Hebrew Texts and Language of the Second Temple Period

Proceedings of an Eighth Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira

Edited by

Steven E. Fassberg
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Chapter 6

The Word אמת in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Steven D. Fraade

1 Introduction

This paper began as a footnote to a published article (in Hebrew) in the journal Meghillot, an English version of which subsequently appeared. To summarize one part of that article, in “rewriting” the biblical pericope of the Deuteronomic high court (Deut 17:8–13), the Temple Scroll rearranges the verses a bit and adds some interesting details, the most significant of which are, in reworking Deut 17:10, that the court’s verdicts derive “from the book of the Teaching (Torah)” (ספר התורה) and that “they (the members of the court) declare it to you in truth” (ויבא untranslated). This emphasis on the “truth” of the scripturally...
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derived verdict and its trustworthy transmission, is in sharp contrast, I argue and seek to explain, to the interpretation of the Sifre commentary to Deuteronomy 17:11, “You must not deviate from the verdict that they tell you either to the right or the left” (לא תסור מן הדברים אשר יגידו לך ימין ושמאל): “Even if they show you that right is left and left is right, obey them” (אפילו מראים בעיניך על ימין שהוא שמאל על שמאל הוא שמאל ושמאל הוא ימין). If, as I have previously argued at length, the Temple Scroll seeks to rein in the relative autonomy of the Deuteronomic court (especially if compared to the judicial bodies under Moses's prophetic authority during the period of wilderness wandering), the rabbinic midrash seeks to do the opposite: to further expand and loosen it.

My purpose in this paper is to look more closely at the use of the word אמת in other texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls so as to better understand its importance for Qumran communal ideology and self-understanding, especially as it is used in relation to such other judicial nouns as צדקה/צדק and משפט, with which, in the scrolls (but apparently not elsewhere), it is often used in combination, and in some other places apparently inserted. Yigael Yadin, in his notes to his edition of the Temple Scroll, suggests that אמת here and elsewhere in the scrolls denotes a sectarian (exclusive) claim to (divine) truth.  


6 See Exod 18:13–27; Num 11:10–17, 24–25; Deut 1:9–18; and my discussion in the introductions to my aforementioned articles.

7 The noun משפט/צדק does not appear in this immediate context, it is emphasized in the preceding chapter, in Deut 16:18 and 20, to which I shall return.

8 Yigael Yadin, Temple Scroll, 2:251 in note to line 4. For previous treatments of אמת in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Devorah Dimant, “The Vocabulary of the Qumran Sectarian Texts,” in History, Ideology and Bible Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Collected Studies, FAT 90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 57–100 (83); eadem, “Criteria for the Identification of Qumran Sectarian
sense, I am expanding Yadin’s note as well. Before doing so, however, attention should be paid to 1QS 1:15, “And do not deviate from the laws of his truth (that is, his true laws) by going either right or left” (লו אול לומד חומרי אמתו לבלת ימין) (משמאל), which immediately follows an admonition to members not to deviate, either early or late, from the proper festival calendar. The language of 1QS 1:15 is so close to that of Deut 17:11, but with the substitution of “from his true laws” (מהוקחי אמתו) for “from the verdict that they tell you” (מן־הדבר אשר־יגידו לך), as to suggest its deliberate re-formulation. However, the same could be said of its relation to Deut 28:14, “And do not deviate from any of the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, whether to the right or to the left” (לא תסור מכל־הדברים אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם ימין ושמאול). Although we might say that both verses were in mind in the formulation of 1QS 1:15, I would favor Deut 17:11 as having the greater resonance. In any case, the received judgements (Deut 17:11) and commandments (Deut 28:14), according to the formulations of the Temple Scroll and Community Rule, are not so much those received from human intermediaries such as Moses, as those containing absolute divine (that is, sectarian) truth. We shall have an opportunity to expand upon this after completing our textual tour.

