

Scrolls from the Judean Desert

Prepared by William D. Barrick, Th.D.
The Master's Seminary



1QpHab

Introduction

Manuscripts hidden in caves in the area around the Dead Sea provide vital information about

- Judaism from approximately 300 B.C. until A.D. 135. This allows us to better understand what some Jews believed and how they lived in the time from shortly after the close of the Old Testament canon until shortly after the completion of the New Testament;
- The text of the Old Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls are our oldest biblical texts.¹

Discovered during the tumultuous founding of the modern state of Israel (1947-48), the scrolls have changed much of what scholars thought about the history and development of the Old Testament. Publication of the finds has taken over 50 years and we are only just now beginning to gain an accurate understanding of the nature of the finds and their significance to biblical studies.

Scrolls and Fragments

“Dead Sea Scrolls” might refer, in its broadest sense, to the materials in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) from nine different sites (including Qumran, Masada, Naḥal Ḥever, Wadi Murabba‘at, Khirbet Mird, Wadi ed-Daliyeh, Naḥal Ṣe’elim). Discoveries of manuscripts in eleven caves associated with Qumran are the centerpiece of the collection of scrolls. These were not the first such discoveries in the region. Origen (A.D. 185-284), an early Christian scholar, had obtained a text of Psalms in Greek that had been discovered in a jar near Jericho (about 7.5 miles from Qumran). Church historian, Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) wrote that both Hebrew and Greek manuscripts had been discovered in a jar in the vicinity of Jericho. Later, in the eighth century the patriarch of Seleucia (located in modern Iraq) revealed in a letter that Old Testament books and other writings were found in



¹ One exception to this statement might be argued. A silver amulet found in a grave on the shoulder of the Valley of Hinnom (Ketef Hinnom) outside the Old City of Jerusalem contains the text of the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:24-26) and can be dated to approximately 600 B.C.

the rocks near Jericho just ten years prior to his writing. He indicated that up to 140 manuscripts had been removed from that specific location.

Since 1947 thousands of fragments from approximately 900 different texts have been recovered. Over 50% of all the Dead Sea Scrolls comprise non-biblical and non-sectarian contemporary Jewish literature (approximately 400 manuscripts). A variety of Essene sectarian compositions make up 25% (approximately 200 manuscripts), while another 25% are copies of scriptural books (210+ manuscripts to date).

Of all Old Testament books, copies of Psalms (36 manuscripts) and Deuteronomy (30 manuscripts) are the most numerous. There are also 21 manuscripts of Isaiah, 19 of Genesis, 17 of Exodus, and 13 of Leviticus. All of the biblical books are represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls except the Book of Esther and the Book of Nehemiah. Some scholars would consider Nehemiah included, since Ezra-Nehemiah comprises one book in the Hebrew Bible. Copies of both Psalms and Genesis have been recovered from six different Qumran caves. Five caves have produced copies of Deuteronomy. Almost 140 of the biblical manuscripts were found in Cave 4 overlooking the Wadi Qumran on the southern edge of the ancient Qumran community.

Two types of Hebrew script

Paleo-Hebrew: 
 Jewish Hebrew: 
 Transliteration: *h w h y*

Many of the manuscripts are merely collections of fragments. Many fragments have yet to be reunited with other fragments from their original manuscript. The process is painstakingly slow and tedious. Some fragments may never be identified with any particular manuscript, because scholars cannot make that

determination on the basis of just a few words or even a few letters. Different scribal hands are discernible due to the variations in handwriting. This provides scholars with yet another factor aiding the identification process. Of the biblical scrolls, twelve are written with the older paleo-Hebrew script (see side bar above). Books with copies written in this script include the five books of Moses and the Book of Job.

