

THE EXCLUSION OF EPHRAIM IN REV. 7:4-8
AND ESSENE POLEMIC AGAINST PHARISEES

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Ephraim is conspicuous by its absence in the list of twelve tribes given in Rev. 7:4-8. This list of tribes, from whom the 144,000 are to be sealed, is unique in known ancient literature, as it includes Joseph and Manasseh but not Ephraim. The few previous attempts to explain this aspect of the list have been unconvincing. R. Bauckham observed recently that the list's inclusion of Joseph and his son Manasseh, rather than either just Joseph or his two sons, "is unparalleled and has never been explained."¹ This note proposes that Ephraim was excluded from the list as part of a polemic against Pharisees.

Two other notable features of the list of twelve tribes in Rev. 7:4-8 have been accounted for plausibly. These two features also show that the make-up of the list is not merely a random grouping of twelve names, but that it conveys symbolic meaning. First, also absent from the list is the tribe of Dan. Many commentators attribute this omission to possible associations of Dan with idolatry; idolatry is a major concern in Revelation.² Second, Judah is placed

¹ *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 221. On pages 221-22 in his chapter titled, "The Apocalypse as a Christian War Scroll," Bauckham first dismisses the proposal of an error in copying which would have confused Dan and Manasseh, then he offers two alternate proposals involving a mistaken exegesis by the author of Revelation of either Ezekiel 37 or Numbers 1. Bauckham does not present these with confidence; he begins, "Possibly..." (his italics). These two proposals are not persuasive, because they involve reading Joseph in Rev. 7:8 as if intended to mean Ephraim; but it is not clear why the author of Revelation would so misread either of these passages in the manner suggested. Even if that were the case, and he conflated Joseph and Ephraim, the mention of Manasseh in Rev. 7:6 would still be anomalous. Bauckham does provide an excellent survey and bibliography, to which may be added S. Pines, "Notes on the Twelve Tribes in Qumran, Early Christianity and Jewish Tradition," *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity Presented to David Flusser on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (ed. I. Gruenwald, S. Shaked and G.G. Stroumsa; Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 32; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992) 151-54.

² See, e.g., Judg. 18:30 and 1 Kgs 12:29. Bauckham (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 223) dismisses the relevance of speculation (in, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.2)

at the head of the list. This place of prominence is reasonably considered as a manifestation of the Christian view of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah with ancestry from Judah. Nonetheless, it is worth noting further that Judah is also a term used self-descriptively by Qumran Essenes.³

In several sectarian texts from Qumran the name Ephraim is used symbolically for "those who seek smooth things," $\text{שְׂרָרִי תְּרַבְּלָהָא}$.⁴ For example, in 4QP^aNah 3-4 ii 2 the commentator interprets Nah. 3:1a as follows: "The interpretation of it: this is the city of Ephraim—the Seekers-After-Smooth-Things at the end of days—who in deceit and falsehood conduct themselves."⁵ Numerous scholars have correctly recognized the phrase $\text{שְׂרָרִי תְּרַבְּלָהָא}$ as a pun against those who pursue תְּרַבְּלָהָא , i.e., the Pharisees.⁶ Though the Qumran Essenes surely pursued their own legal exegesis and determinations, it should be clearly noted that nowhere in the known Qumran manuscripts do Essenes call their own legal decisions תְּרַבְּלָהָא .⁷

That the antichrist might come from the tribe of Dan as being attested too late to influence Revelation. Bauckham also argues against the relevance of a mention of apostasy in T. Dan 5:4-6.

³ See, e.g., D.R. Schwartz, "To Join Oneself to the House of Judah (Damascus Document IV, 11)," *RevQ* 10 (1981) 435-46, especially 440.

⁴ Among the mentions of "seekers of smooth things" are 1QH 2:32; 4QP^aIsac 23 ii 10; 4QP^aNah 1-2 ii [7]; 3-4 i 2, 7; 3-4 ii 2, 4, 3-4 iii 3, 7; and compare CD 1:18. For Ephraim see 4QP^aIsac 4, 6-7 i 20; 4QP^aHosb 2: [2], 3, 5-6: [3]; 10, 26: [1]; 4QP^aNah 3-4 i [12]; 3-4 ii 2, 8; 3-4 iii 5; 3-4 iv [5]; 4QP^aPs^a 1-10 ii 1; and compare CD 7:12, 13, 14:1.

⁵ It is interesting that Jubilees, which retells most of the content of Genesis, omits any retelling of Gen. 48:1-20 in which Ephraim receives a greater blessing than his older brother, Manasseh. See J.C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (CSCO 510-11, Scriptores Aethiopiici 87-88; Louvain: E. Peters, 1989).

