

RHETORIC AND HERMENEUTICS
IN MIQṢAT MA'ĀṢE HA-TORAH (4QMMT):
THE CASE OF THE BLESSINGS AND CURSES

STEVEN D. FRAADE
Yale University

1. *Introduction*

In his "Additional Observations on 4QMMT," J. Strugnell notes the need for a more extensive treatment of the "theology and tradition history of Section C" of that text (the hortatory conclusion to the legal body). He similarly expresses the need for "a thorough attempt to understand the relations between the language and theological traditions of this section" in relation to chronologically and ideologically proximate works within the Qumran corpus and related writings.¹ Those desiderata remain unfilled. My purpose here is to make a modest contribution thereto by examining one central biblical motif in Section C, both for its rhetorical function in the present textual context as well as for its resonance with other Qumran texts. Building on an earlier study of mine, I begin with the proposition that we listen to the text of 4QMMT as it might have been addressed, whether primarily or secondarily, to a sectarian community of auditors.²

2. *Blessings and Curses in 4QMMT*

Section C of 4QMMT contains the following central unit (according to the composite text and translation of Strugnell and E. Qimron):³

(12) [. . .] וכח[וב] (13) והיא כי (14) [יבן] א עליך כו[להדבר] ים האלה באחריה
(15) והקללה [והשיבוה] ה אל ל[בב]ך ושבחה אלו בכל לבבך

¹ "Appendix 3: Additional Observations on 4QMMT," in E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4.V: Miqṣat Ma'āse Ha-Torah* (DJD 10; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 205.

² S.D. Fraade, "To Whom It May Concern: 4QMMT and Its Addressee(s)," *RevQ* 19 (2000) 507–26.

³ Qimron and Strugnell, DJD 10.58–61. Texts employed are, for C 12, 4Q397

(16) וכן]ל נפשך [באחרית] [והן] [] [] (17) [כהוב בספר] מושה ובס[פרי הנביא]ים שיבואו של (18)⁴ [הבר]כו[ח] שבא[ו] ו[] ב[] [] [כימי שלומה בן הויד ואף בקללוח (19) [ש]באו כימי [יר]ובעם בן נבש ועד גל[ו]ח ירושלם וצדקיה מלך יהוד[ה] (20) שיביאם ב[] ואנחנו מכירים שבאו מקצת הברכת והקללוח (21) שכחוב בס[פר] מו[שה] וזה הוא אחרית הימים שישובו בישר[אל] (22) לח[מי]ד⁵ [] ולוא ישבו אחו[ר] [והרשעים ירש[ע]ו ואמן] [] (23) [והן] []

(12) And it is written (13) “and it shall come to pass, when (14) all these things [be]fall you,” at the end of days, the blessings (15) and the curses, [“then you will take] it to hea[rt] and you will return unto him with all your heart (16) and with all your soul,” at the end [of time, so that you may live] (17) [It is written in the book] of Moses [and in the books of the Prophets] that there will come [. . .] (18) [the blessings have (already) befallen in . . .] in the days of Solomon the son of David. And the curses (19) [that] have (already) befallen from the days of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and up to when Jerusalem and Zedekiah King of Judah went into captivity (20) that He will bring them [. . .]. And we know that some of the blessings and the curses have (already) been fulfilled (21) as it is written in the bo[ok] of Mo[ses]. And this is at the end of days when they will return to Isra[el] (22) [forever⁶ . . .] and not be cancelled, but the wicked will act wickedly, and [. . .] (23) and [. . .].

Following a call to the addressee(s) to “study (carefully) the book of Moses and the books of the Prophets and (the writings of) David [and the events of] ages past” (C 10–12), our section begins (C 13–16) with a paraphrastic and reduced citation of Deut. 30:1–3, “When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse . . .— and you take them to heart . . . and you return to the LORD your God . . . with all your heart and soul,” inserting the temporal qualification, “at the end of days,” from Deut. 4:30.⁷ Both Deut. 30:1–3 and 4:30

14–21, with lacunae filled from 4Q398 14–17 i; for C 13–17, 4Q398 14–17 i, with lacunae filled from 4Q397 14–21; for C 18–22, 4Q398 11–13, with lacunae filled from 4Q397 14–21 and 4Q397 22. I have not tried to indicate in my transcription which letters are more or less doubtful, and have only approximated the size of gaps in the text. For these, see the transcriptions of the *editio princeps* and the photographic plates thereto.

