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From Dust to Exalted Crown: Royal and Temple Themes Common to the Psalms and the Dead Sea Scrolls

David J. Larsen

Abstract: *David J. Larsen, after showing how many of the Qumran texts rely on the "Royal Psalms" in the Bible—which have a vital connection to the temple drama—then goes on to exaltation in the views of the Qumran community. He indicates how Adam and Eve are archetypal for Israelite temple ritual, which makes humans kings and priests, bringing the participant into the presence of God by a journey accompanied with covenants, making him part of the Divine Council. Bestowed with knowledge of the divine mysteries, one then becomes a teacher helping others on the way through divine mysteries, who then, as a group are raised to the same end. It is, Larsen shows, a journey where one is dressed in royal and priestly robes and receives a crown of righteousness, in a ritual setting.*

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See David J. Larsen, "From Dust to Exalted Crown: Royal and Temple Themes Common to the Psalms and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Temple Insights: Proceedings of the Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, "The Temple on Mount Zion," 22 September 2012,* ed. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 145–156. Further information at https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/temple-insights/.]

For those who are looking, discussion of the temple and temple-related imagery can be found abundantly among the scrolls discovered in the caves of Qumran. In the scrolls, we find a strong focus on the priesthood; there is talk of a purified temple, including the glorious eschatological temple that the community expected would come in the end times; and there is talk of temple worship. There are texts that draw on the ark of the covenant narratives, that mention the Holy of Holies, and that tell of measuring lines and plummets. If we consider the Garden of Eden story to be a temple text, there are a number of scrolls that make references to the Garden setting and to Adam and Eve. In fact, it has become well known that the community at Qumran sought to regain "all the glory of Adam" — that is, they desired to be clothed in God's glory, as Adam was in the Garden of Eden. The Qumran community believed that they had access to the true temple, which was equated with Eden.[1]

While a broad discussion of temple imagery in the Dead Sea Scrolls would be fascinating, space does not permit that. I will focus on a small selection of temple-related themes found in some of the Qumran documents and how the authors of these documents drew on Royal Psalms known from the biblical Psalter to express these themes.

The "Royal Psalms" — including Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144, and possibly others — are thus designated due to their content, which includes mentions of the Israelite monarchy and/or expressions and settings that would have involved the Israelite king. Many of these are psalms that Christians would consider "messianic." In my research, I have found that many of the poetic writings found at Qumran — including the *Hodayot*, or "Thanksgiving Psalms," and the many non-canonical psalms — rely heavily on the Royal Psalms for inspiration; that especially applies to Psalms 18 and 89. The content in the Qumran writings that is based on these Royal Psalms relates to, among other things, the exaltation of the speaker of the psalm and/or his community; their participation in the divine council, including communion with angelic beings and visions of Deity; God instructing the leader of the community in the heavenly mysteries, which include God's primeval victories and the creation of the world; and appointing the leader as a teacher of those mysteries. The revelation of the mysteries, or wonders, of God evokes, in some texts, a reaction of praise — singing or shouting — and is sometimes also connected to the imagery of being clothed in glorious or priestly robes.

Exaltation of Mortal Beings

I'll begin with the idea of the exaltation of mortal beings in the scrolls, which is often expressed in terms of the "lifting up" of the leader and/or group "from dust to the eternal heights." As British scholar Crispin Fletcher-Louis has pointed out, commenting on the corpus of poetic writings known as the "Thanksgiving Psalms" (or in Hebrew, the "Hodayot"), "Much of the *Hodayot* is a sustained and extended meditation on the anthropology of Genesis 2:7, where Adam is formed from the dust of the ground."[2]

He explains that after Adam and Eve are created from the lowly dust of the earth, according to some texts, they are subsequently placed in Eden — elevated to a new, glorious state. Fletcher-Louis asserts that:

> … the movement of Adam and (Eve) into Eden becomes a paradigm for entry and full inclusion of the Israelite in the Temple and in the holiness that it gives God's people.[3]

The way we find this motif expressed in the *Hodayot* is often in the speaker of the hymn, who is depicted as a suffering servant of God, crying out to the Lord from the depths of the underworld, or from the grasp of death, and asking for deliverance. The speaker then praises God for having saved him and raised him up to "the eternal heights" — to the heavenly realm — where he may now mingle with the gods. For example, in *4QHodayot*^{a} (4QH^{a}) fragment 7ii, lines 8–9, we read:

> (God) lifts up the poor from the dust to [the eternal height], and to the clouds he magnifies him in stature, and (he is) with the heavenly beings in the assembly of the community.…

Similarly, in column XI of *1QHodayot*^{a} (1QH^{a}) lines 20–24, we read:

> I give thanks to You, O Lord, for You have redeemed my soul from the pit. From Sheol and Abaddon *You have raised me up to an eternal height* (לרום), so that I might walk about on a limitless plain. I know that there is hope for him whom You formed from the dust for the eternal council…. that he might take his place with the host of the holy ones and enter into community with the congregation of the children of heaven.