However, first some raw (and imprecise) numbers: the noun אמת, in its various forms, appears 192 times in the Hebrew Bible (but unevenly distributed, e.g., with 39 of those in Psalms). It appears not once in the Hebrew manuscripts of Ben Sira. By contrast, in the non-biblical scrolls from Qumran it appears 310 times, with a particularly strong presence in so-called sectarian scrolls, plus 34 times in the Qumran biblical scrolls.9 It appears 242 times in tannaitic corpora (with 158 of those in the tannaitic midrashim). I have not adjusted these numbers for proportionality per corpus size, but my initial impression is that the word אמת certainly has an outsized presence in Qumran texts compared to its antecedents and successors. But more importantly for our present purposes,

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9 These numbers, and those that follow for the Dead Sea Scrolls, are for total appearances counting all scrolls, allowing for multiple appearances in multiple copies of the same compositions (e.g., all copies of the Community Rule).

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I could find very few biblical (6) or early (tannaitic) rabbinic (5) cases (the latter being mainly scriptural citations) in which the noun אמת appears in such close combination with either צדק/ ++) or צדקה/++, and most commonly with both, as it does some 50 times in the Dead Sea Scrolls, a number of which we shall examine shortly.

In the Hebrew Bible the nouns משפט צדק or צדק/ ++) often appear in combination such as צדקה ומשפט/++ or משפט צדק. For example: Gen 18:19, “For I have singled him (Abraham) out that he may enjoin upon his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right” (כי ידעתיו למען לעשות צדקה ומשפט); Deut 16:18, “And they (the judges) shall judge the people with true justice” (ושפטו את־העם משפט־צדק); Isa 1:21, “Alas, she has become a harlot, the faithful city that was filled with justice, where righteousness dwelt, but now murderers” (איכה היתה קריה נאמנה מלאתי משפט צדק ילין בה והוה המרצחים;); Ps 33:5, “He loves righteousness and justice; the Lord’s mercy fills the earth” (אהבה צדק ומשפט חסד מלאה הארץ;); Ps 97:2, “Dense clouds are around him; righteousness and justice are the base of his throne” (ענן וערפל סביביו צדק ומשפט מכון כסאו;); Ps 99:4, “Mighty king who loves justice, it was you who established equity, you who worked righteous judgment in Jacob” (עון מלך משפט צדק וצדק ביעקב אתה עשית;); Prov 21:3, “Doing what is righteous and just is more desired by the Lord than sacrifice” (עשה צדק ומשפט נבחר לה׳ מבחר;). And, of course, there are others.

As mentioned, there are some 50 occurrences in the Dead Sea Scrolls in which this biblical idiom, or a slight variant thereof, is adjusted so as to include the noun אמת or אמת or אמת (his [=God’s] truth”). That is, the twosome idiom has become a frequent threesome. I provide here just a sampling. To begin with, the opening of the Community Rule (1QS 1:4–6) includes in its description of proper conduct of the members of the Yaḥad, the following requirement:

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10 One of them, Ps 89:15, will be discussed below in conjunction with 11Q5 (11QPsl) 26:10–11. For a good example, see Jer 4:2.
11 Although צדק and צדקה do not here constitute a phrase, they are poetically linked.
“To distance oneself from all evil and to hold fast to all good deeds; to prac-
tice truth, justice and righteousness upon the earth” (רָאִיתָם מְכֹל רֵע וְלָדוֹם בָּהוּ הַיָּמִין לְשָׁמְשַׁת אֲדֹمַת וְרֵעוֹת וְמָשְׁפֵּט בָּהּ). Similarly, in the Community Rule (1QS 8:2), speaking of the conduct of the Council of the Community (עזרת העדה), we find, “To do truth, righteousness, justice, loving kindness, and humility, one with another” (מְכֹל רֵע וְלָדוֹם בָּהוּ אֲדֹמַת וְצִדָּקָה). But elsewhere, the attribute of truth, combined with those of righteousness and justice, is attributed directly to God, as in the following from the “Hymn to the Creator” (11Q5 [11QPs] 26:10–11): “Mercy and truth surround his presence; truth, and justice, and righteousness are the base of his throne” (חָסד וּמַשָּׁפֵּט וּצְדָּקָה וְאֲמֻת לְכַל בְּכָרוֹת). Compare this to the very similar Ps 97:2, where כָּרוֹת and משפט appear, but without אמת: “Dense clouds are around him; righteousness and justice are the base of his throne” (עֵרְפֵּל עָלָיו צְדָּק וּמַשָּׁפֵּט). However, compare Ps 89:15, where אמת does appear, but less directly with כָּרוֹת and משפט and in direct parallelism with “mercy,” a significantly more frequent biblical and early rabbinic combination. Similarly, for the association of divine truth with divine righteousness and justice, see the Community Rule (1QS) 11:4–5: “For the truth of God is the rock of my footstep, and his strength is the staff of my right hand. From the fountain of his righteousness is my justice” (היא סלע פעמי וגוּבָרתוּ המשפט ובון מַצֶּנָע). For God addressed as “you are a God of truth” (אתה אֲמַת), see 1QH 7:25.

