

# The “Beatitude” fragments from Qumran Cave IV: A literary comparison with Ancient Christian proverbs

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## **Abstract**

*As the corpus of texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls has filled out, their value in Judeo-Christian studies has become increasingly apparent. A case in point involves the proverbial sayings known as the Cave 4 “Beatitudes” (4Q525), which find parallel in the “Beatitudes” of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. When these Qumranic “ashreis” first came to light, Emile Puech and Benedict T. Viviano argued that they evince a transformation, from their use in the “sapiential” genre to their presence in the Gospels where they are employed as part of an eschatological hope. The error of this analysis, I argue, is the confusion of aspect with tense. Rather than referencing present and future “tense”, the textual issue revolves around complete or incomplete action. The Greek of the Gospels is, I suggest, struggling to mimic the imperfect form of kindred Semitic proverbs, and should be considered no more “eschatological” than their Hebrew counterparts. In short, the New Testament Beatitudes appear largely congruent with the Qumran fragments, and the “progression” is not from the “present” to the*

*eschatological "future", but from the pursuit of "wisdom" to the pursuit of the "kingdom of heaven".*

## 1. Introduction

The manuscript finds of the Judean Desert, commonly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, stand at a unique intersection between the world of ancient Judaism and early/nascent Christianity. They have opened a window on the genesis of New Testament theological constructs, bringing into focus innumerable issues that had previously eluded the grasp textual scholars. The cache of fragments from Qumran Cave 4 has – even after the major Qumranic texts were revealed – provided an ongoing wealth of insight regarding both Jewish and Christian sources. A prominent example relates to a series of "pithy" wisdom-statements collectively referred to as the Cave 4 "Beatitudes"/4QBeat (4Q525), referenced below:

[Happy/ Blessed is he who speaks the truth] with a pure heart  
and does not slander with his tongue.<sup>1</sup>

Happy/ Blessed are those who uphold her [Wisdom's] precepts  
and do not uphold to the ways of iniquity.

Happy/ Blessed are those who take joy in her,  
and do not burst forth in ways of foolishness.

Happy/ Blessed are those who seek after her with pure hands,  
and do not search for her with a heart of treachery.

Happy/ Blessed is the man who has acquired Wisdom,  
and walks in the Law of the Most High,  
and prepares his heart in its ways ...

(4Q525 f2ii+3:1-4)<sup>2</sup>

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1 Emile Puech published the text officially in 1998. See E. Puech, *Qumran Grotte 4XVIII: Textes Hébreux (4Q521-4Q528, 4Q576-4Q579)*, DJD 25 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998:115-78). He reconstructs this line (especially, p. 126) as indicated, arguing that it preserves the second part of a beatitude and noting that it is preceded by a *vacat*. The structure of what remains, including the word *v'lo*, resembles the other sayings as well as Psa. 15:2-3: "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he does not backbite with his tongue, nor do evil to his neighbor, nor take up a reproach against his neighbor".

2 The remainder of the *ashrei* sayings in this passage (following Puech's rendering of the first two lines), are translated by the author.

A series of additional attributes follow (f2ii+3:4-8), declaring that such a person: is restrained by wisdom's corrections, is satisfied by her chastisements, does not forsake wisdom during trials, does not abandon her in distress, never forgets the day of judgment, in humility does not abhor her, meditates on her, reflects on her during trial, attains understanding of her, establishes her before his eyes (not walking in wickedness), and fixes his heart on her. The overall theme is not the pedagogic function of adversity, but the need to persevere in study in spite of it, knowing that God will put an end to it.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the fact that this Qumranic text contains at least some language that is peculiarly sectarian, such as "humility of the soul" (4Q525 f2ii+3:6) and "those who walk in perfection" (4Q525 f5:11), makes comparison with other "sectarian" literature of the period (specifically Judeo-Christian literature) all the more compelling.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Parallel Judeo-Christian textuality

These proverbs are indeed striking in their similarity to the so-called "Beatitudes" of the Christian Gospels – a somewhat congruent list of proverbial sayings attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. While the Beatitudes derive from the Latin *beatus*, or "blessed", we should understand at the outset that the Greek term *makarioi* is the rough equivalent of the Hebrew *ashrei*, which appears over forty times in

3 Matthew J. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Vol. 116 (2007, Leiden: Brill), 213. See also Jacqueline C.R. De Roo, "Is 4Q525 a Qumran Sectarian Document?" in Stanley Porter, *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After* (1997, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press), 338-367, esp. 359.

4 De Roo (347-50) argues that the text may even have been a product of the Teacher of Righteousness. She relates the "discerning ones" who go astray (4Q525 f16:3) to the errant behavior of the "sons of righteousness" in 1QS 3:22. Goff, however, disagrees, maintaining that the differences between 4Q525 and the sectarian corpus far outweigh the similarities. He sees the 4Q525 as the product of an "upper class milieu". Goff, 219, 227; Charlesworth, *The Qumran Beatitudes (4Q525) and the New Testament* (Mat. 5:3-11; Luk. 6:20-26), *RHPR* 80 (2000): 13-35, esp. 21. See also J. Strugnell, "The Smaller Hebrew Wisdom Texts Found at Qumran: Variations, Resemblances, and Lines of Development", in L. H. Schiffman (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20-25, 1997* (2000, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society/Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum), 1-60, esp. 50.