Scholars have devised a system of abbreviations to identify the various Dead Sea manuscripts.² Note how these abbreviations are formed:

Cave #	Location	Book	Classifier	Abbreviation
1	Q	Is	^a	1QIs ^a
1	Q	pHab		1QpHab
4	Q	XII	-A	4QXII-A
11	Q	Pss		11QPss
8	Hev	XII	Gr	8HevXIIgr
	Mur	XII		MurXII
	Mas	Ps	^b	MasPs ^b

- 1QIs^a = first Isaiah scroll to be found in Qumran Cave 1
 1QpHb = Habakkuk commentary (*peshet*) from Qumran Cave 1
 4QXII-A = first Minor Prophets scroll found in Qumran Cave 4

² For a fuller listing, see Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 557-62.

- 11QPss = Psalms scroll from Qumran Cave 11
 8HevXIIgr = Greek Minor Prophets scroll found in Nahal Hever Cave 8
 MurXII = Minor Prophets scroll found at Muraba'at
 MasPs^b = second Psalms scroll found at Masada

Yet another system employs numbers rather than the multitude of abbreviations involved in the system represented above. Scrolls originally found by the Bedouin have not been assigned numbers in this system (e.g., 1QIs^a and 1QpHab). Note the following equivalents:

- 1QIs^b = 1Q8
 1QDan^a = 1Q71
 3QPs = 3Q2
 4QpaleoGen^m = 4Q12

*Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*³ is the official publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, extending to 39 volumes thus far. A more recent series is also available in a more accessible format.⁴

Dating the Dead Sea Scrolls⁵

Both Carbon-14 accelerator mass spectrometry and paleographic analysis (comparison of the styles of alphabetic letters with other ancient Hebrew texts) have been applied to the scrolls and fragments from the Dead Sea region.

Scroll	C-14 Calibrated Age Ranges	Paleographic Age
Testament of Kohath	388–353 B.C. 295–220 B.C.	100–75 B.C.
Reworked Pentateuch	339–324 B.C. 209–117 B.C.	125–100 B.C.
Book of Isaiah	335–327 B.C. 202–107 B.C.	125–100 B.C.
Testament of Levi	191–155 B.C. 146–120 B.C.	Late 2 nd century– early 1 st century B.C.
Book of Samuel	192–63 B.C.	100–75 B.C.
Temple Scroll	97 B.C.–A.D. 1	Late 1 st century B.C.– early 1 st century A.D.
Genesis Apocryphon	73 B.C.–A.D. 14	Late 1 st century B.C.– early 1 st century A.D.
Thanksgiving Hymns	21 B.C.–A.D. 61	50 B.C.–A.D. 70

³ Milik Barthélemy et al., eds., *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, 39 vols. (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1955-2002).

⁴ James Charlesworth et al., eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck/Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994-).

⁵ Data in the following table obtained from Philip R. Davies, George J. Brooke, and Phillip R. Callaway, *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 74; and James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 18. The latter volume is an excellent up-to-date introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Archaeological Debate Surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls

The “scriptorium” at Qumran (identified originally by Roland de Vaux) might turn out to be nothing more than a private dining room. Unfortunately, de Vaux appears to have ignored the lamps, juglets, lathe-turned stoneware, and glass vessels that help to demonstrate the economic wealth of Herodian Qumran. Architectural details, geometric tiles, stucco, columns, evidence of arches, and flagstone also indicate a wealthy settlement rather than a monastic sectarian settlement. All of this casts doubt upon the assumption that the Qumran community actually produced the scrolls themselves utilizing a group of scribes working within a carefully devised system for copying the Hebrew Bible and producing copies of other texts. Scholars now understand that many scrolls found at Qumran came from other places in ancient Israel.

For the most recent archaeological study offering support to de Vaux’s viewpoint, see Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

The Scrolls and the Text of the Old Testament

Bruce Zuckerman of the University of Southern California School of Religion’s West Semitic Research Project is employing computer enhancement to reconstruct the texts of the scrolls. Decisions made regarding which pixels will be white and which black can effect the final readings—readings that might be solely the opinion of the enhancer. Such virtual reconstruction runs the risk of producing texts that are not necessarily consistent with the actual physical evidence and its readability (or lack thereof).

