

# The End of the Law: The Messianic Torah in the Pseudepigrapha

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## Abstract

Like the Messianic Banquet, the Messianic Torah is a concept frequently encountered among New Testament scholars. It seems to be presupposed as a category well known to first century Judaism and, therefore, to be a yardstick against which Jesus' 'legislative' activity could and can be measured. An examination of this concept begins with the tension in Jewish thought between the eternity of the Mosaic Law and the various strategies designed to supplement its inadequacy to deal with contemporary situations. Given that the unique circumstances of the Messianic Age involve a further complication, the relevant texts are reviewed for their contributions to the problem. The Old Testament writers look to a deepening of observance of the Mosaic Law in the eschatological times. The Pseudepigrapha offer little more apart from a hint of Messianic legislation in *Psalms of Solomon* 17. Even the gospels do not show us a Jesus who fits readily into the model of a Messianic legislator. In fact St John probably pictures him as the embodiment of the Torah, the Word made flesh. The conclusion is that, whatever the later rabbinic teaching on the subject, the idea of the Messianic Torah is a scholarly construct as far as the New Testament is concerned.

## Keywords

Messiah, Torah, Pseudepigrapha, Eschatology, Jesus

### The Law: Eternal and Pre-existent

'Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not have life; and I defiled them through their very gifts...' Whatever the precise meaning of this difficult text from Ezekiel (20:25), it hardly represents mainstream Old Testament tradition with regard to the Mosaic Torah. For many of these writers, the Law was 'holy and the commandment...holy, just and good' without any hint of the irony St. Paul may have intended in using

these words.<sup>1</sup> Not only holy but eternal: this is made clear in Psalm 119, that great acrostic on the glories of the Law:

‘O Lord, thy word [i.e. the Law] endureth for ever in heaven.’<sup>2</sup>

‘The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.’<sup>3</sup>

‘As concerning thy testimonies, I have known long since: that thou hast grounded them for ever.’<sup>4</sup>

Baruch shared this belief, writing that, ‘the law endures for ever’,<sup>5</sup> a view echoed by Sirach: ‘for eternity I [the Law] shall not cease to exist’,<sup>6</sup> and by the author of Wisdom for whom the law was an “imperishable light”.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Baruch and Sirach go further, identifying this eternal Law with divine Wisdom itself. According to the former:

‘She [Wisdom] is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures for ever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die’ (Bar 4:1).

Sirach is equally explicit:

‘All this [the Wisdom whose praises he has been singing in the Canticle to Wisdom in 24:1–22] is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob’ (Sir 24:23).

Most, if not all, of these authors were writing in the closing years of the pre-Christian era, but their doctrine was based on earlier texts, particularly the provisions found in the ‘P’ source of the Pentateuch, marking out certain observances such as the Day of Atonement as an “everlasting statute”.<sup>8</sup> So the eternity of the Torah was a well-established concept by the time of our Lord, but it is worth bearing in mind three very important qualifications. In the first place, although eternal, the Law is not usually said to be immutable. None of these authors is committed to preserving each jot and tittle. Indeed, by singling out particular observances within the Law as eternal, the ‘P’ source may be allowing implicitly for modification of less important material. Secondly, and linked with this, it is not claimed that the Law cannot be supplemented. Despite the, conventional, provisions of Deuteronomy against adding or subtracting from Moses’

<sup>1</sup> Cf Rom 7:12.

<sup>2</sup> Ps.119:89.

<sup>3</sup> Ps.119:144.

<sup>4</sup> Ps.119:152.

<sup>5</sup> Bar 4:1.

<sup>6</sup> Sir 24:9. Sirach also viewed the Law as pre-existent; “From eternity, in the beginning he created me.”

<sup>7</sup> Wisd 18:4.

<sup>8</sup> eg Ex 16:34; Lev 16:34.

words,<sup>9</sup> the existence of new legal collections like the *Book of Jubilees* suggests that these words were explained away, if not disregarded. Thirdly, nowhere are the precise nature and parameters of this eternal 'Law' defined. Whereas in rabbinic times it would be quite clear to what 'Torah', whether written or oral, referred, this is far from the case in earlier texts such as First Isaiah.<sup>10</sup> When he says (2:3) that *tôrāh* (law/teaching) – not *hattôrāh* (*the* law) note – shall go forth from Zion, it is by no means certain that he is signifying by this Genesis 1:1 to Deuteronomy 34:12 in the Masoretic Text! The same uncertainty surrounds use of the term in the first century. On two occasions, the Fourth Gospel introduces quotations from the Psalms by referring to them as written in 'your/the law'<sup>11</sup> while Paul shows enormous inventiveness in his use of the term.