⁶ The translation is from M. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books* (CBQMS 8; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1979) 163. Horgan provides helpful analysis and bibliography.

⁷ See, e.g., M. Kister, "Biblical Phrases and Hidden Biblical Interpretations and Pesharim," *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport; STJD 10, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992) 27-39; J. Amoussine, "Ephraim et Manassé dans le Peshér de Nahum (4QP^aNahum)," *RevQ* 4 (1963) 389-96. Also for bibliography see H. Eshel, "The Historical Background of the Peshér Interpreting Joshua's Curse on the Rebuilder of Jericho," *RevQ* 15 (1992) 416 n. 32.

⁸ This assessment is based on the published texts known to me, and on inquiries made to some of the Qumran editors, including consultation of J.A. Fitzmyer, et al., *A Preliminary Concordance to the Hebrew and Aramaic Fragments From Qumran...* (Göttingen: photocopied, 1988). Also I did not find the term תְּרַבְּלָהָא in any of the microfiche photographs of 4Q251, called 4QHalakah^a by J. Milik (and also known as 4QLegal Commentary on the Torah), and of 4Q524, called 4QHalakah^b

The question becomes whether this Qumran symbolic use of Ephraim for Pharisees is relevant to Revelation. I suggest the term did move from Late Second Temple Jewish sectarian polemic into the polemic between movements within early Christianity.

It has frequently been affirmed, justifiably in my view, that John who wrote Revelation was a Jewish-Christian. By the modern term "Jewish-Christian" here I mean merely that John, while a Christian, also emphasized the continuing importance of Jewish commandments such as refusing meat offered to idols.⁸ In this well-known early Christian debate, Paul's letters present a different position from that of Revelation.⁹ Of course Paul was—or had been—a Pharisee, according to Phil. 3:5.¹⁰

Thus far, Essenes and Pharisees have been mentioned. Clearly, Revelation cannot be seen as a work compatible with Sadducean influence, given its emphasis on angels, predestination, and resurrection. Likewise, Revelation, though certainly a strongly anti-Roman work, cannot be considered a pro-Zealot work. More like Daniel than like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Revelation advocated prayer to God so he—not humans—would obliterate the enemies. Though one cannot establish Essene identity or influence merely by a process of elimination, comparing the worldview of Revelation with these groups and texts can help to define the characteristic concerns and help to establish affinities. The case for Essene influence will have to be made on the basis of positive associations.¹¹

text; see E. Tov, et al. (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Microfilm: A Comprehensive Facsimile Edition of the Texts from the Judean Desert* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993). See also E. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSS 29, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 99. Of course Qumran texts use the root in the Biblical Hebrew sense.

This lack of usage of the term מִשְׁתָּר in the presumably contemporary Pharisaic (and later Rabbinic) sense is an indication of considerable consistency among the Qumran texts. In Essene vocabulary, for example, 4QMMT is not a halakhic text, but an anti-halakhic text.

⁸ For a discussion of the ancient names of Jewish-Christian groups (including Ebionites, Nazarenes, and Minim), see my 1990 Duke University Ph.D. dissertation, *The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epphanianus: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations*, 74-97.

⁹ Compare, e.g., 1 Cor. 10:23-30 and Rev. 2:14, 20.

¹⁰ In the same verse Paul is said to be "of the tribe of Benjamin"; compare Rom. 11:11. According to Acts 22:28 Paul was a Roman citizen by birth.

¹¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt a complete survey of possible Essene influences on Revelation. What is presented here merely provides the plausible background for an anti-Pharisee symbology in Rev. 7:4-8. A more comprehensive analysis would need to address, for instance, issues of dualism, attitudes towards sexuality, separatism, and hopes for a new and different

Revelation urged Christians in Asia Minor not to assimilate to Roman culture.¹² This is what Celsus, author of *Aléthēs Logos*, was quite worried about: the social consequences of Christianity, more so than its theology.¹³ Both Paul and the comparatively assimilated or integrated Jewish community in Asia Minor,¹⁴ a patriotic Roman province, were seen as relatively less threatening by people like Celsus, and inversely more unsatisfactory to John. John viewed some Pauline Christians and Pharisaic Jews as coexisting too easily with Rome. In return, some who saw or heard of John probably regarded him as a wandering prophet with an anti-social message.

