Yesterday I talked about the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for understanding Jesus and the milieu out of which earliest Christianity grew. My basic point is that if Jesus was a Jew, then to understand him, you have to understand Jews in his world. And the Dead Sea Scrolls provide us valuable information to that end.

I am not saying that the Dead Sea Scrolls are representative of what all or even most Jews thought at the time. They clearly are not. If the “Essene hypothesis” is right – and it is the view held by the vast majority of the experts (among whom I do not number myself) (and among whom they do not number me either! ) – then the Scrolls were produced by a Jewish sect that had very distinctive views of its own that were not, in many respects, shared by outsiders. In particular, this was a group of Jews who insisted that the coming apocalyptic judgment, soon to arrive, would bring destruction not only to the hated Romans and the “obvious” enemies of God, but to many Jews as well, including the priests who were in charge of the Temple cult in Jerusalem.

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The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christianity