In the Royal Psalms, similar imagery is applied to the figure of the king. In Psalm 2, the king has been placed by God on Mount Zion, God's holy hill; in Psalm 110 the royal figure is given a seat at God's right hand. The language that we see in some of these psalms from the *Hodayot*, however, is alluding directly to Psalm 18. In Psalm 18, the psalmist cries

out to the Lord for deliverance from the "cords of Sheol" and the "snares of death." The Lord hears his servant's voice and comes flying out of His temple in fiery indignation to free the suffering servant from his enemies. He reaches down from on high and draws his servant up out of the mighty waters and lifts him to a safe place, exalting him above his adversaries.

The idea of being raised from death or from the dust to an exalted state is not uncommon in biblical texts. In 1 Samuel 2:8, which some scholars recognize as a Royal Psalm, we read, "[God] raises up the poor from the dust … to make them sit with princes and inherit a throne of glory."

The election of a ruler from among the common people is repeatedly referred to as raising one "from the dust," a formula clearly stated in the words of the Lord to King Baasha of Israel in 1 Kings 16:2: "I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel." Walter Brüeggemann, in his study "From Dust to Kingship," argues:

> To be taken "from the dust" means to be elevated from obscurity to royal office.… Since the royal office depends upon covenant with the appropriate god, to be taken from the dust means to be accepted as a covenant-partner.… [4]

In the Qumran texts, therefore, we see the speaker of the hymns, who is likely the leader of the congregation, placing himself in the position of the king from the Royal Psalms. In support of Brüeggemann's theory, we find in a text called 1QSb, or "Rule of the Blessing," a figure known as the Prince of the Congregation who is to take part in a great renewal of the covenant and who is blessed to be "lifted to an eternal height."

The *Hodayot* equates "the eternal heights" with the Divine Council, the Congregation of the Holy Ones. As cited above, lines 21–24 of 1QH[a] column XI indicate that when the speaker is exalted, he is permitted to enter the "eternal council" and join "the congregation of the children of heaven." In a number of texts, the exaltation of the "servant" to the divine council is followed by God teaching him "the covenant" in conjunction with "the divine mysteries." In 1QH[a] column XV, the servant proclaims:

> [You] … have exalted my horn on high, and I shine forth with sevenfold light (lines 26–27).
>
> I thank yo[u, O Lor]d, that you have instructed me in your truth, and made known to me your wondrous mysteries (lines 29–30).

In column XII, we see a similar sequence:

> You have made my face to shine by Your covenant (line 5).
>
> I seek You, and as an enduring dawning, as [perfe]ct light, You have revealed Yourself to me" (line 6). "For You have given me understanding of the mysteries of Your wonder (lines 27–28).

In a number of the texts, it is apparent that the knowledge that the servant learns from God in the divine council — the so-called "mysteries of wonder" — is related to God's great primeval victories, including the crushing of the dragon Rahab, the calming of the waters of Chaos, and the establishment of the earth upon the seas. In essence, the servant is taught, in the congregation of heaven, about God's work in the Creation of the universe.

I have found this sequence to be a pattern that can be found throughout the corpus of the *Hodayot* and in other non-canonical psalms found at Qumran, including 4Q381, which has been labeled by scholars as a collection of previously unknown Royal Psalms. My research has led me to believe that this pattern is either directly or indirectly based on the traditions found in Psalm 89.

In Psalm 89, verses 3 and 4, God makes His covenant with His chosen servant, David. We are then transported in verse 5 to the "congregation of the holy ones," where the psalmist witnesses the heavens praising God for His wonders.

In the next verses, God is praised for His greatness and superiority, and then we get a description of those wonders: God stilled the raging sea, broke Rahab in pieces, and scattered all enemies; in verses 11 and 12, we are told about God's creation of the world.

In the biblical psalm, the segments regarding the election of the king and God's covenant with him, the praising of God in the divine council, and then the events that follow seem to be disjointed — it is difficult to see how they are related. However, in the Qumran compositions that draw on this psalm, these elements are used more seamlessly to present us with a fuller image of what the author envisions for this heavenly ascent, if we may call it that. But the basic elements are all there in Psalm 89.

In examples such as columns XII and XV of 1QH^{a}, the text indicates that the individual who is lifted up to heaven and taught the mysteries of creation by God is then appointed to teach others:

> You, my God, have appointed me as a holy counsel to the weary… You have [strengthened m]e in your covenant, and

> my tongue has become like (the tongues of) those taught by you (XV:13).
>
> Through me you have illumined the faces of many… (XII:28).