⁴ Lines 18–24 are from 4Q398 11–13. Their inclusion here, as befits their contents, follows the composite text. For differences of opinion on this placement, see Qimron and Strugnell, DJD 10.201–2.

⁵ For the alternative reconstruction, [. . . לח]ורה, see F. García Martínez, “4QMMT in a Qumran Context,” *Reading 4QMMT: New Perspectives on Qumran Law and History* (eds J. Kampen and M.J. Bernstein; SBLSymS 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 19; M.J. Bernstein, “The Employment and Interpretation of Scripture in 4QMMT,” *Reading 4QMMT*, 49; M. Kister, “Studies in 4QMiqṣat Ma’āše Ha-Torah and Related Texts: Law, Theology, Language and Calendar” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 68 (1998/99) 349, citing 4QpPs^a = 4Q171 1–2 ii 2–3 (כל השבים לחורה).

⁶ For an alternative reconstruction, “to Torah,” see n. 5.

⁷ The phrase “at the end of days” (באחרית הימים) is also found in Deut. 31:29, with respect to the misfortunes that will befall Israel for its evil deeds, which verse certainly

stress prophetically that after Israel has suffered the covenantal consequences of their evil deeds, they will wholeheartedly return to God and his commandments, as now stressed, "at the end of days."

This section of 4QMMT concludes (C 21) by again invoking Scripture with respect to the blessings and curses, "as it is written in the book of Moses," stressing that the biblical blessings and curses previously mentioned, having been partly fulfilled in biblical times, will be completed with (true) Israel's repentance in the end of days. Thus, the section on blessings and curses in 4QMMT is framed by scriptural reference to and emphasis on the "end of days" when Israel (or at least a righteous part thereof) will take to heart the lessons of its sacred history and return to God. This is particularly significant since in the Deuteronomic version of the blessings and curses themselves (Deuteronomy 27–28), there is no provision for Israel's return to God and the land from which they have been exiled, as is the case in the Book of Leviticus's version of the blessings and curses (Lev. 26:3–46, esp. 40–45; albeit in the language of God's remembering the covenant rather than Israel's returning to God). In all three texts (Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and 4QMMT), the section on blessings and curses follows a collection of laws, thereby reinforcing the sanction of those laws.⁸

Following its initial paraphrase of Deut. 30:1–3, and following a break due to an uncertain join, 4QMMT proceeds to state that part (but not all) of the prophesied blessings and curses have already befallen Israel, the blessings in the days of Solomon (with the building of the first Temple), the curses in the days from Jeroboam until Zedekiah (from the split between northern and southern kingdoms

resonates with our section of 4QMMT. The sequence of words "all these things at the end of days" (כל הדברים האלה באחרית הימים), however, matches precisely that of Deut. 4:30. The occurrence of this phrase in Hos. 3:5 should be taken into account, since the context there is also one of turning. See below, n. 14. The phrase באחרית הימים may be repeated in 4QMMT C 16 (or באחרית העת as in C 30), but the text is too damaged to make out anything more than the first word. The translation of Strugnell and Qimron (DJD 10.61), "at the end [of time. . .]," assumes באחרית העת (cf. their transcription of 4Q398 14–17 i 8 in DJD 10.37). For the most extensive discussion of the expression "end of days" in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see A. Steudel, "אחרית הימים in the Texts from Qumran," *RevQ* 16 (1993) 225–46.