In several other cases, God’s אמת is invoked in direct support of his justice and judgments against Israel. Thus, in Community Rule (1QS) 1:24–26, this justification of divine justice as אמת is uttered in the context of confession: “We have perverted ourselves, we have rebel[led], we [have sin]ed, we have acted wickedly, we [and] our [fath]ers before us, by our walking […] True and righte[ous] is the [Go]d of [Israel and] his judgement against us and [our] fathers” (אֲמְתָה [מְשָׁפֵּט וּצְדָּקָה] וּכָּרֹתִין); and from the parallel confession in Damascus Document (CD [MS B] 20:28–30), “We have sinned, we have acted wickedly, both we and our fathers, in our walking contrarily with respect to the laws of the covenant. Righteousness and truth are your judgements against us” (שָׁמַעְנוּ וּשָׁמַעְנוּ וּאֶמְלָכָה בֵּטֵחָה חָיוָּה בְּלָדְנֵהוּ [אֲמַת וּמַשָּׁפֵּט כֶּבֶק]). Or from the parallel confession in Damascus Document (CD [MS B] 20:28–30), “We have sinned, we have acted wickedly, both we and our fathers, in our walking contrarily with respect to the laws of the covenant. Righteousness and truth are your judgements against us” (שָׁמַעְנוּ וּשָׁמַעְנוּ וּאֶמְלָכָה בֵּטֵחָה חָיוָּה בְּלָדְנֵהוּ [אֲמַת וּמַשָּׁפֵּט כֶּבֶק]).

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12 Compare also Ps 85:11, where אמת appears, but in a different construction.
13 The word אֲלֵה ("God") is written in paleo-Hebrew script.
The laws by which the community lived, and thereby sought to differentiate itself from the rest of Israel, are undergirded by the claim that they are divinely true, and hence not to be spurned. See Damascus Document (CD [MS B] 20:30–31): “And they are not to lift a hand against his holy statutes and his righteous precepts and his true testimonies” (ללא ירمو יلع חקי ומדת המשמשות). According to 1QS 9:17–18, members themselves are to channel (divine) truth and righteous justice in their reproving of one another: “(One must) reprove—(with) true knowledge and righteous judgement—(only) those who have chosen the way” (לוהבתו תשת אמת ומדות צדק ול commodo יד).16 These two aspects of אמת, its being divine and its being manifest in the laws by which the community conducts its life, are, of course, deeply complementary, but also profoundly self-confirming for the community’s members, as we shall continue to see.

4 The Yaḥad and אמת

In the passages to be considered next, the link between righteousness, justice, and truth continues to be expressed, but in a more sectarian vein, identifying the “laws of truth” (or, “true laws”) and truth more broadly with the life and members of the community, identified as the “sons of truth” (בני אמת) or “sons of his (God’s) truth” (בני אמתו, or, “his truthful sons”).17 Consider the following two texts, which are part of the same larger context. In 4Q266 (4QDa) 11 5–718 we read: “And anyone who rejects these regulations, (which are) in accordance with all the statutes found19 in the law of Moses, shall not be reckoned among all the sons of his (God’s) truth; for his soul has despised righteous instruction” (יחשב לא וכול המואס במשפטים האלה על פי כול החוקים הנמצאים בתורת משה (לו) [לא] ישב).18