With these qualifications in mind, we see very much the same description of an eternal Law in the Pseudepigrapha though perhaps it is fair to note that here it is a question of a few key texts rather than a mass of material. *4 Ezra* is typical:

'The law... does not perish but remains in its glory.'

Or again, in similar terms, *2 Baruch* 77:15:

'Though we depart, yet the law remains.'<sup>12</sup>

*1 Enoch* is no less definite and is beginning to deal with the related question of immutability:

'Woe to you who alter the words of truth and they distort the eternal law' (*1En* 99:2).

We might also bring in the *Psalms of Solomon* though strictly speaking the emphasis here is on the eternity of the covenant rather than its law:

'For the testimony is in the law of the everlasting covenant' (*Pss Sol* 11:4).

And Philo, a contemporary, though not Pseudepigraphical, writer, is of the opinion that the provisions of the law are 'stable, unmoved, unshaken... we expect them to abide through all time as immortal as long as the sun and moon and the whole heaven and world exist'.<sup>13</sup> Faced with such a widespread and emphatic tradition with regard to the status of the Torah, how could there be any question

<sup>9</sup> Deut 4:2, 12:32.

<sup>10</sup> Particularly if the more radical critics are correct about the exilic or later date of the Pentateuch.

<sup>11</sup> Jn 10:34, 15:35.

<sup>12</sup> Also, even more explicit, *2 Bar* 59:2: "The lamp of the eternal law."

<sup>13</sup> Philo, *Vita Mosis* II, 14.

of its modification, supplementation, still less abrogation or replacement?<sup>14</sup> – all of these processes, it should be noted, distinct from one another, though all, at one time or another, brought under the umbrella of the ‘Messianic Torah’. The lack of semantic identity between the Hebrew *tôrāh* and the Greek *nomos* does nothing to make matters more precise.

### The Law: Outdated and Inadequate

The basic answer is that the Torah, if understood as the legal provisions in the Pentateuch, was not an adequate or sufficient guide for ordinary life at the turn of the era and well before, let alone for a different form of life at the eschaton. Many of its enactments were obscure or outdated while many new problems/situations – execution by crucifixion, for example – had arisen to which ‘Moses’ could not and was not designed to find an answer. Such a scenario is, ironically, to be detected in the Pentateuch itself, with various laws clearly updating/supplementing their predecessors.<sup>15</sup> The most notable example of this would be the book of Deuteronomy itself, explicitly labelled in the LXX as a “second law.” Later on, the *Book of Jubilees* attempts a similar strategy of producing another ‘Mosaic’ text which purports to have been dictated to Moses on Sinai by the Angel of the Presence. Although largely a haggadic *relecture* of the narrative from Genesis 1 to Exodus 15:22, *Jubilees* contains much halakhic material intended to modify/emphasise old laws or introduce new ones, something which may well have been its *raison d’être*. We encounter much the same sort of thing in some of the Enochic literature, particularly when it is dealing with calendrical matters.<sup>16</sup> By the first century A.D., various further solutions to this problem had arisen. The Pharisees and later the rabbis looked for enlightenment to oral tradition which they claimed had been revealed to Moses on Sinai along with the written Torah and handed down by a process of authorised transmission. This oral tradition was to attain the status of a Second Torah. Another solution to the problem of Torah deficiency, and one much favoured at Qumran, was that of inspired exegesis. But the same Spirit that inspired the exegete was also capable of giving direct and new revelation. Again, this was not a new phenomenon in intertestamental times. Ezekiel 40–8 propounds a new law of the

<sup>14</sup> As we shall see, it was exactly this kind of thinking which led the rabbis and their predecessors to develop the doctrine of the oral Torah. *De facto* they conceded an element of abrogation, eg the laws of the adulteress which were not enforced in the Mishnaic period.

<sup>15</sup> eg the legislation on the Day of Atonement which, in Leviticus 16, betrays signs of successive revisions.

