

# Some Torah Precepts

## Miqsat Ma`ase ha-Torah



Fragment A: height 8 cm (3 1/8 in.)  
length 12.9 cm (5 in.)

Fragment B: height 4.3 cm (1 11/16 in.)  
length 7 cm (2 3/4 in.)

Fragment C: height 9.1 cm (3 9/16 in.)  
length 17.4 cm (6 7/8 in.)

4Q396(MMTc) Parchment Copied late first century B.C.E.-early first century C.E.

Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (8)

This scroll, apparently in the form of a letter, is unique in language, style, and content. Using linguistic and theological analysis, the original text has been dated as one of the earliest works of the Qumran sect. This sectarian polemical document, of which six incomplete manuscripts have been discovered, is commonly referred to as MMT, an abbreviation of its Hebrew name, Miqsat Ma`ase ha-Torah. Together the six fragments provide a composite text of about 130 lines, which probably cover about two-thirds of the original. The initial part of the text is completely missing.

Apparently it consisted of four sections: (1) the opening formula, now lost; (2) a calendar of 364 days; (3) a list of more than twenty rulings in religious law (Halakhot), most of which are peculiar to the sect; and (4) an epilogue that deals with the separation of the sect from the multitude of the people and attempts to persuade the addressee to adopt the sect's legal views. The "halakhot," or religious laws, form the core of the letter; the remainder of the text is merely the framework. The calendar, although a separate section, was probably also related to the sphere of "halakhah." These "halakhot" deal chiefly with the Temple and its ritual. The author states that disagreement on these matters caused the sect to secede from Israel.

### References

- Strugnell, J., and E. Qimron. Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, X. Oxford, forthcoming.
- Sussman, Y. "The History of 'Halakha' and the Dead Sea Scrolls -- Preliminary Observations on Miqsat Ma`ase Ha-Torah (4QMMT)" (in Hebrew), Tarbiz 59 (1990):11-76.

## English Translation of Some Torah Precepts (Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah)

1. until sunset on the eighth day. And concerning [the impurity] of
2. the [dead] person we are of the opinion that every bone, whether it
3. has its flesh on it or not--should be (treated) according to the law of the dead or  
the slain.
4. And concerning the mixed marriages that are being performed among the people,  
and they are sons of holy [seed],
5. as is written, Israel is holy. And concerning his (Israel's) [clean] animal
6. it is written that one must not let it mate with another species, and concerning his  
clothes [it is written that they should not]
7. be of mixed stuff; and one must not sow his field and vineyard with mixed  
species.
8. Because they (Israel) are holy, and the sons of Aaron are [most holy.]
9. But you know that some of the priests and [the laity intermingle]
10. [And they] adhere to each other and pollute the holy seed
11. as well as their (i.e. the priests') own [seed] with corrupt women. Since [the sons  
of Aaron should...]

Transcription and translation by J. Strugnell and E. Qimron

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