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15 4QSd (4Q258) viii (frags. 4a ii, 4c–f) 2 here has לבחירי. For the chosen ones, see below, n. 34.
16 For reproof within the community alone, see CD 9:2–3. For the “way” of the community being דרך אמתו ("the way of truth" or "the true way"), see 1QS 4:17; 4Q259 (4QSε) iii (frags. 2a ii, 3a–c) 4.
17 Note as well the single occurrence of בת אמת ("daughter of truth") in the fragmentary 4Q502 (4QpapRitual of Marriage) 2 6.
18 // 4Q270 (4QDe) 7 i 19–21.
19 The verb “to find” (מצא) is used in the scrolls to denote revealed sectarian legal interpretations of the Torah. See CD 6:19; 15:20; 1QS 8:11–12; 9:35; 4QMMT C 30. See Steven D. Fraade, Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages, JSJSup 147 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 80–81.
The context clearly indicates that the rules referred to here are sectarian interpretations of Scripture.

For the designation “sons of truth,” as the implied equivalent of “sons of light,” see also the Community Rule (1QS) 4:6 (as part of the so-called “Treatise of the Two Spirits”): “These are the principles of the spirit for the sons of truth [in the] world” (aleza coter oh qel etam hakol). A few lines later in 4Q266 (4QDa) 11–12 we read: “But our ancestors you chose and to their descendants you gave the statutes of your truth (or, your truthful statutes) and your holy laws, which if a man does them, he shall live” (amohem mosafet kodeshhash etsher yesh haadam wahis haadam). The “sons of truth” (alone) are in possession of God’s (who himself is truth) “statutes of truth” (or, truthful statutes). In another text (4Q416 [4QInstructionb] 110) we read: “From heaven he shall pronounce judgement upon the work of wickedness, but all the children of his truth (or, his faithful children) will be accepted with favor by [him] (mishpesh osulot lehovah metsim et bi amah arot lia).

With regard to this identification of the “sons of light” with the “sons of truth,” it is noteworthy that the “Treatise of the Two Spirits” (1QS 3:3–4:26), concludes as follows (1QS 4:24–25): “According to a man’s share in truth shall he be righteous and thus hate deceit, and according to his inheritance in the lot of deceit he shall be evil through it, and thus loathe truth” (veof halah ti esamah veoatzak). The Sons of Light embody truth whereas the Sons of Darkness loathe it. Conversely, the Sons of Light hate deceit, whereas deceit is the lot of the Sons of Darkness, just as truth is lot of the Sons of Light. The predestined lots of light and darkness, truth and deceit, are polar opposites with no gradations in between.

The identification of the community members themselves with amah is further evidenced in the expression, “men of (the) truth” (see Exod 18:21), as expressed in the following passage from Pesher Habakkuk (1QpHab 7:9–14: “If it delays, wait for it; for it will surely come and will not be late” [Hab 2:3b]. (vacat) Its interpretation concerns the men of truth, who observe the Torah, whose hands do not slacken in the service of truth (or, true service) when the last time is drawn out for them” (am yeshmukha hash le yim naa).

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20 For a close parallel to the last clause of this citation, see 1QS 2:26–31.
21 For the expression “sons of his truth” (see also 1QM 17:8. For the expression “truth [in the world],” see 1QS 4:19.
22 For the very end, see Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11, 13, 21.
23 Some read this as וַצְדֵק.
24 For the “spirit of truth” (רוח האמת) being opposite to the “spirit of deceit” (רוח העול), as light is to darkness, see 1QS 3:18–19. Similarly, “the angel of his truth” (מלאך אמתה) rules over the domain of truth in 1QS 3:24; 4Q177 (4QCatena A) 12–13 i 7.
Thus, the men of truth observe the Torah and serve God in truth. Likewise, in the Words of the Maskil (4Q298 [4Qcrypt-A Words Maskil] 3–4 ii 6–7), the Maskil addresses the community as follows: "And men of truth, pursue righteousness." 25

Similarly, the community is referred as a "house of truth" (or, true house) in the Community Rule (1QS) 5:5–6: "They shall lay a foundation of truth for Israel, for the Community of the eternal covenant. They shall atone for all those who willingly offer themselves to holiness in Aaron and to the house of truth in Israel, and for those who join them in Community." 26

Note as well the close association (especially in the shorter version) between the words אמת and ייחד in the sequence, אמת לישראל ייחד, "truth for Israel, for the Community," to which we now turn.

