

The Origin of Jesus

by Sven Nilsen, 2024

In this essay I discuss how the story of Jesus might have started based on scientific evidence. If Jesus lived, then he might be an apocalyptic preacher of an end that never came. The Messiah identity was human, by existing Jewish prophecies. His message might have been Jewish spiritual cleanliness preparation for the new kingdom in Yahweh's presence according to Temple practices. Later Jesus was deified by Hellenistic tradition and associated with Dionysus, an agricultural deity. The historical Jesus might have believed in a coming Messiah and not identify himself as one alive.

The Qumran sect was mostly associated with a Jewish ascetic community who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. The community thrives from around 3rd century BCE to 1st century CE. This sect prophesied about not one, but two Messiahs:

- The priestly Messiah of Aaron
- The Davidic Messiah of Israel

Neither of the two Messiahs were thought about as deities, but they were associated with the end of days, a final judgement and establishment of righteousness and peace. This is the starting point for arguing that there was anticipation of a priestly Messiah figure who was not expected to be a kingly or political leader. Instead, the priestly Messiah figure would have a role in establishing and maintaining public and ritual practices. Notice that this community evolved over 4 centuries, which gives enough time for a such anticipation to spread in Israel.

One of the central themes in the scrolls is the expectations of a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, culminating in an apocalyptic end of the current age and the dawn of a new era of righteousness. The scrolls often refer to a "Teacher of Righteousness", Moreh Tzedek, who is a pivotal figure within the community's history and beliefs. He is portrayed as a spiritual leader who preached messages of repentance, righteous living and preparations of the end times. He is also depicted as persecuted by adversaries, often referred to as "Wicked Priest" or "Man of Lies". Moreh Tzedek is generally considered by scholars to been a past leader who had profound impact on the community's formation and beliefs.

While members of the community likely did not claim to be the Teacher of Righteousness themselves, they did view themselves as spiritual successors who carried on his legacy. There were no recordings of specific members leaving the sect among the Dead Sea Scrolls, but they had documents that indicate a system for punishment for persistent or major violations by expulsion from the community. If a member was expelled, then it is likely that the person would put some distance between themselves and the sect. The person might do it due to safety and avoiding conflict, psychological distance, cultural reintegration and finding new community.

John the Baptist is traditionally associated with the region around the Jordan river, specifically the area where the river nears the Dead Sea. This would be between 20 to 30 km away from the Qumran sect. It is conceivable that John and the Qumran community were aware about each other. However, the Qumran sect separated themselves from mainstream Jewish society. They referred to themselves as "The Sons of Light", contrasted to the Jewish society as "The Sons of Darkness". Their prophetic and apocalyptic outlook might have restricted which people they shared their believes with. It is possible that the community considered their texts too complex or sacred for the

uninitiated. Writings from the Dead Sea Scrolls primarily address members of the community or those already sympathetic to their views.

In the broader culture at the time, ritual washing was used to prepare the human body of being in the presence of Yahweh. Initially, this had nothing to do with cleansing of sins. It symbolizes purification, renewal and preparation for spiritual act or events. These rituals address different forms of impurity such as contact with the dead, skin diseases, or bodily fluids. A Mikveh is a ritual pool used for the purpose of achieving spiritual purity. The Qumran community, as well as other Jews of the period, built and used these pools for purposes, which included immersions related to tasks involving sacred objects, religious festivals, and before entering the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Qumran sect put emphasis on the divine kingdom that was to come, in a time when Yahweh would take place among the people. Only those who had prepared themselves with spiritual purification would live in this new kingdom. Therefore, in order to be prepared for the coming kingdom of Yahweh, the sect built pools and regularly went through the ritual washing. The sect viewed themselves as a community of priests and priestly figures, modeling their lives on the Temple's purity rules despite not serving in the Jerusalem Temple itself. Their washings were analogous to the Temple's requirements for priests, emphasizing their role as a holy congregation ready to serve in the new kingdom. By rigorously maintaining their purity laws, which included regular ritual washings, the Qumran community distinguished themselves from other Jewish groups and society at large, whom they often regarded as impure and corrupt. This distinction was crucial for their identity as the true followers of God, prepared for the divine kingdom. Ritual purification reinforced the community's sense of being in a renewed covenant with God. They believed that, unlike the rest of society, they were upholding the true standards of the covenant, and ritual washing was an expression of their fidelity to this commitment.