Essenes regarded Ephraim negatively, and Revelation, by excluding them from the divine seal of protection from the coming wrath, also regarded Ephraim negatively.¹⁵ But evidently some early Jewish writers—represented in several passages in Tannaitic Targumim and Midrashim—regarded Ephraim in a particularly positive manner.¹⁶

Jerusalem temple. On the latter point, see, e.g., D. C. Allison, "4Q403 Frag. 1, Col. 1, 38-46 and the Revelation to John," *RevQ* 12 (1986) 409-13. In a forthcoming study, I hope to demonstrate the relevance of the original text of Rev. 22:14 to such a study.

¹² For an analysis of Revelation as rejecting various other groups in society, see, e.g., A. Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," *HTR* 79 (1986) 308-20.

¹³ In my view (detailed in a forthcoming study), Celsus lived, not in Rome or Alexandria, as often assumed, but in Pergamum, Asia Minor.

¹⁴ On the stability and political and economic engagement of the Jewish community in Asia Minor, see, e.g., A. T. Kraabel, *Judaism in Asia Minor*, Harvard Univ. Ph.D. dissertation, 1968, announced as forthcoming as *The Jews of Western Asia Minor under the Roman Empire* (SPB; Leiden: E. J. Brill). Also drawing on archeology as well as texts is C. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986). On tension between early Christians and the more established Jewish community in Asia Minor, see, e.g., R. Wilken, "Melito, the Jewish Community at Sardis, and the Sacrifice of Isaac," *TS* 37 (1976) 53-69.

¹⁵ Though Ephraim is not explicitly named as having been withdrawn from the list, the presence of Joseph and Manasseh draws attention to the absence of Ephraim. This sort of indirect reference is typical of Revelation, as for instance in the many thinly disguised references to Rome.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of these texts, see J. Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim," *HTR* 68 (1975) 1-15. See also S. H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation: The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum* (HUCCM 2; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1974). For an attempt to associate John 11:54 with these rabbinic texts, see R. Paterantonio, "El Mesías Ascensionado: El Mesías ben Efraim en el Evangelio de Juan," *Revisión* 44 (1982) 1-64.

These passages make two relevant assertions. The first is that a warrior Messiah of Ephraim would precede the Messiah of David; eventually, Bar Kokhba was identified with the Messiah of Ephraim. For instance, Heinemann cites "the Targum of Cant. 4.5 and 7.4, which speaks of 'two redeemers who will redeem you in the future, the Messiah ben David and the Messiah ben Ephraim.'"¹⁷ Heinemann argues that the figure of the Messiah of Ephraim was transformed from a victorious warrior to a messiah who must die only after the defeat of Bar Kokhba.¹⁸

Second, several rabbinic texts assert that the dry bones of Ezekiel 37 will be resurrected¹⁹ and that the bones are identified as being from the tribe of Ephraim,²⁰ who had attempted to begin the Exodus from Egypt too soon. Here again, Heinemann persuasively argues that this tradition evolved in the early centuries of the common era. Beginning with exegesis of Ps. 79:9 and 1 Chron. 7:20-21 in Palestinian Targumim on Exod. 13:17 and Mekhilta Beshallah and other texts,²¹ an account emerged in which Ephraim disobediently attempted to begin the Exodus before the appointed time, and so were massacred by Philistines. But eventually the remains of the Ephraimites were seen as identical with the bones in Ezekiel 37 which would be revived, as expressed in later texts, such as b. San. 92b. After the death of Bar Kokhba, Heinemann concludes, these two legends were transformed, "the Messiah of Ephraim had to fall in battle; yet the Ephraimites and their leader who had been slain, were worthy of resurrection."²² An additional motive for the transformation of these legends may have been provided by anti-Ephraim polemic found in Qumran texts and in Rev. 7:4-8.

It is unlikely to be merely coincidental that in rabbinic literature Ephraim is specifically described as meriting resurrection, whereas

¹⁷ Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim," 7, which provides additional references.

¹⁸ Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim," 8.

¹⁹ 4QSecond Ezekiel also comments on the resurrection of these dry bones; there, with attendant prophecies, the bones are described as joined together, then covered with skin, then standing. See the presentation of 4Q385 Second Ezekiel 2-3 in J. Strugnell and D. Dimant, "4QSecond Ezekiel," *RevQ* 13 (1988) 45-58 and note M. Kister and E. Qimron, "Observations on 4QSecond Ezekiel," *RevQ* 15 (1992) 596.

²⁰ This is the case despite the specification in Ezek. 37:11 that "these bones are the whole house of Israel."

²¹ Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim," 10-13.

²² Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim," 15.

in Revelation, Ephraim, by its omission from the list of tribes, is apparently excluded from resurrection.

In conclusion, Rev. 7:4-8 conspicuously excluded Ephraim, and by so doing, the Essene-influenced author polemically asserted that Pharisees were not among those predestined elect who were to be sealed in advance of their resurrection.