Although the association of אמת with ייחד, of truth with the Community, has been implicit in many of the preceding examples, it becomes even closer with the direct linking of the two words in immediate or near-immediate sequence. In several places in the scrolls, we find the expression ייחד אמת or ייחד אמתו, a "Community of truth" or "a Community of his truth" (or, his true community), with the pronominal suffix in the latter referring to God. For example, in the Community Rule (1QS) 2:24–25, we read, "For they shall all comprise a Community of truth, genuine humility, love of mercy, and righteous intent, each for his fellow, within a holy council, members in an eternal assembly" (אשר לרעהו בעצת קדש ייחד אמתו ענות טוב ומחשבת צדק ואת ייחד אמתו ענות טוב ומחשבת צדק אלהי עולם). The inclusion of truth as first among the attributes of the community signals its relative importance. Similarly, emphasizing the exclusive nature of the Community of truth, see the Community Rule (1QS) 2:25–31:27

And whoever refuses to enter [into the covenant of God], (preferring) to walk in the stubbornness of his heart, shall not [enter into the Community of his truth (or, his true Community), inasmuch as his soul has rejected the instructions of knowledge of the precepts of righteousness. He has not succeeded in transforming his life, and he is not to be reckoned among the upright"

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25 For the supplying of צדק here, see DJD 23:26. The phrase אנשי אמת appears in one other place in the scrolls, in the Temple Scroll (11Q19 57:8) to designate the king’s body guard.

26 For "willingly offering" oneself, see 1QS 5:10, to be treated below. Compare the expression בית התורה as a designation for the community in CD (MS B) 2030, 13.

27 4Q257 (4QpapSv) iii (frgs. ia iii, 2a–g) 1.
Once again from the “Treatise of the Two Spirits,” we see the atoning and purifying force of the spiritual truth of the Community for its members (Community Rule [1QS 3:6–8]): 28 “For it is through the spirit of the council of truth of God that the ways of a person, all of his iniquities, are atoned for, so he can behold the light of life. And it is by the holy spirit (belonging) to the Community through his truth that he shall be purified from all his iniquities” (Responsibly a spirit of the community together and all of his iniquities, by his truth, purified from all his iniquities).

Although in the following passage (1QS 5:9–10) may be adverbial (“together”), I would suggest the following translation, given the close connection between joining the community and “willingly offering” oneself (מתנדב) that we have seen previously: 30 “the multitude of the men of their covenant who willingly offer themselves (as a) Community for his truth” (לרוב אנשי הברית המתנדבים יחד לאמתו).

Finally, we have at least one instance (1QS 5:3–4) of the order ז poderá התנוה take first place among the communal attributes. However, note carefully that the parallel in 4QSd (4Q258) i (frags. 1a i, 1b) 3 lacks the words בהיעד altogether. While it is impossible to know with certainty whether those words represent an insertion in 1QS or a deletion in 4QSd (and without going into the larger much-debated question of the chronological relation of 1QS to the 4QS fragments), in this specific case it would seem that an insertion in 1QS would be the more plausible, especially as we saw, at the very beginning of our tour, the word added in the Temple Scroll (11Q19) 56:3–4, to which we have now come full circle.

Before concluding, however, let us look at one final passage in which ז poderá precedes, but not immediately, בהיעד, that being 1QS 9:18–19, 31 which recounts the teaching of the Maskil: “He shall guide them with knowledge, and instruct them in the mysteries of wonder and truth among the men of the Community” (להנחותם בדעונותום והשכלה והסודים והאור והאמת יחד). Once again what distinguishes the members of the בהיעד is (among other attributes and practices)

28 // 4Q255 (4QS*) 2 1–2; 4Q257 (4QpapS*) iii (frgs. 1a iii, 2a–g) 9–11.
29 4Q255 (4QS*) has “his holy spirit” instead of “the holy spirit.”
30 See 1QS 5:5–6.
31 // 4Q258 (4QSd) viii (frags. 4a ii, 4c–f) 3.
their being instructed in (and in possession of) the divine truth by which they conduct their lives.