⁸ In the case of Deuteronomy, the laws are also prefaced by an invoking of blessing and curse (11:26–30). On the overall influence of the Book of Deuteronomy on 4QMMT, and the possible modeling of the latter on the former, see Fraade, "To Whom It May Concern," 513 n. 17.

until the destruction of the Temple and exile from the land). Implicit, then, is the question: When will the blessings and curses be completed, or, what is the historical referent of the scriptural *אחרית הימים* when Israel (or a sectarian remnant) will return (finally) to God and his commandments as biblically foretold (in the paraphrastic merging of Deut. 30:1–3 and 4:30, with which this section began)? Thus, I would render C 21–22 as: “And this (now) is the end of days, when they will return in Israel forever,⁹ and will not (again) turn back.”¹⁰ This presumes that the verb *שׁוּב* here is employed in the same sense as it is in C 15–16, in the paraphrase of Deut. 30:1–3, with its subject being (some of) the Israelites and not the blessings and curses, as in the translation of Strugnell and Qimron (cited above). In other words, this will be the final return, with no more turning back.¹¹

The three elements combined in the paraphrase of Deut. 30:1–3 (with Deut. 4:30) at the beginning of this section—end of days, blessings and curses, and return—are, we are told, being realized in the present time (or will be in the immediate future) among the text’s community of intramural auditors: they alone among Israel will return wholeheartedly and finally to God and his Torah, while the wicked will continue to act wickedly (and be punished, as in Deut. 30:7). The dualistic division between the righteous and the wicked is imminently complete. The present is situated in relation to the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy, with its covenantal promise of ultimate return, the pre-exilic history of the Israelite monarchy, and the impending final fulfillment of the covenantal blessings and curses. In this setting, the concluding words of 4QMMT take on particular urgency: “Consider all these things and ask Him that He strengthen your will and

⁹ Or, “to the Torah.” See above, n. 5.

¹⁰ For this understanding, see García Martínez, “4QMMT in a Qumran Context,” 19; Bernstein, “The Employment and Interpretation of Scripture in 4QMMT,” 49; Kister, “Studies in 4QMiqšat Ma’āše Ha-Torah,” 348–51. Kister (351) argues that the demonstrative pronoun serves to define the earlier expression “end of days” (C 14, from Deut. 4:30) as referring to Israel’s return to the Torah and the completion of the blessings and curses.

¹¹ For this use of *אָחֵרִית*, note especially IQS 1:16–17 (*וְלוֹא לִשְׁבַח בְּאַחֵרִית*), in the context of a ceremony of blessings and curses upon entering the community) and IQM 15:8–9 (*וְאֵל חֲשׁוֹב אָחֵרִית*), in the context of an eschatological battle). Cf. Num. 14:43: *הֲשׁוּבָה מֵאַחֵרֵי ה'* (“you have turned from following the LORD”). Perhaps there is a subtle word play here: in the end of days (*אֲחֵרֵי יְמֵי*), there will be no turning back (*אָחֵרִית*). See Kister, “Studies in 4QMiqšat Ma’āše Ha-Torah,” 349–50, who cites Jub. 1:15, 23–24. See also below, n. 14.

remove from you the plans of evil and the device of Belial so that you may rejoice at the end of time (בְּאַחֲרֵי־יְהוָה הַעֵת) . . .” (C 28–30).¹²

3. Blessings and Curses in the Temple Scroll

4QMMT’s rhetorical employment of the Deuteronomic blessings and curses resonates strongly with other texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. To begin with, let us compare the Temple Scroll’s “law of the king” (11Q19 = 11QT^a 56:12–59:21), wherein Deut. 17:14–20 is paraphrastically expanded.¹³ Following rules for the king’s conduct of holy war (58:15–21), the Temple Scroll includes a long section of curses for violating the covenant and spurning God’s Torah and blessings for returning wholeheartedly to God according to the present words of Torah (אָחֵר יָשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי בְּכוֹל לִבְבָמָה וּבְכוֹל נַפְשָמָה כְּכוֹל דְּבַרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת),¹⁴ applied first to the people and then to the king, based primarily on Deuteronomy 28, but drawing also on Leviticus 26 and other passages, as if Deuteronomy 28 had been written with the king in mind (59:2–21).¹⁵ If the king strays from God’s commands his dynasty will be short-lived. But “if he will walk in my statutes, and will observe my commandments, and will do what is right and good in my sight,”¹⁶

¹² For more on this concluding section, see Fraade, “To Whom It May Concern,” 516–21.