According to the prevailing theory among many scholars, the Qumran sect began sometime in the late 3rd or early 2nd century BCE. This was a time of great upheaval and change within Jewish society in Judea, marked by the influence of Hellenistic culture, internal conflicts over religious and political leadership, and the struggle for independence from various foreign powers, including the Seleucid Empire. The group associated with Qumran is often identified with, or at least related to, the Essenes, a Jewish sect mentioned by Josephus and other ancient writers alongside the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Essenes are described as a pious group with rigorous religious practices, communal ownership of property, and an ascetic lifestyle. The members of the Qumran sect seem to have separated from mainstream Jewish society due to religious disagreements, possibly about the interpretation of the Law, the administration of the Temple, and the calendar. The Qumran community revered a figure they called the "Teacher of Righteousness," who appears to have been a founding or reforming leader with significant influence on the group's doctrines and practices. It is speculated that this figure may have had a dispute with the religious authorities in Jerusalem, prompting a move towards forming a separate monastic-like community at Qumran. The sect had a distinct approach to scriptural interpretation, including the belief that prophecies were being fulfilled in their own time, and they saw themselves as living in the last days before the divine intervention. The community held strong apocalyptic beliefs, foreseeing a final battle between the forces of good (the "Sons of Light," with which they identified) and evil (the "Sons of Darkness"). These eschatological beliefs might have attracted followers seeking a more intimate relationship with God and a life aligned with their expectations of the world's imminent end. The community's ascetic practices, emphasis on celibacy (among some members), and shared property suggest an attempt to create an ideal religious society separate from the perceived corruption of the surrounding world. The site of Qumran was likely chosen for its remoteness and proximity to the Dead Sea. The community thereby created a center for religious study, communal living, and ritual purity that persisted for several centuries, until its abandonment around the time of the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE).

In the Qumran sect, ritual washing played a role in maintaining a state of cleanliness before God. The sect members were required to perform ablutions to purify themselves from impurity, and the Community Rule prescribes immersion in water for the purification of both physical and spiritual defilements. Ritual purity was essential for participation in communal meals and religious observances. The War Scroll describes the eschatological battle between the forces of good and evil, also includes provisions for maintaining purity within the camp of the "Sons of Light." There are instructions for the soldiers on cleanliness, indicating that even in a military context, the state of ritual purity was crucial. The Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah document includes a list of halakhic (legal) rulings, some of which pertain to issues of purity and impurity. It suggests disputes between the sect and other contemporary Jewish authorities regarding the proper observance of the law, including practices related to purity. Various commentary scrolls (pesherim) on sacred texts, which interpret the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, assume an intimate knowledge of and adherence to the community's purity practices, indicating that these practices are inherent to the community's identity and covenant with God. The communal emphasis on ritual washing at Qumran was part of a larger framework of purity that set them apart from other groups within Judaism, which they saw as failing to live according to God's true requirements. They believed that by adhering to their rigorous practices, they were preparing themselves for participation in the divine kingdom they anticipated would soon be established on Earth. For the Qumran sect, ritual washing was thus not only a matter of physical cleanliness but was also deeply tied to spiritual readiness and holiness.

For John the Baptist, the baptism in the Jordan river is ritual washing under anticipation of a new kingdom. The ritual prepares people for the presence of Yahweh and the coming of Messiah. People who get baptized by John believe they live in the end of times. The ritual cleanliness is associated with the expected presence of Yahweh, according to general Jewish cultural beliefs of ritual washing when serving in the Jerusalem Temple. This was traditionally related to the role of priests. Common people did not have a problem with spiritual impurity on a regular basis. However, the apocalyptic elements of anticipating the near term coming of Messiah and establishing a new kingdom with Yahweh's presence, contributed to people believing in the necessity of preparing themselves. This was a ritual reflecting the common religious practice, but applied to a spiritual belief in the special circumstances at the time, when people thought the world would end soon. By performing the ritual, the people entered a state of spiritual cleanliness that would allow Yahweh's presence as if they were priests serving at the Temple or participating in a holy communion.