the Bible (twenty-six of them in the Psalms), derives from the root 'sh-r, meaning "to walk", or "to advance" (as in Isa. 3:12; 9:15; Prov. 4:14; 9:6; 23:19). Euphemistically, *ashrei* may be understood as "happy", "fortunate", "privileged", or even "lucky".<sup>5</sup> Its biblical use has been explained as an exclamation from an observer expressing admiration and wonder regarding the good fortune of another.<sup>6</sup> From the moment that these *ashrei* sayings were first identified in the Qumranic corpus, their place in Judeo-Christian research has been considered by prominent scholars in the field, such as Emile Puech, of Jerusalem's Ecole Biblique. In publishing the fragments of these proverbs, in 1991, Puech masterfully assembled them into a more or less coherent text, in three distinct columns. He also suggested that what remains represents only half of an original sequence of nine beatitudes.<sup>7</sup> The four beatitudes that did not survive would have been mirrored by the four that did, followed by one longer beatitude at the end. The pattern may be summarized as: [4] + 4 + 1. If Puech's reconstruction is correct, the Qumranic beatitudes comprise two strophes of thirty-one words each. Each strophe contains two distiches, one comprised of fifteen words and the other of sixteen. He theorizes that the extant portion of the Qumranic text originally followed one or more strophe of thirty-one words.<sup>8</sup> His

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5 Some lexicographers connect it with the Akkadian roots *wasaru* ("to be upright") and *eseru* ("to be in order"). Others link it with an Egyptian root meaning "prosperity", "happiness", and "good luck". See Hava Tirosh-Samuels, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being* (2003, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press), 62.

6 Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (1995, New York: Schocken), 224; Waldemar Janzen, *Asre in the Old Testament*, *HTR* (1965): 215-226.

7 This is based on analysis of other beatitude collections, including 1QH 6:13-16, Sir. 14:20-27 and Mat. 5:3-10. Preliminary publications include E. Puech "The Collection of Beatitudes in Hebrew and in Greek" (4Q525 1-4 and Mat. 5:3-12), in F. Manns and E. Allot (Eds.), *Early Christianity in Context* (1993, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press), 353-68; idem, *Un hymne essénien en partie retrouvé et les béatitudes*, *RQ* (1988):59-88; idem, *4Q525 et le péripocopes des Beatitudes in Ben Sira et Matthieu*, *RB* 98, 138 (1991): 80-106.

8 Puech, "The Collection of Beatitudes", 361. Puech points to a similar passage in 1QH 6:13-16 that (according to his reconstruction) also contains a strophe of thirty-one words.

arguments of course cannot be verified, as they relate to portions of the text that no longer exist. It remains debatable whether the various beatitude collections were written according to the same structural guidelines.<sup>9</sup> His research was in any case scrutinized and re-evaluated in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, by Benedict T. Viviano, in late 1992.<sup>10</sup> Viviano, building on Puech's work, arrived at a number of important observations, attempting to define the relationship between the Dead Sea *ashrei* fragments, the *ashrei* proverbs of the Hebrew Bible, those of the apocryphal literature, and the New Testament Beatitudes. Nonetheless, the conclusions that Viviano and Puech reach regarding the New Testament's use of these sayings arguably miss the mark in some important respects.

Specifically, they conclude that the Qumranic *ashreis* stand in a line of literary development, from their use in the Hebrew Bible to their subsequent New Testament Greek equivalents. They point out that in the scroll fragments, as well as in other apocryphal literature from the Second Temple period, such sayings are embedded in the "sapiential", or "wisdom literature" genre.<sup>11</sup> They argue, however, that the Dead Sea *ashrei* sayings are emblematic of a literary transformation, from sapiential content to their utilization in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Matthew, as part of an eschatological promise. I would suggest, to the contrary, that the

9 Goff, 205, suggests that it is unnecessary to apply Puech's structural patterns to portions of 4Q525 that have not survived.

10 B.T. Viviano, *Beatitudes Found Among Dead Sea Scrolls*, *BAR* 18 (6, 1992): 53-55, 66.

11 For a detailed discussion of the Qumranic Beatitudes within the context of wisdom literature, see John Kampen, *Wisdom Literature* (2011, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), 307 ff. D.J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts* (1996, London: Routledge), 66-70; A. S. Van der Woude, "Wisdom at Qumran", in J. Day, R. Gordon & H.G.M. Williamson (Eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton* (1995, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press), 244-56. It has also been observed that the wisdom text from the Cairo Geniza employs the term *ashrei* with the explicit connection of wisdom and Torah. See G. Wilhelm Nebe, "Die wiederentdeckte Weisheitsschrift aus der Kairoer Geniza und ihre 'Nahe' zum Schrifttum von Qumran und zu Essenern", in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris 1992* (George J. Brooke (Ed.); *STDJ* 15; 1994, Leiden: Brill), 244.

distinction between "present" and "future-tense" beatitudes, championed decades ago by J. Dupont, whose classic study divided such sayings into the categories of sapiential and eschatological, is essentially an artificial one.<sup>12</sup>

Geza Vermes later noted the principal distinction between the Beatitudes of Matthew and 4Q525, namely, that the Gospel in each case lists a specific virtue common to the "blessed", followed by a corresponding reward, while the Qumranic sayings comprise "antithetic parallelisms" of an ordinary nature.<sup>13</sup> However, in choosing to contrast – rather than compare – the Dead Sea fragments with the Gospel, Vermes glosses over the potential value of the former in interpreting the significance of the latter.

Nearly two decades after their original publication, Joseph Fitzmeyer, in commenting on the Cave 4 Beatitudes (five by his count), observed that this literary device is now established as having been common to Palestinian Judaism prior to the writing of the Gospels, and that the evangelists imitated it. This is clear enough, though Fitzmeyer goes on to assert that while kindred in form to Ben Sira 14 and the Christian versions in Matthew 5 and Luke 6, the Qumran Beatitudes are sapiential, rather than eschatological, in tone.<sup>14</sup> His underlying assumption, however, is that the Beatitudes of Jesus, which begin with the promise of the "kingdom of heaven", are in fact eschatological.<sup>15</sup>

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12 J. Dupont, *Les Beatitudes*, 3 vols. (1952-73, Paris: Gabalda).

13 Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1995, Sheffield, England, Sheffield Academic Press), 286.

14 Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2009, New Jersey: Paulist Press), 69, 119.