¹³ For an extensive treatment, see S.D. Fraade, “‘The Torah of the King’ (Deut. 17:14–20) in the Temple Scroll and Early Rabbinic Law,” *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. J.R. Davila; STDJ 46; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 31–39. For the intersections between the Temple Scroll and 4QMMT, see L. Schiffman, “Miqsat Ma’aseh Ha-Torah and the Temple Scroll,” *RevQ* 14 (1990) 435–57.

¹⁴ 59:9–10. Note the similarity of expression, drawn from Deut. 30:2, to 4QMMT C 15–16, now conflated with Deut. 17:18, as well as the similar use of יָשׁוּבוּ here and in 4QMMT C 21. The phrase אָחֵר יָשׁוּבוּ may echo Hos. 3:5, and is the antithesis of לֹא יָשׁוּבוּ אָחֵר of 4QMMT C 22 (on which see above, n. 11). Hos. 3:4–5 bears citation in full (נְטָפָה): “For the Israelites shall go a long time without king and without officials, without sacrifice and without cult pillars, and without ephod and teraphim. Afterward, the Israelites will turn back and will seek the LORD their God and David their king—and they will thrill over the LORD and over His bounty in the days to come (בְּאַחֲרֵי־יְהוָה הַיָּמִים).”

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 28 may have been chosen as the primary text since it addresses its audience in the second person singular, and not plural as in Leviticus 26, suggesting perhaps that its addressee is the king. Furthermore, according to some rabbinic traditions, the “law of the king” (Deut. 17:14–20) was immediately followed by the “blessings and curses” (Deuteronomy 28) during the septennial *haqhel* ceremony of Torah reading by the king. But this tradition is not at all certain. See Fraade, “The Torah of the King,” 45–46 n. 54.

¹⁶ Drawing on Lev. 26:3; Deut. 28:1; 1 Kgs 6:12; Deut. 6:18 and 12:28, which also inform the similar expression in 4QMMT C 31.

he will be rewarded with victory over his enemies and an everlasting dynastic rule (Deut. 17:20). While implicitly the curses have already befallen the Israelite monarchy, the full measure of the blessings is yet to come. Like 4QMMT, the Temple Scroll invokes and reworks the Deuteronomic blessings and curses at the conclusion of a section of sectarian Torah rules as a way of providing sanctions for the observance of those rules and of situating their observers and auditors within an eschatological context of ultimate reward and punishment.

4. *Blessings and Curses in the Community Rule*

The biblical blessings and curses served more than hermeneutical and rhetorical usages at Qumran; they played a central role in the ritual life of the community as well. The ceremonial recitation of blessings and curses is biblically prescribed as part of a one-time covenantal ceremony after crossing the Jordan, arriving at Mts Gerizim and Ebal, erecting steles on which are written the Teaching, building an altar, and offering sacrifices thereupon (Deut. 11:29; 27:1–10, 11–13, 14–26; Josh. 8:30–35).¹⁷ Only at Qumran, so far as we know, did this provide the basis for an *annually* re-enacted ceremony of blessings and curses, forming the dramatic centerpiece of a covenant-renewal ritual during which new members entered the community and existing members were confirmed in their status (מעמד). Just as it was performed upon crossing the Jordan (בעברכם אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן), so it was to be performed upon crossing over into the covenant (בעוברם בכריה, 1QS 1:18).¹⁸

Our main text for this ritual is 1QS 1:16–2:18.¹⁹ This passage recounts what appears to have been an annual ritual of covenantal renewal,

¹⁷ There are significant text-historical questions, which cannot be entered here, regarding the relation of the seemingly separate ceremony prescribed in Deut. 27:11–13 to that in 27:14–26, and the relation of both to Josh. 8:30–35. See J.H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996) 251–52. There is no such ceremonial aspect to the blessings and curses of Lev. 26:3–46. As might be expected, traditional Jewish exegetes have tended to reconcile the differences between these accounts by amalgamating them into one ceremony. See for example, Josephus, *Ant.* 4:305–308; 5:68–70; *m. Soṭ.* 7:5; *t. Soṭ.* 8:9–10; *Sifre Deut.* 55; *b. Soṭ.* 33a, 37b.