<sup>16</sup> 4 *Ezra* gives virtual *carte blanche* to this kind of pseudepigraphic activity with its endorsement of seventy esoteric books for the wise. Cf 4 *Ezra* 14:46.

temple as a direct revelation from God. Michael Wise has claimed a similar status for the Temple Scroll, 11QT, with the Teacher of Righteousness functioning as a second Moses receiving direct communication from God.<sup>17</sup>

The important thing to notice about all these ways of dealing with the legal question is that in no case are we presented with an abrogation of the old Torah or the promulgation of a new, superior substitute for it. All we have, all that is claimed, is interpretation and, from time to time, expansion of the existing Torah.

### The Messianic Age: A Unique Situation

But would such methods continue to be adequate? Above all, would they meet the needs of the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come?<sup>18</sup> Would not the changed requirements of either or both of these Ages demand a totally new Torah? There are many theoretical considerations which would *a priori* favour the development of such a doctrine. If the conditions of the eschaton were radically different – no sin, for example,<sup>19</sup> or a totally spiritualised existence – what would be the continuing status of sacrifices of atonement or regulations about food and purity which formed such a substantial part of the existing Torah? If men neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven, what about the moral provisions of a law designed for the weak and sinful? Moreover if the eschatological process is pictured on an *Urzeit* = *Endzeit* basis, as a new Exodus<sup>20</sup> with a new Covenant and a new Moses, isn't it antecedently probable that there will be a new Law to match? The later rabbis thought that as the first redeemer was so would be the second, and such thinking could quickly lead to speculation on the status of the Torah. Still further, in whatever way one regarded the Messiah, whether as king, priest or prophet – or any combination of the three—he was likely to have a close relationship with the Law which regulated, and to some extent was regulated by, all three offices. And moving on from there, what about the position of the Gentiles in the eschatological establishment? Having been vanquished and/or ingathered, were they to be subject to the Torah, and if so, which one and how much of

<sup>17</sup> Michael Wise, *A Critical Study of the Temple Scroll from Qumran Cave 11* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1990), pp 184–9.

<sup>18</sup> W. D. Davies has denied that a careful distinction between these ages was made in pre-rabbinic times. Nevertheless, one should not use the terms loosely as if they were always and everywhere interchangeable, cf. W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (CUP, 1964), p.182.

<sup>19</sup> cf. 2 Bar 73:4.

<sup>20</sup> The Exodus is often taken with Creation as *Urzeit*. In each case, the Lord triumphs over the waters.

it?<sup>21</sup> These fundamental questions which perplexed the rabbis and eventually gave rise to the doctrine of the Messianic Torah as encountered in *Yahqut* on Isaiah 26:2 must have exercised, to some extent, the minds of the apocalyptic writers of the Second Temple period. But as with the case of the Messianic Banquet, the evidence is slim and ambiguous and must be carefully weighed. In particular, the rabbinic evidence collected by Billerbeck cannot be admitted.<sup>22</sup> It is all later, and some of it, like *Yahqut*, above, considerably later.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Robert Banks has effectively demonstrated that none of it, apart from the *Yahqut*, is explicitly Messianic, and none of it envisages a new Torah which abrogates and substitutes for the old. W. D. Davies argued that this very lack of rabbinic evidence was due to ‘deliberate surgery’ by the rabbis to avoid conceding Christian claims.<sup>24</sup> But, as we shall see, the Pseudepigrapha, which, if anything, show evidence of deliberate *Christian* surgery, also have little or no evidence for the Messianic Torah and, as Banks points out, unlike the case of apocalyptic, there was no re-emergence of a New Torah doctrine in Judaism after the rabbis loosened their control.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps we should add here that an author like Justin, arguing apologetically, is even less valid as evidence for Jewish belief/practice in the second century.<sup>26</sup> What he may shed light on is how Christians at that time were interpreting the New Testament texts on the subject.

### The Canonical Writers

Rather than working back from the, frequently undatable, rabbis, it is safer, as we have argued, to work forward from the Old Testament texts. The canonical writers who dealt with eschatological matters had no reservations about the crucial position of the Torah. Thus in Is 2:3, we read that:

‘In the latter days many peoples shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, so that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’

<sup>21</sup> That this is not an abstract question can be seen from the very real battles over the question of Gentile-Christian observance of Torah in Acts and in Paul.