15 Even verses that would suggest, to the contrary, that the "kingdom of heaven"/"kingdom of God" is to be understood as a present-tense phenomenon (such as Luk. 11:20 and 17:21) were reinterpreted by C.H. Dodd as "realized eschatology", his assumption being that even if the context is "present", the term is by nature eschatological. See C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1961, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons). Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bluesman, Norman Perrin and Johannes Weiss all conceived of the "kingdom" of the Gospels in entirely futuristic terms, looking to the apocalyptic traditions of multiple Jewish sects of the period. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, (1911, London: A. And C. Black; 2005, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications), 238 ff.; Rudolph Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: the Presence of Eternity*, (1962, New York: Harper

### 3. The weakness of prior analysis

To be sure, the notion that the “kingdom of heaven”/“kingdom of God” of Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20 must refer to some future, messianic age, concomitant with the expected *parousia*, is widely held in New Testament scholarship. Puech and Viviano conclude that the Qumranic *ashre'is* are not eschatological (viewing both clauses as being in what they refer to as the “present tense”), and that the New Testament differs from them in this regard. They contend that the Qumranic sayings are unlike those of the New Testament, since they are still in the present tense and have not yet progressed to the stage of offering a future promise. I will argue, however, that this flies in the face of what should be seen as continuity between 4Q525 and the Matthean beatitudes, and that both collections of sayings encourage the pursuit of wisdom/the “kingdom of heaven” in an immediate sense.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Puech and Viviano seem to ignore the striking continuation of the Cave 4 sayings, reconstructed as follows:

[... and You will place a crown of gold on] his [hea]d, and with kings You will se[at him, and ...] [... by] His [sc]epter up with up[righ]tness and amid]st brothers He will scatt[er ...] (4Q525 f2ii+3:9-10).

Is this not the promise of a reward, exactly contrary to what Puech and Viviano suggest?<sup>17</sup> I will agree, however, that the reward is framed in a present, not an eschatological, context.

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& Row), 182 ff.; Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, (1963, Louisville, KY: John Knox Press), 69 ff.; Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, (1971, Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 132 ff.

- 16 Goff, 207, 210. Both the Psalms and the Proverbs established a tradition, echoed in Ben Sira and the Qumranic material, of equating wisdom with the Torah. Specifically, the terminology of the “path” in Sir 14:21 equates to that of Prov. 3:17. See Puech, 4Q525 et les péricopes des Béatitudes, 92; Viviano, Eight Beatitudes from Qumran and in Matthew? A New Publication from Cave Four, *SEA* 58 (1993): 71-84, esp. 79; A.A. Di Leila and P.W. Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (1987, AB 39; New York: Doubleday), 263.
- 17 Puech in fact translates this as “she” will place a crown of gold on his head, suggesting that it does indeed reference an “eschatological reward”. See Puech, “The Collection of Beatitudes”, 364; A. Lange, “In Diskussion mit dem Tempel: zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kohelet, und weisheitlichen Kreisen am Jerusalemer Tempel”, in A. Schoors (Ed.), *Qohelet in the Context*

Furthermore, I assert that their assumptions *vis-à-vis* the New Testament are flawed, inasmuch as they never question the conventional interpretation. While the general consensus of New Testament scholarship is that the New Testament Beatitudes must be framed eschatologically, I suggest that the "conventional wisdom" deserves to be challenged.<sup>18</sup>

The fundamental weakness of this analysis, as I see it, lies in miscategorizing simple Hebraic patterns, confusing "aspect" with "tense" – forcing ancient forms into modern molds. Indeed, rather than referencing present and future "tense", the issue regarding 4Q525 should be presented as revolving around complete and incomplete action – of "perfect" and "imperfect" forms in Hebrew. In that regard the Qumranic text should be understood as no more "present tense" than the Christian Beatitudes should be conceived as "future tense". Unraveling the resulting conundrum will be the thrust of the research at hand.

#### 4. The grammatical pattern

On a grammatical level, the pattern we find in 4Q525 consists of the introductory word "Blessed" (*ashrei*) followed by a participial

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- of Wisdom* (1998, *BETL* 136; Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press/Peeters), 113-59. It has been noted, however, that the eschatology of 4QBeatitudes is undeveloped and "muted", lacking any scene of final judgment. The crown can more easily be seen as an image of wisdom. Nor is any messianic speculation to be found in the text. See Goff, 218. De Roo suggests that the "eschatology" of 4Q525 is equivalent to that of the book of Joel. See De Roo, *Is 4Q525 a Sectarial Document?*, 343.
- 18 J.S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (1987, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International), 188, declares that the Beatitudes represent "proclamations of eschatological salvation". Traditional commentators invariably call attention to the "future-tense" in the Greek. See Carl G. Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Theological Investigation* (2001, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press), 27, 61, 170. It is typically asserted, for example, that the first and last of the Matthean Beatitudes employ "present-tense" verbs, while those in the middle are "future-tense". See Ben Witherington, *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament, Vol. 1* (2009, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 134. See also R.A. Stein, *The New American Commentary, Vol. 24: Luke* (1992, Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group), 200 ff. While it is evident that the Lukan formulation of the Beatitudes invites



noun/regular noun (*tomkhim, golim, dorshim, adam*), in turn followed by an imperfect verb (*yitmokhu, yabiu, yishkhar, yithalekh*). Our initial observation is that they form a “program” of sorts for righteous conduct, and are by no means in the context of eschatology. This group of “wisdom” statements, however, represents a significant evolution from the Hebrew Bible, where the *ashreis* are scattered and unconnected, rather than programmatic, usually appearing alone or in pairs.<sup>19</sup> Biblical examples include:

- Ashreikha Yisrael* – Happy are you, O Israel ... (Deut. 33:29)  
*Ashrei kol khokei lo* – Happy are all who wait for Him ... (Isa. 30:18)  
*Ashrei enosh ya’aseh zot* – Happy is the man who does this ... (Isa. 56:2)  
*Ashrei ha-ish* – Happy is the man ... (Psa. 1:1)  
*Ashrei kol-khosei bo* – Happy are all who trust in Him ... (Psa. 2:12)  
*Ashrei adam* – Happy is the man ... (Psa. 32:2; 84:6; 84:13)  
*Ashrei ha-gever* – Happy is the man ... (Psa. 34:9; 40:5; 94:12; 127:5)  
*Ashrei ha-goi* – Happy is the nation ... (Psa. 33:12)  
*Ashrei ha-am* – Happy is the people ... (Psa. 89:16; 144:15)  
*Ashrei maskil* – Happy is the prudent one ... (Psa. 41:2)  
*Ashrei tivkhar* – Happy is the one whom You choose ... (Psa. 65:5)  
*Ashrei shomrei mishpat* – Happy are those who keep judgment ... (Psa. 106:3)

Another prominent representative beatitude is found in Proverbs 8:34:

Happy is the man who hearkens to me watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.

