

Reading Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Jewish World of the New Testament

Reading

- Josephus, JW 2.119-161
- Community Rule (1QS; Serek ha-Yahad)
- Damascus Document (CD) i-viii
- War Scroll (1QM) (i-iii, v, x, xviii-xix)

Josephus

- What does Josephus tell us about the Essenes? Does all of this agree with the picture we get of the Qumran group in the Community Rule?
- Josephus spends much more time describing the Essenes in the *Jewish War* than he does describing the other Jewish "schools". Why do you think he would place so much emphasis on them?

Community Rule

- What kind of leadership structure does the Qumran community employ? How is this grounded in their theology?
- What are the penalties used in disciplining community members? What does the choice of penalties say about the priorities and theology of the community?
- The community rule has often been seen to present parallels with the "dualism" and "determinism" of the Gospel of John. What similarities do you see? How does this influence our reading of John?
- Remember that this is the same group that produced and used the Thanksgiving Hymns. Does it change the way you read the Community Rule to think of these people also singing those hymns?

Damascus Document

- How does the author of CD (the Damascus Document) understand the group's place in salvation history?

The War Scroll

- What kind of eschatology is reflected in the War Scroll? Do you think this is a faithful reading of the prophets' predictions? Why or why not?
- How does the author of the War Scroll say the final war must be organized and fought? What do his various instructions tell us about the theology and focus of the Qumran sect?

After having read all of these documents for this week,

- What are the common elements of belief and practice that Qumran/the Essenes share with most of the other Jews we've read about this term?
- What would you say are the distinctive emphases of Qumran/Essene theology, over against other Jewish groups?