<sup>22</sup> H. Strack und P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (München: Beck, 1928).

<sup>23</sup> *Yahqut* is thirteenth century A.D.

<sup>24</sup> W. D. Davies, *Setting* (1964), p.185.

<sup>25</sup> R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (CUP, 1975), pp. 67–85.

<sup>26</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chapter XI. Justin’s belief in a new Law seems to be simply an inference from the New Covenant promised by the prophets.

Important to note here are the place of the Gentiles, the replacement of Sinai by Zion,<sup>27</sup> and the anarthous *tôrāh* and *dābar*—a teaching and a word. When all this is added up and however it is assessed, the one thing it does not amount to is a *Messianic Torah* for the Messiah is nowhere mentioned. Rather it is God himself here who is the teacher/legislator. Presumably this is also the case in a less well-known text from the same author (30:20–1):

‘And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you saying; “This is the way, walk in it”.’

Jeremiah in his new covenant passage (31:33) and Ezekiel in 36:27 both look to a future when the Law will be written on the people’s hearts. It is unlikely, however, that they are speaking of a new Law for the desire for an interiorisation of the Mosaic law is found not only in the prophets but also in the Psalms<sup>28</sup> and even Deuteronomy<sup>29</sup> itself.

The beginnings of an association of the law for the eschaton with the Messiah *may* be seen with Deutero-Isaiah’s servant figure, for in Isaiah 42:4 it is said:

‘He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.’

If the servant is a Mosaic Messiah<sup>30</sup> and his law is a *tôrāh* in the developed sense rather than simply teaching in general, then here we have a classic case of the Messianic Torah. But this is a series of big ifs, and it is worth noting that even if this *is* the Messianic Torah, then it appears to be destined not for Israel but for the Gentiles! Nevertheless, these are roots from which a developed doctrine could grow. Did they find fertile ground in the Pseudepigrapha?<sup>31</sup>

## The Pseudepigrapha

The answer is almost certainly not. Like the Old Testament, the Pseudepigrapha pay relatively little attention to the Messiah. They

<sup>27</sup> Cf Ps 68:17. If Zion replaces Sinai in some respects, as the place of God’s presence, for example, then it can be seen also as the locus for any new law that is to be delivered

<sup>28</sup> Ps 37:29 – “the law of his God is in his heart”; Ps 40:8 – “I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.”

<sup>29</sup> Deut 6:6 – “And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart.”

<sup>30</sup> ie along the lines of Deut 18:15ff.

<sup>31</sup> In the ‘Apocrypha’, mention is made of a coming prophet and the Law in 1 Macc 4:41–6 and 14:28–49 but both cases concern interpretation of the Law rather than fresh legislation.

pay even less to his putative Torah. The late W. D. Davies found no evidence in the *Psalms of Solomon* but substantial indications in *1 Enoch*.<sup>32</sup> My impression is the exact reverse. In that *Pss Sol* 17 deals at length with the role of a Davidic Messianic king, it cannot avoid the Torah issue. Obviously much of the Messiah's activity in this respect will be judicial, simply carrying out his judgement according to the existing Torah.<sup>33</sup> But there are hints of more. The Gentiles serve under his 'yoke' and see his 'glory' (*Pss Sol* 17:30–1), both traditional circumlocutions for the Torah. Moreover, 'he shall be a righteous king *taught by God*' (v.32). This could, of course, simply refer once more to judicial activity, except that in v.42 we read:

'This is the majesty of the king of Israel of which God has knowledge, So as to raise him up over the house of Israel to educate [paideusei] them.'

This does seem to indicate a legislative role for the Davidic Messiah.

