic thought. It is also clear that they considered their own age the period foretold by the Bible as the final repentance of Israel.

In light of these beliefs, the authors exhort the addressee (singular) to recall the events surrounding the reigns of Israel's kings, to examine their deeds, and to note that those who observed the laws of the Torah were spared misfortune, their transgressions forgiven. Such was the case with David, whom the addressee is asked to remember.

The authors then sum up why they sent this text to the addressee:

And indeed, we have written to you some of the rulings pertaining to the Torah which we considered were good for you and your people, for [we have seen] that you have wisdom and knowledge of the Torah. Understand all these (matters) and seek from Him that He correct your counsel and distance from you evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial, in order that you shall rejoice in the end when you find some of our words correct. And let it be considered right for you, and lead you to do righteousness and good, and may it be for your benefit, and for that of Israel. (*HALAKHIC LETTER C26-32*)

Here the phrase *Miq?at Ma'ase ha-Torah* (some of the rulings pertaining to the Torah) appears. The authors state that the letter is intended for the benefit of the addressee and the nation. The addressee is credited with being wise and having sufficient knowledge of the Torah to understand the halakhic matters presented in the letter. The writers call on him to mend his ways and renounce all of his incorrect views on matters of Jewish law. Doing so will lead him to rejoice at the end of this period (the End of Days), for he will come to realize that the writers of the letter are indeed correct in their views. His repentance will be judged a righteous deed, beneficial both for him and for all Israel.

One of the interesting features of the *Halakhic Letter* is the way the grammatical number of addressees shifts. In the introductory sentence, the letter is addressed to an individual, but in the list of laws, the authors engage in a dispute with a group ("you," plural). When the text returns to its main argument -- at the conclusion of the list of laws -- it shifts back to the singular. We will see later that the plural sections are addressed to priests of the Jerusalem Temple, and the singular to the Hasmonaean ruler.

To understand the nature of this text, we will consider an example of one of its halakhic

controversies -- the law regarding liquid streams:

[And even] regarding (poured out) liquid streams, we sa[y] that they do not have [pu]rity. And even the liquid streams do not separate between the impure [and the] pure. For the moisture of the liquid streams and (the vessel) which receives from them are both considered one identical moisture. (*HALAKHIC LETTER B56-58*)

This enigmatic rule refers to questions of ritual purity in the pouring of liquids from one vessel to another. In a case when the upper vessel is pure and the lower one is not, the question in our text concerns whether the upper vessel -- the source of the liquid stream -- can be rendered impure when the stream itself links the two vessels together. The text of the *Halakhic Letter* asserts that the entire entity is "one moisture," that is, that the impurity does rise back up the stream, against the direction of the flow, so as to render the upper vessel impure.

This law has a close parallel in the Mishnah. There, in reporting a number of disputes between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Mishnah states:

The Sadducees say: "We complain against you Pharisees. For you declare pure the (poured out) liquid stream." (*M. YADAYIM 4:7*)

In contrast to our text and the Sadducean view implied in the Mishnah, the Pharisees ruled that in such cases the stream did not impart impurity to the pure vessel from which it was being poured. To them, the impurity of the lower vessel could not flow up, against the flow of the stream, to render the upper vessel impure. Because the Sadducees, in this and many other cases, share the same positions we find in the *Halakhic Letter*, we can convincingly show, using this and other Qumran texts, that the Qumran sect had a substratum of Sadducean halakhic views.

It appears that this letter was written to the head of the Jerusalem establishment, the high priest. The comparisons with the kings of Judah and Israel must have been particularly appropriate to someone who saw himself as an almost royal figure. In the letter, the ruler is admonished to take care lest he go the way of the kings of First Temple times. Such a warning could be addressed only to a figure who could identify, because of his own station in life, with the ancient kings of biblical Israel.

The *Halakhic Letter* makes no mention of the Teacher of Righteousness or any other leader or official known from the sectarian documents. Because the sect's own official history, presented in the *Zadokite Fragments*, claims that their initial separation from the main body of Israel took place some twenty years before the coming of the teacher, we can conclude that the *Halakhic Letter* was written by the collective leadership of the sect in those initial years. This explains why the teacher does not appear in this text.