This form is prominent in certain apocalypses, especially 2 Enoch.<sup>20</sup>

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more of a future-tense understanding, it will be argued that the Matthean formulation is more reliable and allows for an interpretation that is more “immediate” and “present”.

- 19 See Goff, 202. “Happy” is arguably a better translation, as *ashrei* should be distinguished from the other word frequently translated “blessed”, *barukh*. *Ashrei* is employed to reference a human being, while *barukh* extols God.
- 20 Other isolated beatitudes in the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha include Bar 4:4; *Pss. Sol.* 4:23; 5:16; 6:1; 10:1; 17:44; 1 *Enoch* 58:2; *Life of Adam and Eve* 21:2; 29:10. See C.A. Evans, *Matthew* (2012, New York: Cambridge Univ. Press), 100.

It should be noted that in the Bible the term *ashrei* is followed, sometimes by a regular noun, including several that refer to "man" (*ish*, *adam*, *gever*) and at other times by what may be categorized as participial nouns, in construct form with an additional noun.

Occasionally we find two parallel verses containing the word *ashrei*, such as Psalm 32:1-2:

Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not charge iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

and Psalm 84:5-6:

Blessed is the man whose strength is in You; Your ways are in their hearts. Passing through the valley of weeping, they will make it a fountain; the early rain also covers it with blessings.

In these examples a participial noun (*nasui peshal yoshvei beteikha*) in the first line is echoed by the regular noun *adam* in the second. Moreover, while the imperfect verb *yakhshov* does appear in one of these verses, its presence is random, by no means prefiguring the deliberate pattern evidenced in 4Q525.

## 5. The evidence of Ben Sira

In any case, such biblical couplets appear to represent the beginning of a literary/liturgical formulation in antiquity that would find further expression in Ben Sira. We find, for example, the following couplet, reminiscent of the Psalms:

Blessed is the man who does not blunder with his lips  
and need not suffer grief for sin.  
Blessed is he whose heart does not condemn him,  
and who has not given up his hope. (Sir. 14:1-2)

The reference to the "heart" at this point not only reminds one of 4Q525 f2ii+3:1, but also of Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart ..." <sup>21</sup> There are several other "blesseds" scattered across the text of Ben Sira:

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21 See C. Martone, "The Ben Sira MSS from Qumran and Masada", in P.C. Beentjes (Ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (1997, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.), 93. Martone notes the parallel between Ben Sira,

Blessed is the rich man who is found blameless,  
 and who does not go after gold. (Sir. 31:8)  
 Blessed is the soul of the man who fears the Lord!  
 To whom does he look? And who is his support? (Sir. 34:15)  
 Blessed are those who saw you,  
 and those who have been adorned in love;  
 for we also shall surely live. (Sir. 48:11)  
 Blessed is he who concerns himself with these things,  
 and he who lays them to heart will become wise. (Sir. 50:28)

All of these proverbs are traditionally sapiential in tone, conveying practical wisdom for the attainment of inner qualities of spirituality. They are evidence of the merging of wisdom traditions and Torah piety, culminating in a description of Lady Wisdom.<sup>22</sup>

We find, however, a new stylistic development in Ben Sira, in the form of a distinct grouping of sapiential/*ashrei* statements, commencing with an initial phrase, "Happy is the person", followed by a series of modifiers relating to the pursuit of wisdom:

Happy is the person who meditates on wisdom and reasons intelligently,  
 who reflects in his heart on her ways and ponders her secrets,  
 pursuing her like a hunter, and lying in wait on her paths;  
 who peers through her windows and listens at her doors; who  
 camps near her house and fastens his tent peg to her walls;  
 who pitches his tent near her, and so occupies an excellent  
 lodging place;

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22 4Q525, and Mat. 5:8, yet makes the common assumption that "the eschatological character that we find in the Matthean text" is absent in the Qumranic passage. See also G.J. Brooke, *The Wisdom of Matthew's Beatitudes* (4QBeat and Mat. 5:3-12), *Scripture Bulletin* 19 (1988-1989): 38. The figure of Lady Wisdom may also be referenced in 4Q525. See Goff, 215. "Her punishments"/"reproofs" are alluded to in 4Q525 f2 ii+3:4 and f5:11; "her paths" in 4Q525 f2ii+3:4, f5:7, 9; "Her statutes" in 4Q525 f2ii+3:1, f5:10. 4Q525 f2ii+3:2 declares that those who are happy "rejoice in her". See White Crawford, *Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly at Qumran*, *DSD* 5 (1998): 355-66. (esp. 363-64). See also Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *Lady Wisdom and Her House*, *RevQ* 23 (2008): 371-81; Harrington, 68; B.G. Wright, *Wisdom and Women at Qumran*, *DSD* 11 (2004): 240-61 (esp. 248-49); R.D. Moore, *Personification of the Seduction of Evil: "The Wiles of the Wicked Woman"*, *RevQ* 10 (1981): 518.

who places his children under her shelter, and lodges under her boughs;  
who is sheltered by her from the heat, and dwells in the midst of her glory. (Sir. 14:20-27)

While there is only one "blessed" prefacing the series of phrases that follow, its presence is implicit in all of them, which reproduce a series of participial phrases, according to the formula *ashrei ha-ish asher*. ...<sup>23</sup> Together, they form a present-tense "program" of sorts for righteous conduct, and are by no means in the context of eschatology.<sup>24</sup> This group of "wisdom" statements represents, by anyone's estimation, a significant evolution from those in the Hebrew Bible.