5 Conclusions

How shall we explain the apparent insertions of אמת into contexts that stress righteousness and justice, whether in the reworking of the Deuteronomic pericope on the high court, a reworking of an earlier version of the Community Rule, or much more widely the inclusion of אמת in the biblical idioms of /צדק צדק ומשפט לעם ומשפט צדק and צדק ומשפט? To answer this question let me return briefly to my earlier study comparing the Temple Scroll’s reworking of the biblical pericope on the high court with that of our earliest midrashic commentary thereto. The Deuteronomic description of the central high court, unlike its predecessors of ad hoc courts or councils to assist Moses in judging the people, is remarkable for its human autonomy from either direct or indirect, royal, prophetic, or oracular oversight or confirmation.32 While the Deuteronomic text is emphatic in its insistence that the verdicts of the court be followed without exception or wavering (Deut 17:10–13), Deuteronomy elsewhere (1:16–17; 16:18–20) is well aware of the possible corruptibility and hence fallibility of human judges, and by implication, of their rulings. The Temple Scroll TS (11Q19 51:15–18) not only recognizes this risk of judicial fallibility, but goes even further in explicitly legislating the death penalty for judges who fail to live up to the standards of judicial impartiality.33

Even the biblical emphatic requirement that the judges doubly “pursue”34 justice, "צדק צדק תרדוף" ("Justice, justice shall you pursue” [Deut 16:20]), implies

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34 For the combination of the verb דרשה and the noun אמת, see 4Q298 (4Qcrypt-A Words Maskil) 3–4 ii 6–7, treated above, with the comment in DJD 20.26. See Deut 16:20; Isa 51:1; Prov 11:19; 25:9; 4Q298 (4Qcrypt-A Words Maskil) 1 2; 4Q418 (4QInstruction4) 69 210, restored and following אמת בהרי אמת ("But you are the chosen ones of truth [or, the truly chosen ones]"). For the chosen ones, see above, n. 15. It might be that similar uncertainty is implied by the verb דרשה with respect to the human pursuit of אמת as in Deut 17:9, where some ancient versions (Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Qimron’s restoration of the Temple Scroll [11Q19 56:1]) have or presume ודרשה. Note that the nightly study activity
that this is an aspirational rather than a necessary outcome. Note in this regard Sifre Deuteronomy’s interpretation of Deut 16:20,35 closely attuned to its repetition of the noun צדק: “If a person is convicted (of a capital crime), from whence do we learn that he can be retried (upon the discovery of new evidence) and found innocent? As it is said, ‘Justice, justice shall you shall pursue’“ (צדק צדק תרדוף). The assumption here is that the capital guilty verdict of a court may be subsequently reversed upon the discovery of new evidence, rendering the former of the two verdicts false, thereby requiring two acts of justice for justice to be fully and finally served.

To the members of the Qumran community, by contrast, the pursuit of צדק ומשפט needed to be underwritten, as it were, byאמת, and not to be contingent on fallible human judgment. In terms of the passages with which we began, left and right are truly left and right, with nothing relative or fictive about them, as the idiom of “left and right” is unambiguously employed multiple times elsewhere in the scrolls.37

From the passages of the Dead Sea Scrolls that we have examined we have seen that the wordאמת, whether functioning as a noun or an adjective, is not only ubiquitous, but is strategically placed, and, in at least two cases that we have seen, inserted in close relation not only toצדק andמשפט, but also toיחד and other communal terms. The wordאמת denotes a cardinal attribute of both God and the members of the community. The latter are largely defined by their practice and teaching of thetrue ritual and communal laws that, on the one hand, absolutely differentiate them with self-assured certainty from the rest of Israel, and, on the other, eternally bond them in truth both to one another and to the covenantal divine source of non-contingent righteousness and justice.

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35 Sifre Deut §144 (ed. Finkelstein, 199, checked against MS Vatican 32).
36 For parallels, employing different verses, see Mek. R. Ishmael Mishpaṭim 20 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, 327–28); Mek. R. Shim’on bar Yoḥai Exod 237 (ed. Epstein-Melamed, 216); b. Sanh. 33b.
37 For the use of the biblical metaphor of “right and/or left” in the scrolls, see 1QS 1:15; 3:10 (=4Q257 i iiii 14); 4Q266 (4QD*) 11 17–18; 4Q504 (4QDibHama) 1–2 ii 14 (restored); CD (MS B) 20:9b–30a, 30b–31a.