

The Teacher Of Righteousness: A Messianic Interpretation Of Joel 2:23

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Abstract

The title of the Qumran leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, seems to be derived from a biblical text, but which specific text has been disputed. The most likely source of the title is Joel 2:23. The Qumran sect was accurate in their understanding of this text, but incorrect in identifying their founder as the referent. Instead, Joel 2:23 predicts the Messiah coming to Israel and ushering in a reign of prosperity and abundance.

The Qumran sect had a mysterious and revered leader. In the mid- to late-second century BC, they mention the “Teacher of Righteousness” some fifteen times in the published Dead Sea Scrolls.¹ Although he does not appear to be considered the Messiah, the Teacher of Righteousness did have messianic characteristics, including the idea that “fidelity to his inspired teaching [was] considered necessary for salvation.”² In attributing messianic qualities to this mysterious teacher, the Qumran scrolls depict him “as a new Moses,” a role also central to Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus as Messiah.³

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Scholars recognize the Qumran community’s source of the title Teacher of Righteousness as biblical, though the specific reference is disputed. Some attribute it to Hosea 10:12 (“until he comes and sends righteousness on you like the rain,” עַד־יָבוֹא וַיִּרְחַק לָכֶם), while others see it as derived from Joel 2:23 (“because he gives you the autumn rain for your vindication,” כִּי־יִתֵּן לָכֶם אֶת־הַמֹּרֶה לְצִדְקָה). Still others view it as coming from both verses.⁴

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