While Ben Sira appears in the LXX, it is clear that the Greek text was translated from a Hebrew original, based on fragmentary remains (specifically OR.1102) represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>25</sup> By the same token, one may well ask whether the Beatitudes of the Gospels might likewise be rooted in an unrecovered Semitic *grundschrift*. If so, detailed linguistic comparison with the Qumranic text becomes all the more compelling.

## 6. The New Testament grammatical pattern

Puech observes that the Matthean beatitudes possess a symmetry comparable to that found in the Qumranic material, which he calls the

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23 It is suggested that the author of 4Q525 must already have recognized a literary genre present in Sir. 14:20-15:1. The Ben Sira passage represents the oldest known group of eight Hebrew beatitudes, notwithstanding that it is prefaced by only a single *ashrei*. There are two strophes of four stichs or four beatitudes organized in sub-groups, two by two. See Puech, "Ben Sira and Qumran", in A. Passaro, G. Bellia (Eds.), *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology* (2008, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), 90; idem. "The Collection of Beatitudes", 357, 361; idem. 4Q525 et les péripécopes des Béatitudes, 80. For an overview of Ben Sira, in relation to wisdom literature, see B. G. Wright, *Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom* (2008, Leiden: Brill).

24 Notably, there is language elsewhere in Ben Sira (e.g. Sir. 40:8-9) that may echo the curses of Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut. 28:22), though not in the *ashrei* context of the passage in question. M.J. Goff, *Hellenistic Instruction in Palestine and Egypt: Ben Sira and Papyrus Insignia*, *JSJ* 36 (2005): 147-72 (esp. 166-67).

25 The Qumranic Ben Sira text covers the equivalent of Ecclesiasticus 39:15-40:8 and is identified as MS B in various editions.

*substrat sémitique* of Matthew 5:3-12.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, he follows the dominant view, that the Lukan Beatitudes, comprising the initial section of that Gospel's "Sermon on the Plain", represent an abbreviated version of the Matthean formulation (the "Sermon on the Mount") of these sayings.<sup>27</sup> The latter are comprised of two strophes of thirty-six words each, for a total of seventy-two. The first ten verses of Matthew 5 convey eight beatitudes, followed by a longer beatitude in verses 11-12 – an "8 + 1" structure that presumably echoes the "[4] + 4 + 1" format that Puech proposes for 4Q525.<sup>28</sup> Each strophe contains one distich of twenty words and another of sixteen. All such beatitude collections, Puech claims, follow precise patterns and rules.<sup>29</sup> Luke notably lacks the symmetry of the beatitudes of Ben Sira, 4Q525 and Matthew, additionally balancing its "blesseds" with a series of "woes".<sup>30</sup> In any case, with regard to content, the New Testament Beatitudes (whether in Matthew or their shorter version in Luke) are, as in Ben Sira, grouped together

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- 26 Puech, *Qumran Grotte 4XVIII*, 115; idem, 4Q525 et les péricopes des Béatitudes, 80. Indeed, the structural pattern of Mat. 5 is closer to 4Q525 than either Sir. 14 or 1QH 6.
- 27 Puech, "The Collection of Beatitudes", 362, refers to Matthew's version as "*une composition matthéenne originelle*". Luke's version is "secondary and later", notwithstanding the dominant view that a more original form of Q is represented by Luke than by Matthew. David Flusser claims that there were originally ten beatitudes in the synoptic collection, though Matthew preserves only nine. The tenth is represented by Luke 6:21b, which he suggests was deleted by Matthew. See D. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (1988, Jerusalem: Magnes Press), 112-13; J. C. VanderKam and P.W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2002, New York: HarperSanFrancisco), 336-38. A frequent assumption is that a series of three beatitudes were included in Q, and that Luke and Matthew expanded them, with Luke adding a sequence of "woes". See J.S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (2000, Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 68.
- 28 Betz considers Mat. 5:11-12 an expansion of those that precede it; Hans Dieter Betz, Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount* (1995, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress), 105.
- 29 Puech, "The Collection of Beatitudes", 361.
- 30 Nonetheless, the corresponding set of four woes has pattern similar to that of 4Q525, consisting of three parallel statements followed by a longer one. See R.A. Horsley, J.A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (1999, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International), 211. 4Q525, while lacking a series of "woes", does contain a description of horrors upon the unrighteous, including poverty, the poisonous

thematically.<sup>31</sup> The issue at hand, however, is whether these Greek "blesseds" should be viewed as essentially eschatological, or whether they comprise, like the *ashrei* statements of Ben Sira and the Dead Sea Scrolls, a programmed approach to righteous conduct (i.e. sapiential).

In reviewing what we have seen thus far in the structure of the Qumranic fragment, we may discern a parallel, in a broad sense, with the Christian Beatitudes, the Greek of which appears to parrot a Semitic structure. Specifically, we find participial nounal terms such as "those who mourn" and "those who hunger" (*penthountes*, *peinao*) followed by future tense verb forms – "shall be comforted" and "shall be filled" (*paraklethesontai*, *chortazo*). It seems that the Greek is attempting to reproduce the imperfect verbal structure of kindred Semitic proverbs. Consequently, I will argue, the "blesseds" of the Beatitudes should be considered no more "eschatological" than their Hebrew counterparts from Qumran. In fact, the New Testament Beatitudes appear largely congruent with those of the Dead Sea *ashreis*, and the "progression" is not from the "present" to the eschatological "future", but from the pursuit of "wisdom" to the pursuit of the "kingdom of heaven" as a synonym for *tz'dakah* – "righteousness" – and its attendant spiritual dynamic.

