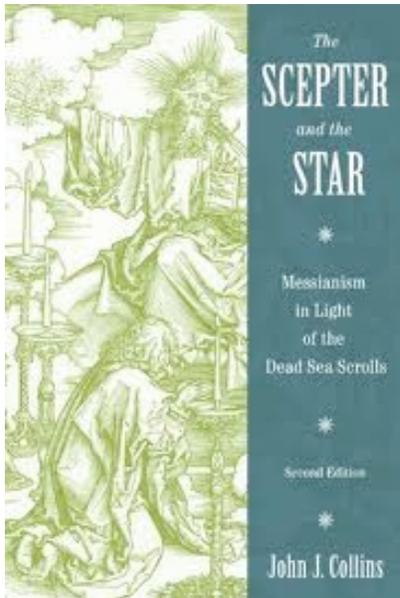


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**Collins, John J.**

***The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls***

2nd edition

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. Pp. xi + 298. Paper.  
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John Collins is an authority in the field of early Judaism and messianism in late antiquity in particular. His classic book on messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls was originally published in 1995. This second edition is mainly an updating in footnotes of the immense literature that has been published on this theme in the last fifteen years. Only the chapter “A Throne in Heavens,” discussing the “Self-Glorification Hymn” found in four fragmentary texts 4Q491c, 4D471b, 4Q427 7, and 4QH<sup>a</sup> 15:35–26:10, has been rewritten completely to take account of Israel Knoll’s new theory regarding this text and the newly found text “The Vision of Gabriel” published by A. Yardeni and B. Elitzur.

Collins wrote his book in 1995, basically on the basis of articles he published a few years earlier, because in 1991 the photographs of all Dead Sea Scrolls were finally published, breaking the long-standing restrictions on the use of the scrolls. At the time this fueled a controversy over why there was such a long delay in the publication of the scrolls and speculations that the scrolls contained information that could harm the Christian belief, the churches, and their power. The most notable controversy was over a few fragments that, according to preliminary reports, mentioned a “dying Messiah.” Suddenly Jesus Christ was not the only Messiah who was executed! Or was the fragment in question speaking about Jesus and consequently the Qumran community was Christian? All this

commotion has now died down, but in the first half of the 1990s it was still an important issue. Other issues with messianic import that steered some controversy, although less sensational, concerned a text associating a messiah with resurrection, a fragment speaking about a figure called “Son of God,” and the question whether Qumran knew one or two Messiahs. John Collins discusses all these issues and other topics: messianism in the Hebrew Bible and in Judaism at the turn of the era (ch. 2); the relation between the Teacher, Priest, and Prophet as messianic figures in the Dead Sea Scrolls (ch. 5); and the Danielic Son of Man (ch. 8). Collins is well aware of the hypothetical character of all reconstructions of the ideas of messianism on the basis of the Dead Sea scrolls. The difficulties are multiple: the fragmentary state of the texts; our ignorance of the relative chronology and origin of many manuscripts; the often metaphorical language used in the scrolls, which is not fully intelligible; and our limited knowledge of the historical context in which the Qumran community lived and operated. Collins demonstrates clearly where the weaknesses are in the many theories that have been launched on these subjects (e.g., the theory of Knoll on The Vision of Gabriel mentioned above). He himself is very careful in formulating his own proposals, supplying them with much good evidence.

In the final chapter, “Messianic Dreams in Action,” Collins discusses the different popular prophetic and royal messianic movements in the first and early second centuries A.D., known basically from Josephus’s accounts, such as the famous Simon bar Kokhba and, of course, Christianity. In the last paragraph of this last chapter Collins summarizes the commonalities *and* differences between Christian and Jewish messianic claims. This last chapter is definitely the most interesting for general theologians interested in learning how the formulations of the Christian creed of the resurrected Christ was rooted not only in Greek philosophy but also and especially in pre-Christian messianism, which we now know much better because of the Dead Sea scrolls.