The exalted individual learns in a covenant-making setting and then apparently transmits the knowledge in a covenant-making setting as well. In 1QH[a] Column XII, the speaker declares that the Lord has illumined His face "for your covenant" (line 6) — strikingly, this illumination apparently occurs in a situation in which the Lord has "appeared" (line 7) to the speaker. Later in the text, the speaker alludes to a group of people who follow him — he proclaims to the Lord that they have "gathered together for your covenant," and that he has "examined" them (line 25). He then relates:

Those who walk in the way of your heart listen to me; they are drawing themselves up before You in the council of the holy ones.

The outcome of the teacher passing on the mysteries that he has learned in heaven to his followers is that they, as a group, are then able to "draw themselves up" into the presence of God in the divine council. As Samuel Thomas explains, in his monograph on *The "Mysteries" of Qumran,* the members of the mortal community, through their worship service, take part in a "kind of (imagined) temple setting in which the human participants meet the angelic retinue in a mutually transformational worship experience."[5]

As I indicated previously, there are elements in these texts that indicate that a vision of Deity is the centerpiece of this celestial learning experience. Elliot Wolfson argues that in a number of these texts, "knowledge of divine truth is equated with visually gazing at the glory, which occasions the recitation of God's mysteries."[6] In other words, the revelation of the mysteries occurs in conjunction with a vision of God's glory.

Similar imagery can be found in Psalm 63:2, where the psalmist says: "Thus I have gazed on you in the sanctuary, seeing your power and your glory." This leads us back to Psalm 89, where, after the description or revelation of God's wonders, we now see a group of people in verse 15 who we should understand to be the mortal congregation that are participating, perhaps reacting, here. This verse should probably be translated — as it is in the RSV, NSRV, ESV, and others — as, "Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance."

I suggest that an appropriate interpretation of this line, in light of the Qumran texts, is that these people are the followers of the individual

who has been exalted, as we can see in verse 17. Because they as followers have now been exalted to the heavenly courts as well, that festal shout that they know to give is the appropriate reaction to the revelation of God's mysteries presented in the preceding verses. This is evidently how the authors of our Qumran texts understood this sequence.

An "apocryphal" psalm known as the "Hymn to the Creator," found on the great Psalms Scroll, 11QPs[a], draws on Psalm 89. The hymn praises Yahweh for His wondrous deeds during the Creation, in much the same way as we find in Psalm 89. After making a clear allusion to the qualities of God's face and His throne as described in Psalm 89:14, the hymn goes on to describe how the angels reacted when they were shown God's wonders in His Creation of the world. The text says, "When all His angels saw, they sang for joy — for He had shown them what they knew not" (XXVI:12). The imagery of the heavenly beings witnessing the Creation and rejoicing in song is found in Job 38:7, where "the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy." I believe that the author of the "Hymn to the Creator," after clearly alluding to Psalm 89:14, meant to equate the motif of the angels singing for joy with verse 15, where the human congregation, who are walking in the light of God's face, know the festal shout and, in verse 16, rejoice in God's name all day long. This juxtapositioning of angels and mortals is common in the texts of the Judean Desert. The hymnist's impetus for making this connection may have been his familiarity with the temple ritual and the tradition of equating the priesthood with the angelic host in his community.

A temple ritual that appears to be related to these motifs is recorded in Sirach 50. This account tells of the high priest, Simon ben Onias, repairing the temple, laying the foundations for the temple walls, and building the walls up. As part of the ritual, Simon emerges from the temple as the embodiment of God's glory and completes the sacrifices. After he pours the wine offering on the altar, the account relates that "Then the sons of Aaron shouted; they blew their trumpets of hammered metal; they sounded a mighty fanfare as a reminder before the Most High." This part of the ritual recalls the feast of the *yom teruah* ("day of shouting/trumpet blasts") mandated in Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 29:1.[7]

A fragmentary text from 4Q381 15 depicts an image very similar to the overall setting we have been describing. In this text, the Lord's servant praises the Lord for the wonders of creation, following the pattern of Psalm 89, and then relates that he understands this knowledge because God has instructed him. There are some gaps in the scroll in the

next lines, but we then see the voice becoming plural, just as it does in Psalm 89. The group sings: "For we will call on your name, my God, and for your salvation" — paralleling the festal shout and rejoicing — and then in the next line, after a few missing words, the text says: "and like a robe, they will put it on, and a covering…." We don't get any more of the text after that, so it's hard to tell exactly what it is that the people are putting on. The reference in line 9 to "salvation" in proximity to the clothing language is reminiscent of Isaiah 61:10:

> I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Jubilees 16:30 indicates that the Israelites, as part of the ritual of the pilgrim feast of Tabernacles, set a wreath or crown on their heads (see Prov. 4:9; Ps. 118:27). This festal investiture imagery can be found in later Jewish and Christian writings concerning the last days; for example, in 4 Esdras 2:38–46, Ezra describes those participating in the eschatological feast:

> Those who have departed from the shadow of this age have received glorious garments from the Lord. Take again your full number, O Zion, and close the list of your people who are clothed in white, who have fulfilled the law of the Lord (4 Esdras 2:39–40).