Most Jews at the time believed that Messiah would come soon, but that Messiah was a person. The requirement of baptism in the sense of John the Baptist, was centered on preparing for Yahweh's presence in the new kingdom. This belief comes from the idea that ritual cleansing is necessary in the presence of Yahweh. It was a ritual beyond ritual washing in the role of a priest. The spiritual cleanliness was thought of as an intimate relationship between the individual and Yahweh. People believed that in the new kingdom, Yahweh would physically be present, in human form. Baptism related to the problem of being in contact with the dead, skin diseases, or bodily fluids in the presence of Yahweh. People believed that Yahweh had a body, like humans have, which body was centered in the Jerusalem Temple. The ritual washing through baptism was used to allow reducing the distance to Yahweh as a physical deity associated with the new kingdom. Although Yahweh had a presence associated with the Jerusalem Temple, this presence was attributed more significance in the apocalyptic perspective of the end of times and the coming of Messiah, but in particular to the bodily relationship to the physical presence of Yahweh.

In the origin of Christianity, Jesus might be a priestly version of the kingly Messiah, but also could be perceived as kingly, who the first Christians might have thought of as coming as a human to restore order. Jesus is expected to come at the end of times and establish a new kingdom. People at the time believed that there would be a resurrection of all the tombs to receive final judgement by

Yahweh. This was thought to happen soon. Baptism was due to Jewish beliefs in spiritual cleanliness which prepared them for Yahweh's presence. The emphasis was on the end of times and preparations using rituals was done with this in mind.

It is possible that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher who preached the coming of Messiah and Yahweh, but got crucified. With other words, Jesus might have not identified himself as Messiah, but instead preaching of some coming Messiah with the new kingdom of Yahweh. Later, he was identified with the coming Messiah and the first among many resurrections, as believed by Paul.

The end never came.

Paul never met Jesus in person and it is only through the reference to James, Jesus' brother in his texts that one has evidence pointing toward some historical Jesus. This might happen due the emphasis on the apocalyptic message and ritual washing as a preparation for Yahweh's presence. There was probably little emphasis on the life of Jesus. The coming Messiah was mostly mythological, but might be identified with a historical person. If there was a core of historicity to Jesus as a myth, it might be the "Teacher of Righteousness" in the Qumran sect, Moreh Tzedek, which prophesied about the end of time coming soon and the two Messiahs, developing the idea of ritual washing as preparation for the presence of Yahweh in the new kingdom.

The story of Jesus in the gospels is largely based on Homeric tales and his resurrection and deification is according to the tradition of translation fables in the Hellenistic world as a way to honour a person. The bread and wine as transfigured body of Jesus comes from an agricultural myth related to Dionysus, where practitioners used entheogens in wine to generate hallucinations and broke bread, both products of agriculture and symbols of death and rebirth.

The Hellenistic world lacked the context of ritual washing in the sense of Jewish apocalyptic preparedness for Yahweh's presence, so baptism became an initiation ritual for the Christian sect. This was associated with the cleansing of sins, a belief in spiritual purity, different from the Jewish purity laws for Temple practices. The death and resurrection of Jesus became over time interpreted in this sense of spiritual purity, rebirth and cleansing of sins. The particular empty tomb of Jesus was more emphasized.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection became the central theme of the doctrine through the influence of Dionysus, due to the prolonged period of time waiting for the end to happen. The second coming as Messiah was still a component of the belief system, but less asserted after Hellenistic influence.

This hypothesis presented in this essay was put together using multiple sources on my own account.

It is based on the excellent work by:

- **Bart D. Ehrman (biblical scholar, deification of Jesus in gospels in the New Testament)**
Bart Ehrman helped me to understand how Jesus could become Son of God over time, but I think the emphasis is not on a historical Jesus, but on the coming of a human Messiah figure expected by Jewish beliefs.
- **Carl A. P. Ruck (classicist, Dionysus cults)**
Carl Ruck helped me to understand the influence of Dionysus in the ritual practices of Christianity.
- **Francesca Stavrakopoulou (biblical scholar, religious anatomy of Yahweh)**
Francesca Stavrakopoulou helped me to understand how people at the time thought about the body of Yahweh and how they used it in their spiritual language and personal relationship of worship.
- **Jodi Magness (archeologist, Qumran sect and ritual washing)**
Jodi Magness helped me to understand the Qumran sect and how they might relate to John the Baptist.

- **Richard Carrier (historian, mythicism of Jesus)**

Richard Carrier helped me to understand the mythological anticipation of Messiah, but I think the emphasis is not on a mythological angel, but it was a non-historical human identity related to a priestly or kingly Messiah.

- **Richard C. Miller (biblical scholar, resurrection and translation fable of Jesus)**

Richard Miller helped me to understand the tradition of translation fables in the Hellenistic world, which explains Jesus' resurrection in the context of a Homeric tale, which is likely how the gospels portrays Jesus.