Things are much less clear in the *1 Enoch* texts cited by Davies.<sup>34</sup> Here we find no mention of the Torah at all. This is, perhaps, to be expected in a work which appears deliberately to underplay the Mosaic heritage and to put forward Enoch as an alternative source of authority.<sup>35</sup> Davies's case is based on the identification of Torah with Wisdom. Such an identification is commonplace in some of our texts, most notably, as we have seen, in *Sirach* 24 and *Baruch* 4. Indeed, it is one of the pillars upon which the doctrine of the pre-existence and eternity of the Torah rests, and it probably lies behind the account of the descent of Wisdom to earth in *1 Enoch* 42. However, there is no question of such an identification in the 'Messianic' passage; still less is the Elect One himself personified Wisdom. The wisdom ascribed to him is the Messianic wisdom of *Isaiah* 11,<sup>36</sup> and the secrets of righteousness<sup>37</sup> and iniquity are likely to be apocalyptic revelations rather than legal provisions.<sup>38</sup> This is Torah in its loosest sense.

<sup>32</sup> W. D. Davies, *Setting* (1964), pp. 140–2.

<sup>33</sup> This is the key criterion for judgement in *2 Baruch* (51).

<sup>34</sup> *1 En* 48:1 and 49:1.

<sup>35</sup> Cf G. Nickelsburg *1 Enoch 1* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), pp 50, 58–9.

<sup>36</sup> *Is* 11:2.

<sup>37</sup> Cf *1 En* 71:3.

<sup>38</sup> Cf Nickelsburg *Enoch* (2001), p 28. 'The eschatological proclamation of the revealed truth about God's law and judgement is an integral feature of the end time'. This is very different from an eschatological Torah replacing the Mosaic one. We may compare this revelatory task to that of the herald in 11Q Melchizedek whose function is 'to instruct them in all the ages of the world' (11QMelch III.20). Nickelsburg, p 52, notes that the eschatological transmission of Enochic wisdom is found in four out of the five major sections of *1 Enoch*, ie all except the *Book of Luminaries* (*1 En* 72–82).

4 *Ezra* is even less promising in this area. Here the Messiah uses his mouth to effect, but as a force to destroy his enemies (again in the manner of Isaiah 11<sup>39</sup>). When he speaks, again, it is to judge not to legislate, and here we come up against a major difficulty for the whole concept of a Messianic Torah. In a very real sense, 'the law and the prophets prophesied until John',<sup>40</sup> that is, they legislated *until* the Messiah who then judges in accordance with their provisions. In a very Pauline sense, that is the 'end' of the Law. With the last judgment, it has fulfilled its purpose, and *a fortiori* if the survivors live on in a new state of sinlessness. Its only justification thereafter would be to provide some sort of standard by which the continuing righteousness of the holy could be demonstrated. Such a situation seems to be envisaged in *Jubilees*. The righteous<sup>41</sup> are home and dry for:

'I will create in them a holy spirit, and I will cleanse them so that they shall not turn away from me again from that day till eternity' (*Jub* 1:23).

What need of any law, old or new, in such an ideal situation? So:

They will hold fast to me and to all my commandments and fulfil my commandments' (*Jub* 1:24).

As for 2 *Baruch's* Messiah, he simply makes a guest appearance at the eschaton and has no time for legislation.

Thus we hardly have a picture of a full-blown Messianic Torah in the Pseudepigrapha, and this is not surprising, for had such existed, we can be sure that St. Paul would have exploited it to the full in his disputes over the Law with Jews and Jewish-Christians. It is very noticeable that he makes no explicit reference to a 'new law' or to Jesus as a new lawgiver. In fact, he specifically refers to the Saviour as *diakonos peritomēs*.<sup>42</sup> Whatever 'the law of Christ' refers to in Galatians 6:3, it is not a well-known concept of Messianic Torah.

## The Gospels

Are the Gospels, then, the first real and extensive evidence for the concept? Have we here, as appears to be the case with the Messianic Banquet, an idea with Old Testament roots developed by Jesus and the evangelists and then taken by scholars to represent existing Jewish belief because, of course, neither Jesus nor the evangelists could possibly have ever had an original thought in their heads? Possibly

<sup>39</sup> 4 *Ezra* 13:10. The reference is to Is 11:4. This text is frequently employed in Messianic writings: eg *Pss Sol* 17:36. Cf 1 *En* 51:3.

<sup>40</sup> Mt 11:13//Lk 16:16.

<sup>41</sup> In this case, apparently, all the children of Israel.