Ezra then sees that the "Son of God" places crowns on these individuals, and he asks his angel-guide about them:

> Then I asked an angel, "Who are these, my lord?" He answered and said to me, "These are they who have put off mortal clothing and have put on the immortal, and have confessed the name of God. Now they are being crowned, and receive palms" (4 Esdras 2:44.45; cf. Revelation 4:4, 10; 7:9).

The traditions of the saved being dressed in glorious robes and receiving crowns as well as those regarding the priestly investiture perhaps derive from the priestly role of the Davidic kings. Deborah Rooke notes the parallels between the use of the breast piece, turban, and diadem by both the high priest and the king.[8] King David, as he led a priestly procession of the ark of the covenant, was dressed in "fine linen robes" and "a linen ephod" (1 Chr. 15:27; see also 2 Sam. 6:14). There is

likely also a parallel between the marriage imagery in Isaiah 61:10 and the royal marriage in Psalm 45, where the king and his bride are dressed in glorious and elaborate vestments.

Returning to the Dead Sea Scrolls, there is a series of texts that arguably place the elements of this scenario into a liturgical performance. These are the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, otherwise known as the Angelic Liturgy. Although the texts are highly fragmentary and their nature and use have been the source of endless debate, some scholars have described the series of hymns as a "conductor's score" for a ritualized ascent to heaven, where the human participants, the community's priesthood, engage in a weekly ritual, a "cultic drama" "which led its participants into and through the [heavenly] temple."[9]

The songs, led by an instructor known as the *maskil*, guide the participants through the various levels of heaven, where they witness and learn the songs of angelic praise to the Almighty. Samuel Thomas argues that as they progress through the heavenly realms, the human "priests themselves are gradually initiated into the divine presence" and gain divine knowledge "through ritual transformation."[10] Judith Newman describes the eighth Sabbath Song as presenting a setting "in which the divine King and Creator is made manifest in the throne room of the Temple."[11] The thirteenth song, which some contend is the climax of the liturgy, is concerned with a discussion of heavenly robes and regalia, which clearly resemble the priestly garments created for Aaron in Exodus 28. Regarding this segment, Newman comments that at this point, "the angel-like priests with the *maskil* at their head [are] fully vested and equipped for their oracular performance."[12] What appears to have occurred in this heavenly liturgy is that the human priests, led by their *maskil*, have received the revelation of the mysteries of God, have been transformed into angelic messengers, are clothed with glory and authority, and are now prepared to share the revelation with others.

To restate this scenario that we have pieced together from these texts:

1. An individual, likely the leader of the community or congregation, is delivered by God and lifted up to stand in the divine council.
2. In this heavenly setting, the exalted man is taught the mysteries of wonder, which include the story of God's primeval victories and his creation of the world — this instruction is apparently given by God Himself and some texts state that the individual has gazed upon God, or God's glory, or that God has appeared to him.

3. The individual is appointed to teach the mysteries to his community or congregation.
4. Those who receive his teachings are likewise elevated to heaven and participate in the heavenly vision and praise God with the angelic beings.
5. When the group (probably both mortals and angels) witnesses the revelation of the wonderful deeds of God in the creation, they shout or sing for joy and engage in praising God.
6. They are clothed in heavenly robes of righteousness.

Notes

1. Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 107-08.
2. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory*, 108.
3. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory*, 108.
4. Walter Brüeggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84, no. 1 (1972), 2-3.
5. Samuel I. Thomas, *The "Mysteries" of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls,* Early Judaism and Its Literature (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 149.
6. Elliot Wolfson, "The Seven Mysteries of Knowledge: Qumran E/Sotericism Recovered," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel,* ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman, *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism* (Leiden; Boston: 2004), 208. As cited in Thomas, *The "Mysteries" of Qumran,* 166.
7. These arguments were inspired by Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "Temple Trumpets and the Angelic Shout," paper presented at "Temple Studies Group Symposium II: Temple Music: Meaning and Influence," held at Temple Church, London, 2009.
8. Deborah W. Rooke, "Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 204ff.
9. J. Davila, "Exploring the Mystical Background of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 433-454.
10. Thomas, The "Mysteries" of Qumran, 168.
11. Judith H. Newman, "Priestly Prophets at Qumran: Summoning Sinai

through the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice," in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions About Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity,* ed. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Themes in Biblical Narrative* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).

12. Newman, "Priestly Prophets at Qumran," 38.

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