Het thema van de antichrist in de intertestamentaire periode

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The primary question of this dissertation was to know if the Antichrist theme does occur in the intertestamental period, and, if so, if it would be possible to reconstruct the evolution of this theme.

From the history of the research (chapter I) it seemed necessary to construct in the first place a clear definition of "Antichrist". We did not find a basis for such a definition in the Epistles of John, although these are the first texts where the word occurs. So we have chosen to look at the texts of the Fathers, the earliest texts of the Christian mainstream where we find a clear definition (ch. II). In order to determine what elements from the intertestamental period are specific to the development of the theme, an examination was made as to how the theme functioned in the New Testament (ch. III) and in the Old Testament (ch. IV). At that point we had a definition with which we could go to the intertestamental texts: "The Antichrist is a man who will appear at the end of time, acting under the influence of the Satan, who will represent the climax of evil, archdeceiver, active both in the political and military domain (tyrant, unjust, murderous) and in the religious domain (pseudo-prophet, antagonist of the Messiah, presumptuous, lawless). To indicate such a degeneracy of the human, the image of a beast can be used. There may also be a link with other figures: Balaam, Goliath, Gog, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. As soon as a combination of these elements occurs, it should suggest the Antichrist theme." (appendix A)

For the relevant passages in the intertestamental (before 50 A.D.) apocrypha (app. B) and Qumran texts (app. C), the text, with translation and a general discussion, is offered (ch. V and VI). Our general view on the Qumran Community is also presented (app. D).

The first texts where we find the theme are the Sibylline Oracles and Judith (from 160-150; ch. V, F and G). The clearest texts are the Damascus Covenant (from 107; ch. VI, B), together with the Habakkuk Pesher (60; ch. VI, G), the Testimonia (4Q175, from 95; ch. VI, C), the Psalms of Solomon (from 64-47; ch. V, L), the Treatise of Shem (from 25-20; ch. V, P), the Testament of Moses (6 A.D.; ch. V, R). In the Damascus Covenant, the Habakkuk Pesher and the Psalms of Solomon it is a pre-eschatological Antichrist; in the other texts it is an eschatological Antichrist. We do not find the Antichrist theme in Melchiresha of the Berakhot (4Q280) and the Testament of Amram (4Q544) (ch. VI, D), or in the Son of the Most High of Pseudo-Daniel (4Q286; ch. VI, L).

To find the origins of the theme, it is not necessary to look at remote
cultures and religions; the basic elements are present in the Old Testament (prophetsim, David, shepherd) and in the history of Israel (Antiochus IV Epiphanes). The figure of the messianic David has been very important for the development of the theme (ch. VII, A7).

Finally, the results of our research are compared with those of earlier researchers. Gunkel and Bousset were wrong in looking for the origin of the theme in too distant places. Charles had many good ideas (and some flaws). Hepp had a good idea in seeing the aspects of lie and violence, but he did not elaborate it. Schilder was wrong in stressing too much the unicity of the Antichrist. Rigaux was wrong in stressing too much the collective opposition to God. Flusser was wrong in his identifications of Melchiresha and the Son of the Most High. Burgmann was too hypothetical, although he evaluated well the importance of some texts. Jenks cannot see any Antichrist without Jesus Christ. Lietaert Peerbolte has the same presupposition. So their target area is the literature (not only "orthodox") of the first Christian centuries, while the intertestamental literature forms only a background for them (ch. VII, C).

It is clear that if one requires the mention of Jesus Christ, or of the word Antichrist, he will be more in the Jenks-Lietaert Peerbolte line, but we think that we have established a valid definition of "Antichrist" without a strictly necessary relation to the Messiah, and that in this sense we have found the theme in a clear way in the intertestamental period (ch. VII, D).