<sup>42</sup> Cf Rom 15:8.

not even that. Although the Gospels paint Jesus in Mosaic colours and although some of these parallels may be discernible in the Sermon on the Mount and its setting,<sup>43</sup> there is no clear indication that Jesus is seen as a new lawgiver or that the Sermon is his Messianic Torah. For one thing, the Messiah was not regarded as primarily a Mosaic figure. Even when, as at Qumran, a prophet like Moses was expected, this eschatological prophet was distinguished from the Messiah. If such a figure brought a new law, it would be eschatological but not 'Messianic'. Moreover, none of the first century eschatological figures described by Josephus, though copying Moses in significant ways, is said to have issued a new Torah. Above all, Matthew's Jesus makes it crystal clear that he has not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it<sup>44</sup> which, in the context of the rest of the Sermon, means that none of the Law will be abrogated but rather its demands made radical and interior. Schweitzer and others saw the resulting ethics as 'interim' and, therefore, in a sense, eschatological.<sup>45</sup> But it would be truer to say that they are closer to the pre-eschatological, 'interim' provisions of Qumran<sup>46</sup> and related texts rather than to the extension of purity required in properly eschatological texts like Ezekiel 40–8 and 11QT.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the nearest Jesus comes to laying down an eschatological provision – though hardly a whole code – is in his treatment of divorce where his appeal to the Creation could be seen as an example of the *Urzeit* = *Endzeit* doctrine.<sup>48</sup> Indeed it is, but the *Urzeit* is itself part of the Torah which indicates how complicated the whole question is! Probably Jesus was doing no more than explaining/interpreting the Torah so that his Torah<sup>49</sup> is to be seen in the same light as the 'Torah of Hillel' or the 'Torah of Shammai' or the Qumran Law of the Covenant.

Perhaps the most decisive blow to the concept of the Messianic Torah in the Gospels, at least as scholars have traditionally understood

<sup>43</sup> The Mount may be intended to recall Sinai but we should not forget that in some eschatology Sinai had been replaced by Zion.

<sup>44</sup> Mt 5:17.

<sup>45</sup> Cf A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A & C Black, 1910), p 352.

<sup>46</sup> CD and IQS expect change at the eschaton but probably in laws governing the community rather than the Torah itself.

<sup>47</sup> Professor Philip Alexander of Manchester University points out that some medieval Jewish law codes resemble 11QT and yet are definitely not intended to replace the Torah. The Law Code of Maimonides was called Mishnah Torah/Deuteronomy which out of context might look like an eschatological law written by a second Moses. In fact, 11QT is very similar to the Mishnah, a flowing text which harmonises biblical law, explains it and adds non-biblical law. The rabbis certainly did not see the Mishnah as a replacement for the Mosaic Torah.

<sup>48</sup> Mk 10:6 and parallels.

<sup>49</sup> N.B. the "new commandment"/"new teaching" of John, Mark and *Barnabas*.

it, is the presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel as surpassing and replacing all the contemporary institutions and festivals of Judaism such as Temple<sup>50</sup> and Tabernacles.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the identification of Jesus with God's Word, his *dabar*, may well be intended to imply his identification with the eternal Torah, itself identified with the Wisdom of God.

### A Scholarly Construct

In the end, we are left with a situation which can be best summed up in Davies's warning: 'It is perilously easy to systematise what was varied, vague and amorphous'.<sup>52</sup> In the same way that the concept of the Messianic Banquet makes precise the familiar general notion of Messianic plenty, so, perhaps, the Messianic Torah is a refinement of the common promise that the eschaton would see a wonderful increase in wisdom and knowledge. As Habakkuk says:

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (2:14).<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, the notion of the Messianic Torah never became precise enough to answer the question of the status of the Torah in present-day Israel for here we have a people restored to the land in which Torah is not the binding legislation, and yet no one believes that the laws of the State of Israel are the eschatological Torah.<sup>54</sup> An old problem with a new face!

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<sup>50</sup> Jn 2:19.

<sup>51</sup> Jn 7:37–8. For a complete exposition of this theme, cf R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to St John* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1966–70) especially p cxliv.

<sup>52</sup> W. D. Davies, *Setting* (CUP, 1964), p 184.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. also Hos 6:2–3 (LXX).

<sup>54</sup> Some Jewish apocalyptic groups believe indeed that the Zionist State is part of the eschatological tribulation. cf. Joel Marcus, 'Modern and Ancient Jewish Apocalypticism,' *JR* 76 (1996), 1–27.