## 7. The "Kingdom of Heaven"

The glib assumption on the part of Puech and Viviano is that the phrase "kingdom of heaven" amounts to another way of saying that those who are unfortunate in the present age will be rewarded in the

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snake, flames of death, and flaming brimstone. See Goff, 221. M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (1992, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 116-46.

- 31 It should be noted that the New Testament as a whole contains roughly forty beatitudes, including John 20:9, Rom. 14:22; Rev. 1:3, 19:9. Additionally, the beatitudes of Psa. 32:1-2 are cited in Rom. 4:7. A series of beatitudes is also found in the *Acts of Paul* 5-6. See also *Gos. Thom.* 54, 68-69. See Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (2000, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 111-14; H. J. Fabry, "Die Seligpreisungen in der Bibel und in Qumran", in C. Hempel, A. Lange, H. Lichtenberger (Eds.), *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (2002, Leuven: Peeters), 189-200; M. Hengel, *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana: Kleine Straigten II*, (1999, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 224-33; H.D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (1995, Hermencia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 97-105.

world to come. The assumption that the “kingdom of heaven”, while promised in the present, is fully realized only after death, is widely held in critical scholarship of the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> The initial clause, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is understood as being in the present tense; the second as in the future. They do not even acknowledge the possibility that the second clause in each of these statements – the promise of reward – might be interpreted in a non-eschatological manner.

There is nonetheless significant ancient textual evidence arguing against an eschatological understanding of the “kingdom of heaven”, to be found, for example, in the Gospel of Thomas:

Jesus said: If those who lead you say to you: See, the kingdom is in heaven, then the birds of the heaven will go before you; if they say to you: It is in the sea, then the fish will go before you. But the kingdom is within you, and it is outside of you (GTh 3, Blatz).

Jacobus Liebenberg suggests that listeners to this Gospel would have been admonished by such sayings against interpreting the “kingdom of heaven/God” as being attained in the future.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, as John Dominic Crossan points out, the Greek phrase should actually be understood as the “kingdom of the heavens”, and is very often mistaken for the kingdom of the future, the next world, or the afterlife. It is in fact synonymous with the “kingdom of God”, “heaven” being a euphemism for “God”. He calls it a “divine cleanup” of the present world, being, simultaneously, “100 percent political” and “100 percent religious”.<sup>34</sup>

While I believe there is considerable merit to Crossan’s approach, I find the socio-political aspects of his exegesis somewhat troubling.

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32 Goff, 222, argues that 4Q525 is “less eschatological” than Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. He assumes that the Christian Beatitudes are “explicitly connected to rewards after death”. See also Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993, Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 143.

33 Jacobus Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus: Parable, Aphorism, and Metaphor in the Sayings Material Common to the Synoptic Tradition and the Gospel of Thomas* (2000, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), 457. See also GhT 51: “His disciples said to him: On what day will the rest of the dead come into being, and on what day will the new world come? He said to them: What you await has come, but you do not know it” (Blatz).

34 John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (2007, New York: Harper Collins), 116-7.

For Crossan, along with Horsely and Borg, the "kingdom of heaven" encompasses countercultural ethics, and behavior as a social exercise. The "kingdom" therefore represents cultural critique and countercultural wisdom.<sup>35</sup> How much of this, however, involves an attempt to assign to Jesus a set of countercultural values that might involve anachronistic projections (far removed from first century Judaism) rather than ancient Israelite "wisdom"?

## 8. The Beatitudes in Rabbinic context

A better understanding of the "kingdom of heaven", I will argue, must begin with the recognition that the term is nowhere found in the Hebrew Bible or in the Qumranic material, but is rather common in rabbinic literature.<sup>36</sup> In rabbinic context it is always understood in an "immediate" sense. Nor is it to be confused with what certainly is a "future" expression, the "world to come" (*olam ha-ba*). An oft-quoted rabbinic passage sums up the use of this term, in Hebrew *malkhut shamayim*: "When a person recites the *Šh'ma*, he takes upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven".<sup>37</sup> The reference here is without question to a present/"immediate" yoke, that in turn embodies the present manifestation of the Divine Presence, the

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35 J. Patterson, "Wisdom in Q and Thomas", in L.G. Purdue, B.B. Scott, and W.J. Wireman (Eds.), *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John J.G. Gammie* (1993, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), 207, 220; J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1992, New York: Harper Collins), 273-4, 275-6; J.S. Kloppenborg Verbin, "Discursive Practices in the Sayings Gospel Q and the Quest of the Historical Jesus", in Andreas Lindemann (Ed.), *The Sayings Source and the Historical Jesus* (2001, Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press), 180-1.

36 Comprehensive lists of "kingdom" references in rabbinic literature may be referenced in Gustaf Dalman, *Words of Jesus: Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (1997, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 96-101, and Hermann L. Strack, Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (1996, Munich: C.H. Beck).

37 Mishnah *Berakhot* 2:2. See Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (2007, Leiden: Brill), 267. Pennington asserts that on occasion rabbinic traditions reference the kingdom in the context of the coming of the Messiah, but he acknowledges that specific theology in this regard seems undeveloped. He also references Louis Jacobs, who defines the terms as "the Rabbinic expression for the sovereignty of God as acknowledged by human beings". See Louis Jacobs, *A Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion* (1999, New York: Oxford University Press), 126 ff.



*Shekhinah*.<sup>38</sup> When the Matthean *ashrei* sayings are evaluated according to a Semitic pattern, understanding them as present (though albeit “incomplete”) states becomes all but inescapable.