¹⁸ For other uses of the verb עבר in this sense in the present context, see 1QS 1:16, 18, 20; 2:10, 19, 20, 21. Cf. Deut. 29:11: לעברך בכריה. If the occasion was one at which new members joined the community and existing members renewed and were reaffirmed in their status in the community, the above phrases could just as well refer to the existing members who would annually (re)enter the covenant.

¹⁹ Its continuation, 1QS 2:19–3:12, is presumed to relate to the same occasion. Fragments

on or just prior to the festival of Shavu'ot (Weeks or Pentecost) on the fifteenth day of the third month (Sivan) according to the Qumran calendar: ככה יעשה שנה בשנה כל יומי ממשלה בליעל (1QS 2:19: "Thus they shall do year after year, all the days of the dominion of Belial" [that is, in the present time]).²⁰ An early fragment of the Damascus Document that appears to have formed the end of that text (4Q266 11 16–18 // 4Q270 7 ii 11–12) links the third month with a communal ceremony of cursing those who depart from the correct understanding of the Torah: וכל [יושבי] המדונה יקהלו בחודש השלישי ואררו את הנושה וכל [יושבי] המדונה יקהלו בחודש השלישי ואררו את הנושה ("All [the inhabitants of] the camps shall congregate in the third month and curse those who turn right [or left from the] Torah").²¹

To repeat: the main innovation of the Community Rule is to turn Deuteronomy 27–28 into an *annual* ritual of the blessings and curses. Even making sense of Deuteronomy 27–28 as a one-time ceremony, however, is no easy matter. In brief, at least two ceremonies appear to be juxtaposed in Deut. 27:11–13 and 27:14–26, the relation of either of which to the list of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28 not being clear. Deut. 11:29 and 27:11–13 describe a ceremony in which the twelve tribes of Israel are to proclaim the blessings and curses, divinely imposed respectively for obeying or disobeying the terms of the covenant: the twelve tribes are divided, six on Mt Gerizim and six on Mt Ebal, the former for the purpose of blessing, the latter for cursing, but without listing any specific blessings or

from other caves include 4Q256 1–4; 4Q257 1 i; 5Q11 1 i–ii. Their textual variants, however, are insignificant for our purposes. For an overview of ritual texts of blessings and curses at Qumran, see B. Nitzan, "Blessings and Curses," *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds L.H. Schiffman and J.C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 95–100, esp. 96–97 for the Community Rule. Curiously, Nitzan makes no mention of the employment of blessings and curses in 4QMMT or the Temple Scroll. I have previously pointed out a number of overlaps of language between 4QMMT (especially Section C) and the Community Rule more generally. See "To Whom It May Concern," 514–21.

²⁰ I take this to refer both to what follows and to what precedes. For Belial in 4QMMT, see C 28–29, cited above.

²¹ J.M. Baumgarten, *Qumran Cave 4.XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266–273)* (DJD 18; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 76–78, 166–67. Although this does not replicate the language of any of the curses of the Community Rule or of Deuteronomy 27–28, the idea of turning to the right or the left most likely derives from Deut. 28:14, just prior to the curses. Note the use of similar language in 1QS 1:15, just prior to our section. For the Qumran calendar's calculation of the date of Shavu'ot, see J.C. VanderKam, "Shavu'ot," *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 871–72. For Shavu'ot as an occasion for covenantal renewal, see Jub. 1:1; 6:10–11, 17–19; 14:1, 18, 20; 15:1; 16:13–14; 22:1, 15, 30; and probably 2 Chron. 15:10–13; Acts 2.

