

SONGS OF THE SAGE

4Q510 & 4Q511 — Qumran Cave 4

Ancient Hebrew Protection Hymns — Study Reading Edition

MANUSCRIPTS AND DATE

Two fragmentary Hebrew witnesses survive: 4Q510 and 4Q511. They are commonly dated around the late 1st century BC to the early 1st century AD (approximately 30 BC–AD 30). 4Q511 is much more extensive, surviving in more than two hundred fragments.

READING KEY

[. . .] = missing/damaged text. [word] = supplied or reconstructed sense. (?) = uncertain.

4Q510 — FRAGMENT 1

[. . .] praises, bless[ings to] the King of glory; words of thanksgiving in songs [. . .]
[. . .] to the God of knowledge; splendor of [mighty] deeds; God of gods, Lord of all holy ones [. . .]
[. . .] from the power of His might they are terrified and scattered [. . .]
And I, the Sage, proclaim the majesty of His glory, to frighten and terrify
all spirits of the destroying angels, and spirits of the bastards, demons, Lilith, howlers and [desert creatures . . .]
and those who strike suddenly, to lead astray the spirit of understanding and to make their heart desolate [. . .]

WHAT THIS FRAGMENT IS SAYING

The speaker identifies himself as the Maskil—the Sage or Instructor. His praise of God functions as protection: supernatural beings are named and are to be frightened or driven away by the proclamation of God's power. The phrase commonly rendered “spirits of the bastards” is especially important for comparison with Enochic traditions concerning the spirits associated with the giant offspring.

4Q511 — SELECT SURVIVING MATERIAL

[. . .] all the spirits of its dominion continually bless Him in their appointed times [. . .]
[. . .] all of them rejoice in the God of righteousness with songs of salvation, because there is no destroyer within their boundaries, and spirits of wickedness do not walk among them,
because the glory of the God of knowledge has shone forth [. . .]
[. . .] For the Sage, a song [. . . praise] His holy name,
and exalt Him, all who know [righteousness . . .]
[. . .] eternal joy and everlasting life, to illuminate light [. . .]
[. . .] those who keep the way of God and the path of His holiness [. . .]
[. . .] the spirit of holiness [. . .] in the Holy of Holies [. . .]
[. . .] the spirits of the bastards [. . .] have no authority to touch [. . .]

[. . .] in all [His] appointed times [. . .]

WHY THIS MATTERS

These fragments show that some Jews in the Second Temple period used liturgical praise as protection against hostile spiritual beings. The surviving text explicitly names Lilith and “spirits of the bastards.” The document should not automatically be treated as a continuation of the Book of Giants, but its vocabulary makes comparison with 1 Enoch and Jubilees worthwhile.

SOURCE NOTE

Study edition prepared from openly accessible Hebrew transcriptions of 4Q510–511 and checked against current scholarly descriptions. It is not a reproduction of Joseph L. Angel's copyrighted 2022 English translation. For serious textual study, consult the manuscript images and critical editions alongside this reading.