Where, moreover, is the element of countercultural, socio-political ethics in the rabbinic usage? To be sure, there is nothing approaching Crossan’s “divine cleanup” in the Mishnaic sense of the term. While *malkhut shamayim* might well be considered “100 percent religious”, to call it “100 percent political” in equal measure would be a grave error. It might be countered, as Crossan does, that there was a dramatic shift in the usage of the term, from the pre-Great Revolt era, when the Temple yet stood – the era reflected in the Gospels – to the later rabbinic era, when political activism was eschewed in favor of more purely “spiritual” approaches.<sup>39</sup> It is argued that following the two failed revolts against the Roman Empire (the “Great Revolt” of 66-70 C.E. and the Bar-Kochba Revolt of 132-135 C.E.), the political elements of ancient Judaism waned, being replaced by a focus on inward circumspection. “Righteousness”/*tzedakah*, now understood purely as “charity”, became an essential element of the culture rather than an expression of rebellion against it. The “kingdom of heaven” was now conceived as the experience of divine rule and divine power (*hesed*) within the heart and soul of the Torah-observant Israelite.

In the final analysis, our understanding of the “kingdom according to Jesus” depends on how congruent we believe his teachings to be with post-70 C.E. Tannaitic Judaism. It is pointed out, for example, that Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai, whose life spanned both the pre- and post-70 C.E. era, employed the term “kingdom of heaven” as part of a broader polemic against the Zealot faction, completely congruent with the “100 percent religious” approach. Similarly, Jose

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38 While the Qumran Beatitudes never reference wisdom as a yoke, they do link wisdom with discipline. See Goff, 212. De Roo links the “distress” alluded to in 4Q525 with “wisdom’s disciplines”. De Roo, *Is 4Q525 a Qumran Sectarian Document?*, 358. Brooke, *The Wisdom of Matthew’s Beatitudes*, 38, offers a different interpretation.

39 In Crossan’s view, the “Great Divine Cleanup” consists of “an interactive process with a present beginning in time and a future ... consummation”. See J. Crossan, *God and Empire*, 116; idem, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1995, New York: HarperCollins), 223.

the Galilean, with regard to the verse in Moses' song at the Red Sea, "The Lord *shall reign* for ever and ever" (Ex. 16:18), declared that this manner of phrasing was regrettable. Had Moses said "The Lord *has reigned* for ever and ever, the kingdom of heaven would have come about immediately".<sup>40</sup> In fact, as early as the House of Hillel, there was the concept that the "kingdom of heaven" could come about at any time, as long as people repented and accepted the divine "yoke". Moreover, no resistance to Rome – either violent or non-violent – would be of use.<sup>41</sup>

Seen in this light, the "torah" of Jesus with respect to the "kingdom" may be viewed as a "bridge" of continuity between the ideas of the earlier *zugot* and the later *Tannaim*.<sup>42</sup> The correlation between teachings attributed to Jesus and those attributed by rabbinic sources to Hillel and Shammai, for example, is well-documented. Jesus appears to take the position of Shammai with regard to divorce, where the only valid ground is declared to be adultery (Mat. 19:19), and proselytism, as Shammai pushes away potential converts and Jesus commands his disciples to speak only to Jews and *not* to go into the way of the Gentiles (Mat. 10:5). Jesus takes a more moderate position, reminiscent of Hillel, on issues such as the Sabbath (saving/preserving life taking precedence; Mat. 12:10), and ritual purity (Mat. 15:11). Some might argue that Talmudic testimony with respect to the early sages was colored by the perspective of the rabbis; but the teachings of Jesus actually bear out the continuity of the sages' teachings and the correctness of rabbinic literature regarding them.<sup>43</sup>

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40 See *Mekhilta* on this verse.

41 David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (1987, New York: Adama Books), 50-51.

42 See Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (2003, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers), 8. Falk asserts that "Jesus' debates with the Pharisees were actually disputes recorded in the Talmud between *Bet Shammai* and *Bet Hillel*".

43 In the parable of the "Good Samaritan", the hero (the "despised Samaritan") behaves in a way consistent with the rabbinic/Pharisaic law of the *goses* ("the dying person"), taking care of the person who has been beaten and abandoned, even at the risk of sustaining ritual impurity should it turn out that he is deceased. E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (1990, Philadelphia: Trinity), 41-42; Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (1998, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 111.

Given such correlations, why should we assume that the term “kingdom of heaven” (as used in the Greek of the Gospels) was altered by the Tannaitic sages in its sense and meaning, evolving into something wholly different from the way it was used prior to 70 C.E.? Should we not understand the Greek term *basileia ton ouranon* as the precise equivalent of Hebrew *malkhut shamayim* in its rabbinical context, namely, “100 percent present/immediate” and “100 percent religious”? Rather than viewing Jesus of Nazareth as a social revolutionary, is it not more appropriate to see him as peripatetic pre-rabbinic sage, operating in circles akin to those of the early Hasidim (the Hasidic sage Honi the Circle-Drawer coming to mind)?

When the Beatitudes of Jesus are viewed as ancient “Hasidic” wisdom, we find broad comparison, not contrast, with the *ashrei* sayings of Qumran. Are not those “who hold to [Wisdom’s] precepts” precisely the ones who inherit (“immediately”) the “kingdom of heaven”? Are not such people “blessed”/“happy”, in a “100 percent religious” context?

## 9. The poor in spirit

While the term *malkhut shamayim* admittedly appears nowhere in the Qumran corpus, the other term in the first Beatitude, “poor in spirit”, certainly does. Puech notes the presence of the term *aniei ruach* in 1QH 6:3, and another parallel with Matthew’s “poor in spirit” has been found in the admonition of 4Q525 (f2ii+3:6) that “in the humility of his soul” (*b’anvut nafsho*) one should not “abhor” wisdom. The context of this passage stresses persisting in the pursuit of wisdom even in times of trial.<sup>44</sup> There is nonetheless no certainty that the Matthean beatitude is advocating the same “humility of soul” as 4Q525.<sup>45</sup>

44 Cf. 1QS 3:8; *T Jud.* 19:2. See Puech, “Un Hymne essenien en partie retrouve et les Beatitudes: 1QH V 12-VI 1 8 (= col. XIII-XIV 7) et 4QReat”, *RevQ* 13 (1988): 66; De Roo, *Is 4Q525 a Qumran Sectarian Document?*, 348; H.-J. Fabry, “Die Armenfrommigkeit in den qumranischen Weisheitstexten”, in David Clines, Hermann Lichtenberger, Hans-Peter Muller (Eds.), *Weisheit in Israel* (2003, Munster: Lit Verlag), 145-65.