curses. By themselves these verses would suggest that the six tribes on Mt Gerizim pronounce the blessings, while those on Mt Ebal pronounce the curses, without any speaking role assigned to the priests and Levites. According to Deut. 27:14–26, however, the Levites proclaim eleven curses against those who perform specific kinds of sins (“Cursed be the person who . . .”), and a twelfth all-inclusive curse (“Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them”), after each of which all the people respond “Amen.” The biblical text includes no equivalent set of blessings. Deuteronomy 28, immediately following the twelve curses pronounced by the Levites, contains lists of the positive and negative consequences (rewards and punishments, including four each in the actual form of blessings and curses) of Israel’s obeying or disobeying the terms of the covenant in general, without any indication of where they fit in performatively with what precedes.²²

Whoever devised the ceremony described in the Community Rule assumed that if the Levites recited the specific curses of Deut. 27:14–26, there must have been an equivalent list of blessings recited by the priests, to each of which the people assented by saying “Amen.” But since the Deuteronomic passage does not specify any blessings pronounced by the priests, they were imported, as it were, and adapted from the “Priestly Blessing” of Num. 6:24–26, which in its own setting indicates that the people are the subjects of the blessings, but without indicating any ceremonial procedure or context.²³

The ceremony as described in the Community Rule has the following components, which may, again, reflect separate ceremonies that have been amalgamated:²⁴ (1) The priests and Levites recount God’s

²² Compare Josh. 8:30–35, which has the Israelites divided into two groups, facing respectively Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal, whereupon *Joshua* reads the blessings and curses as recorded by Moses in the Book of the Torah.

²³ Contrast the Mishnah’s solution to the same exegetical crux: for each of the twelve curses listed in Deut. 27:14–16 there must have been a corresponding blessing for the opposite behavior. The Levites would turn first to Mt Gerizim and recite the blessing, to which the twelve tribes (six on each mountain) would respond, “Amen,” and then similarly recite the corresponding curse facing Mt Gerizim. See m. *Soṭ.* 7:5; *Sifre Deut.* 55.

²⁴ These lines are replete with biblical language and allusions, which I cannot detail here. See the commentary of M.A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 84–88. For other texts of blessing and cursing that might reflect the same ceremony of covenantal renewal, see Nitzan, “Blessings and Curses.” Compare especially 4QBerakhot^{a-c} (4Q286–290), and note 4Q287 4 1, which appears to refer to an annual ceremony of blessing and cursing.

praises, after which those entering the covenant respond, "Amen, amen" (1:18–20).²⁵ (2) The priests recount God's righteous and wondrous deeds and merciful acts towards Israel,²⁶ while the Levites recount the iniquities of Israel "during the dominion of Belial,"²⁷ whereupon those entering the covenant confess having acted sinfully, justifying God's judgments against them and their ancestors and acknowledging his everlasting loving mercy towards them (1:21–2:1). (3) The priests bless "all the men of the lot (נורל) of God who walk perfectly in all his ways," expansively paraphrasing the priestly blessing of Num. 6:24–26 so as to emphasize the contrast between good and evil, God's bestowal of insight and knowledge, and the eternal duration of the blessing (2:1–4). The Levites next curse "all the men of the lot of Belial," emphasizing their total and eternal doom, without recourse to divine forgiveness or mercy or angelic intercession (2:4–9), being a negative expansion of the priestly blessing. Both the blessings and curses are followed by a collective response of "Amen, amen" (2:10). As in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28, the space accorded to the curses significantly exceeds that accorded to the blessings. (4) Finally, the priests and Levites together curse those who have entered the covenant insincerely: "May all the curses of this covenant stick to him. . . . May he put his lot among those who are cursed forever," to which again the assembled respond, "Amen, amen" (2:11–18). After all have entered according to their ranks, the community as a whole is confirmed as "a community of truth, virtuous humility, kindly love, and right intention towards one another in a holy council, and members of an eternal fellowship" (2:19–25).

