

The Single Calendar of the Zadokites

There is a misconception that the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls observed more than one calendar, nothing is further from the truth. All of the material produced by those who have spent their time investigating the scrolls supports a single calendar of 364 days based on the movements of the sun. None of the material proclaims any other calendar. I believe the basis of this misconception may have resulted because there are several calendrical scrolls providing different information however in every case the information is based on the same calendar. I have several books written by different scholars who have studied both the scrolls and their authors, all concur that the calendar is the most important theme of the scrolls,

Below is a comment taken from 'The Dead Sea Scrolls' by Messrs. Wise, Abegg Jnr, and Cook, the highlights are mine,

Adherence to a peculiar calendar (**singular**) is the thread that runs through hundreds of the Dead Sea scrolls. More than any other single element, the calendar binds these works together. It is the calendar that makes the Scrolls a collection. – Therefore if we want to understand the Dead Sea Scrolls we must come to terms with their system for measuring sacred time. – The authors and readers of the Scrolls differed from most Jews of their in the importance they ascribed to the sun. The sun's annual journey through the heavens was the basis for their calendar. – The calendar of the Scrolls proposed a 364 day solar year. The moon, as a secondary body, was sometimes considered and when it was, its movements were described in terms of the sun.

Professor Rachel Ellior in her book 'The Three Temples' concerning the motives behind the secession of the Qumran community says the following,

They (the Qumran Community) regarded the cultic calendar that governed the sacred temple services around the time of their secession – based on a lunar calendar of 354 days, counted in months of unequal lengths dependant on human discretion, based on variable human observations of the new moon – as false and arbitrary, an infringement of the covenant, sinful and wicked. This newly imposed lunar calendar was to be replaced by the ancient priestly solar calendar.

The essence of Ellior's last sentence is that the Qumran community pulled away from the temple worship because of the change to a lunar calendar which they were not prepared to follow. Elaborating further on the system of measurement of sacred time followed by the Qumran community Ellior says,

This system was based on a solar year of 364 days consisting of fifty two weeks, whose Sabbaths were counted in a fixed annual cycle, divided symmetrically among the four annual seasons and on a prescribed mathematical calculation of the progress on the solar year: twelve thirty day months with four further days added to differentiate the four annual seasons. These 364 days were divided into four quarters, or seasons, each of thirteen weeks which together constituted a year of fifty two Sabbaths.

The solar year began on the day on which the heavenly luminaries were created – Wednesday.

There was no Wednesday at the time of creation and Ellior is here using modern parlance to identify the fourth day of the week. The Zadokites always started the year on the fourth day of the week which is our Wednesday. It is important to realise that the weekly rotation is unaffected by the start and end of the calendar year: the weekly rotation commenced with the creation week and has continued uninterrupted: it is in effect outside of calendar calculations. Any calendar not of 364 days and not starting on the fourth day of the week a.k.a. Wednesday is not compliant with the Zadokite calendar.

Professor Vermes in his book 'The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English' describing the calendar of the Qumran community comments,

The Qumran sect rejected this seemingly artificial system (**The Judaic lunar calendar**) and adopted instead a chronological reckoning, probably of priestly origins, based on the sun, practice attested also in the book of Jubilees and 1 Enoch and fully laid out in the remains of a series of calendrical documents (4Q320-30). The outstanding feature of this solar calendar was its absolute regularity, in that, instead of 354 days, not divisible by seven, it consisted of 364 days i.e. that is fifty two weeks precisely.

Its unbroken rhythm meant furthermore that the first day of the year and of each subsequent season always fell on the same day of the week. For the Essenes this was Wednesday, since according to Genesis it was on the fourth day that the sun and the moon were created. Needless to add, the same monotonous sequence also implied that all the feasts of the year always fell on the same day of the week: Passover, the fifteenth day of the first month, was always celebrated on a Wednesday; the feast of Weeks, the fifteenth day of the third month, always on a Sunday, the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month, on a Friday, the Feast of Tabernacles, the fifteenth day of seventh month on a Wednesday. This solar calendar with its eternal regularity cannot of course stand up to the astronomical calculation of 365 days 5 hours 48 minutes and 48 seconds to the year.

In their analysis of the scrolls all of the above scholars refer to the 'calendar' (singular) of the Essenes because the Qumran community observed only one calendar comprising a 364 day year starting on the fourth day of the week (Wednesday). It is preposterous to say they followed more than one calendar? To do so would require duplicating the Festivals throughout the year. That said, different calendrical scrolls record different events, for example, 4Q317 identifies the phases of the moon, 4Q318 provides astrological lore, 4Q320-321a attempt to synchronise the 354 day lunar calendar with the 364 day solar calendar, 4Q329 gives the priestly courses rotation which was on each weekly Sabbath: but all of the information is plotted according to the 364 day solar calendar. That all of this different information can be incorporated on the one calendar proves the point.

The following is an abstract from a paper presented by Professors Eshbal Ratson and Jonathan Ben-Dov and contained in the Journal of biblical Literature. Ratson and Ben-Dov succeeded in deciphering one of the last two remaining scrolls, which has been given the reference 4Q324d,

The calendar constituted a central part of the sectarian identity. Members of the Yahad adhered to a year of 364 days, which was different from the luni-solar year of the Jerusalem temple and the Hasmonean state. The sectarian calendrical tradition is well represented in a variety of documents from Qumran and outside it. It is a highly schematic year with ideal relations between its numerical constituents. The number of 364 days is neatly divided by seven, a typological number with significant religious connotation. Each 364 day year contains exactly fifty-two weeks a fact that allows anchoring the festivals to fixed weekdays, thus avoiding their coincidence with the Sabbath. In addition the number 364 divides neatly by as well, yielding a good symmetry of the four seasons, each season containing exactly 91 days, Finally the synchronization of the 364 day year with a schematic lunar calendar of alternating twenty nine and thirty day months is easily achieved, using an intercalation of one thirty-day month every three years (a triennial cycle of three years of 364 days = three lunar years of 354 days + an inter-calary month of thirty days).

A distinct part of the 364 day calendar tradition appears in a collection of calendrical texts from Qumran that present the characteristics mentioned above in the form of detailed rosters in addition to the following: the triennial cycle involving lunar months; a six year cycle that incorporates the times of service of priestly families (mishmarot) in the temple; and a detailed record of lunar phases along the six year cycle. Each type of calendrical scroll represents only some of these traits and a variety of calendrical 'genre' is created. The scroll 4Q324d represents the Sabbaths and the Festivals as well as a simple record of the names of the priestly courses but does not go into details of either the mishmarot service or the lunar phenomena. It is unique in phasing a distinct type of formula indicating the dates of transitions between the seasons.

The highlighted confirm it is necessary to collect together several scrolls to determine the system of sacred measurement followed by the Qumran society and conversely, that no single scroll will provide the complete picture. But importantly it is one picture (one calendar) that this community adhered to. In closing let me add another comment concerning the work by these two particular scholars,

While the Qumran sect's use of a 364-day calendar was known from previously-translated ancient documents, the newly-translated material -- published in the winter 2017-18 issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* -- reveals the Hebrew name of a festival the sect observed to celebrate each change of season: *Tekufah* ("period" in English).

As stated their recent work discovered another previously unknown celebration, does this infer a further Qumran calendar? Of course not, it merely identifies that the Qumran community added an additional event to their calendar.

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