45 Puech, 4Q525 et les pericopes des Beátitudes, 106; J.M. van Cangh, “Beátitudes de Qumrán et beátitudes évangelícs. Antériorité de Matthieu sur

While Puech argues that both Matthew and the Qumran text relate to submitting oneself to the Torah/wisdom, there are other Qumranic passages that link the "poor in spirit" to the assertion of righteous power and authority. Indeed, we find in the *War Rule* a term roughly parallel to the "poor in spirit", in a passage declaring:

You will ignite the humble of spirit (*n'khei ruakh*) like a fiery torch of fire in a sheaf, consuming the wicked (1QM 11:10).

David Flusser linked this phrase with the Matthean Beatitude ("Blessed are the poor in spirit"), noting that in each case the reference is to the sect itself or to the "Israel of God".<sup>46</sup> Slightly later in the *War Rule*, we read:

Among the poor in spirit (*anavei ruakh*) [...] a hard heart, and by those whose way is perfect shall all wicked nations come to an end (1QM 14:7; 4Q491 f8\_10i:5).

Helmut Stegemann comments, that the *War Rule* elucidates the meaning of "poor in spirit" as those who are permeated by the divine essence/"Holy Spirit" and are thus capable of genuine humility.<sup>47</sup> In this instance, however, one might question whether "poor in spirit" is the best understanding of *anavei ruakh*, or whether we should render the Qumranic term "poor of the spirit". In that case we might understand the expression as referring to those who, although "poor", possess great spiritual dynamic. Perhaps they are "poor" in their own spirits but powerful in the divine spirit. In any case, the imagery of being ignited like a fiery torch and consuming the wicked, and bringing about the end of wicked nations suggests a

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Luc?" in F. Garcia Martinez (Ed.), *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Traditions* (2003, BETL 168, Leuven, Belgium: Peeters), 419; Martin Hengel, *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiania* (1996, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 243-49.

46 David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (1988, Jerusalem: Magnes Press), 102-3, 106. Flusser also notes a parallel in *Mekhilta*: "But Moses drew near unto thick darkness (Ex. 22:21). What brought him this distinction? His meekness, for it is said: 'Now the man Moses was very meek' (Num. 12:3). Scripture states that whoever is meek ends by having the *Shekhinah* dwell with him on earth, as it is said: 'For thus said the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.'"

47 Helmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran*, (1993, New York: Brill), 262.

political element, including a militant tone, that is broadly characteristic of Qumranic literature.<sup>48</sup>

Certainly, the overall sense of the *War Rule* is eschatological, but the juxtaposition in Matthew and Luke of the term “poor in spirit” (*hoi p’tokoi to pneumatē*) with “kingdom of heaven” (*basileia ton ouranon*) strongly suggests otherwise. When it comes to the Gospels, it has been argued that the classic phrase attributed to John the Baptist – “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” – is actually a “floating logion”, properly belonging to Jesus but transferred to the Baptist, whose message was indeed eschatological. This is due to the misperception that “at hand” refers to the near-future.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, the Greek of the passage suggests the “kingdom” is not merely “at hand”, but has already begun, and is therefore a present reality.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the “immediacy” of the divine presence is not at the heart of the message of the Baptist (whose words bear a much more eschatological flavor), but of Jesus himself.

The immediacy of the “kingdom” is elsewhere attested when Jesus exorcises a demon and pronounces:

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you (Luk. 11:19-20).

48 The concept of a militant Davidic messiah was of course not unique to Qumran, and while militant messianism is a well-developed theme in sectarian literature, it did not arise at Qumran until the herodian period (35 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.). Kenneth R. Atkinson, “On the Use of Scripture in the Development of Militant Messianism at Qumran”, in Craig Evans (Ed.), *Interpretation of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity: Studies in Early Christianity and Judaism* (2000, London: T&T Clark), 106-123, esp. 121.

49 It is argued that Matthew tends to conflate the words of John the Baptist with elements of Jesus’ speech. See David Flusser, R. Steven Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius* (2007, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 25.

50 The verb rendered “is at hand” (*eggiken*) is in the perfect, not the present tense, intimating that the kingdom of heaven has already begun. It refers to an event that has transpired already, yet continues in the present. See J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1992, New York: HarperCollins), 345; Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (1983, Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 11.

The verb "come" (*phthano*, the Greek aorist active indicative form) strongly suggests the idea that the divine dynamic, far from being a future promise, is, in the mind of the Gospel writer, a present reality.<sup>51</sup>

## 10. Conclusion

In sum, if a case can be made that the first of the Matthean *ashrei* sayings should be considered in the present/"immediate" sense, it follows that the remainder of the statements might likewise be understood as "present". While commonly taken to mean that those of humble circumstance in the present age will be given great authority in the world to come, these sayings may instead be understood as referencing divine authority and dynamism in the current world order. They represent a declaration that the divine presence/"kingdom of heaven" is presently active in society. Therefore (according to the Matthean version):

those who mourn are comforted  
the meek receive divine power and spiritual dynamic ("inherit the earth")  
the hungry and thirsty are being filled  
those who show mercy are receiving it  
the pure are envisioning God  
the peacemakers are God's children (i.e. wielding divine authority)  
those who are persecuted are spiritually empowered.

Additional research is certainly merited, to further explore the complex interrelationship of nascent Christian and Qumranic thought. When this complex interrelationship is understood, it will be possible to better recognize the place of the Dead Sea *ashrei* sayings in evaluating the essence and progression of the sapiential genre.

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51 Most commentators see the use of the Greek aorist tense in this passage as indicative that the "kingdom" has in some sense already arrived. See Donald A. Hagner, *Mathew 1-13* (1993, Dallas: Word Books), 343; W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (1991, London: T&T Clark), 2:340.