This annual renewal of community and covenant has at its core the biblical pronouncement of blessings and curses and the people's collective affirmation thereof. The enhanced role of the priests and Levites at Qumran as the speakers of the blessings and curses, that is, as intermediaries in the divine-human covenantal relationship, should not be surprising given the hierocratic structure and ideology of the Qumran community. In the sectarian context, however, the blessings and curses serve more than their biblical (and cross-cultural) role of providing divine sanctions to a body of rules to which the people oblige themselves through their assent. At Qumran the blessings and

²⁵ For the double "amen," see Neh. 8:6, another covenant-renewal ceremony.

²⁶ Cf. Neh. 9:5–37 in another covenant-renewal ceremony, but see below, n. 31.

²⁷ For Belial in 4QMMT, see C 28–29, cited above.

curses are designed, by their rewording but especially by their very juxtaposition, to give *performative* force to the dualistic ideology of the community (i.e., “sons of light” vs. “sons of darkness”) in what it understood to be the “end of days.” In other words, the blessings and curses ceremony at Qumran is not just about the consequences for individuals who obey or disobey the commandments, but about the *assignment* of individuals to the antithetical “lots” of good and evil, upon whom will collectively fall the full and final divine visitation.

5. Blessings and Curses in the War Scroll

In this regard, let us look at one final Qumran text, IQM 13:1–6, which speaks neither of a biblical nor a recurring communal ceremony, but of the reciting of blessings and curses on the eschatological battlefield:²⁸

וברכו על עומדם אח אל ישראל ואח כול מעשי אמרו וזעמו שם אח ב[לי]על ואח כול רוחי נורלו וענו ואמרו ברוך אל ישראל בכול מחשבת קודשו ומעשי אמרו וב[ר]וכים כול משרחיו בצדק יודעיו באמונה (*vacat*) וארור בליעל במחשבת משפמה וזעום הואה במשרח אשמו וארורים כול רוחי נורלו במחשבת רשעם וזעומים המה בכול עבודה נדח פמאחם כיא המה נורל חושך ונורל אל לאר [עולמ]ים (*vacat*)

They (the priests, Levites, and elders) shall bless, from their position, the God of Israel and all his truthful works. They shall denounce there Bel[i]al and all the spirits of his lot. They shall speak up, saying, “Blessed (ברוך) be the God of Israel for all his holy plan and his truthful works. Bl[es]sed (ב[ר]וכים) be they, all (who) serve him righteously (and) know him faithfully.” (*vacat*) “Cursed (ארור) be Belial for the hostile plan and may he be denounced for his guilty authority! Cursed (ארורים) be all the spirits of his lot for their wicked plan and may they be denounced for all their service of impure uncleanness! For they are the lot of darkness, but the lot of God is for [everlast]ing light!” (*vacat*)

Here, the full leadership of the eschatological army (priests and Levites, with lay elders taking the place of the people) collectively pronounces both the blessings and the curses. Here, the juxtaposition of blessings and curses are even more starkly dualistic, befitting the eschatological scene. The eschatological ceremony counterposes not just the singularly blessed God of Isarel and the singularly cursed Belial, but the collectively blessed righteous servants and faithful knowers of God, opposite the collectively cursed wicked and impure lot of Belial (whether human or angelic): light vs. darkness.

²⁸ Text and translation is from *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 2: *Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995) 122–23.

6. Conclusions

Viewing the blessings and curses in 4QMMT within the broader context of their employment at Qumran, we can better appreciate their local rhetorical and hermeneutical force. If, as I have argued, 4QMMT most likely functioned, whether primarily or secondarily, intramurally as an instruction directed to neophytes in the Qumran community, its invoking of the biblical blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 27–28 would have resonated in relation to three intersecting temporal domains: biblical past, sectarian present, and eschatological future.

The section of 4QMMT that refers to the blessings and curses does so with explicit terms of scriptural reference (כַּחֲרֹב בְּסֵפֶר מוֹשֶׁה, etc.) and with fairly close scriptural paraphrase (Deut. 30:1–3, with אֲדַרְיָהּ from Deut. 4:30 inserted).²⁹ The blessings and curses being referred to are unmistakably those of the covenantal ceremony enacted after crossing the Jordan upon entering the Land of Israel (subsequent to those at Horeb and in Moab). Given the centrality of the covenantal idea (especially Deuteronomic) to the ideology of the Qumran community,³⁰ this last of the Torah covenants, and the only one performed within the Land of Israel, would have particularly resonated with the Qumran community's self-understanding as the remnant of Israel through whom the covenant would ultimately and imminently be fulfilled. That is, they would have viewed their own sacred history as the next covenantal installment after the covenantal ceremony in Joshua's time.³¹ This understanding is reinforced by the announcement, revealing esoteric knowledge (אֲנַחְנוּ מִכִּירִים), that between then and now (the time-between being the period of the Israelite monarchy leading up to the Babylonian exile), only a part of the blessings and curses have

²⁹ This is particularly remarkable in light of the relatively few explicit scriptural citations in 4QMMT. For a variety of views on the nature of biblical citation in 4QMMT, see M.J. Bernstein, "The Employment and Interpretation of Scripture in 4QMMT," 29–51; G.J. Brooke, "Explicit Presentation of Scripture in 4QMMT," *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies. Published in Honour of Joseph M. Baumgarten* (eds M. Bernstein, F. García Martínez, and J. Kampen; STDJ 23; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 67–88; S.D. Fraade, "Looking for Legal Midrash at Qumran," *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12–14 May, 1996* (eds M.E. Stone and E.G. Chazon; STDJ 28; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 67–68; J.C. VanderKam, "Authoritative Literature in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *DSD* 5 (1998) 393.

³⁰ See J.C. VanderKam, "Covenant," *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 151–55.

been fulfilled, with the remainder (and with it the covenantal consummation) yet to be fulfilled. Thus, the biblical blessings and curses, as here creatively appropriated, are no longer about some past event but about the meaning of the sectarian present. The projection of the ceremony of blessings and curses, however, onto the eschatological battle between the lots of "light" and "darkness" (1QM) also insures that its enactment in the context of annual covenant renewal is experienced not just as present entry or re-entry into covenant and community, but also as anticipatory participation in the eschatological "eternal light" (אור עולמים).³²

The contemporizing of the biblical blessings and curses is effected in two ways. First, the text of 4QMMT declares emphatically that the "end of days," whereupon the blessings and curses will be consummated, is the time of final and irreversible return within Israel, which for the Qumran community is here and now. Second, according to the Community Rule and related texts, the blessings and curses are presently recited within an annual ritual of covenantal renewal that serves to reinforce the antithetical, dualistic division between the "us" of God and the "them" of Belial, and the existential urgency for the text's auditors of being unambiguously counted among the former. Since both documents are likely to have served in the parenetic instruction of new (or renewed) members of the community, whether during or in preparation for the annual ritual of covenant renewal, the manifold intersections between them should not surprise us. In both text and ritual, the addressees/participants are warned of the dangers of backsliding under the device (4QMMT) or dominion (1QS, 1QM) of Belial, but are also given good reason to hope that armed with the correct knowledge and observance of the Torah of Moses, by the grace of their being in the lot of God's righteous, they can yet "rejoice in the end of time" (שחשמח באחרית העת, 4QMMT C 30).

³¹ It is not clear how the Qumran community would have regarded the covenantal ceremony in the time of Ezra (Nehemiah 9–10), since, presumably, they would not have recognized the return from the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the (second) Temple as being legitimate in covenantal terms.

³² This can be seen as well in the reworking of the priestly blessing in 1QS 2:1–4 so as to stress the eternity of its benefits: ברעה עולמים and לשלום עולמים. Similarly, the Levitical curse of Belial's lot stresses eternal damnation: באפלה אש עולמים (2:8).