Early in the process of evaluating the evidence from the finds, scholars assumed that the dominant biblical text type represented in the scrolls was more closely related to the Greek Septuagint (translated approximately 250 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt) than to the traditional Hebrew Masoretic Text. Detailed analysis, however, has changed that picture. In addition to the manuscripts that were most clearly identifiable with the Masoretic Text, most of those characterized by Qumran practice and some of the non-aligned texts are more closely related to the Masoretic Text than to either the Samaritan or Septuagint:⁶

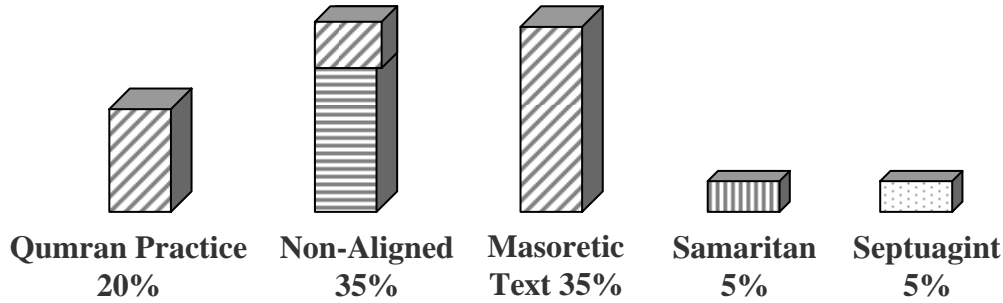
Sample text from non-canonical 11QPs^a (11Q5) xxvii 2-11:

Now David the son of Jesse was wise and shone like the light of the sun, a scribe and man of discernment, blameless in all his ways before God and men. The Lord gave him a brilliant and discerning spirit, so that he wrote: psalms, 3,600; songs to sing before the altar accompanying the daily perpetual burnt-offering, for all the days of the year, 364; for the Sabbath offerings, 52 songs; and for the New Moon offerings, all the festival days and the Day of Atonement, 30 songs. The total of all the songs that he composed was 446, not including 4 songs for charming the demon-possessed with music. The sum total of everything, psalms and songs, was 4,050. All these he composed through prophecy given him by the Most High.

— M. Wise, M. Abegg, and E. Cook, trans., *Poetic and Liturgical Texts*, ed. by Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 6 vols. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 5:197

⁶ Chart compiled on the basis of data from Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 114-17.

Qumran's 210+ Biblical Texts



“Qumran practice” with regard to the scrolls refers to the spelling, word formation, and free approach of scribes to the biblical text that reflect various kinds of adaptations, frequent errors, and numerous corrections. Some of the liberties the scribes took with the biblical text indicate the production of popular texts in an updated language and style, rather than a strict adherence to precise copying.

Due to a number of marginal corrections and insertions of texts accidentally omitted in the St. Mark's Monastery Isaiah Scroll (1QIs^a), it is obvious that the Jewish community never employed it as a synagogue text. It lacks the accuracy required of such manuscripts. That raises a question concerning the placement of the scrolls in jars (see photo at left) in the caves. Were they really put there in order to hide them from the advancing Roman army around A.D. 70? Jewish practice dictates that scrolls or even newly copied texts that prove to be unfit for synagogue use are to be honorably preserved in the same way that bodies are placed within rock-hewn tombs—they are not to be burned or destroyed. Evidence of jar burials of human remains has been found in Palestine. Is it possible that the Dead Sea scroll jars were the “coffins” into which the Essenes placed scrolls unfit for synagogue use? If so, it would not be wise to adopt readings from these scrolls alone to emend the Masoretic Text. The manuscripts are still of value textually, but their readings must be weighed more carefully lest we adopt a reading for which the scroll may have been rejected.



The Scrolls and the New Testament

Two issues have focused attention on the Dead Sea Scrolls' contributions to New Testament studies: nineteen Greek fragments in Cave 7 and the view of some scholars that the Scrolls are Jewish Christian in nature. As to the former, the fragments are too tiny for their contents to be identified with certainty. As for the latter, the claims of Robert H. Eisenman and Michael O. Wise in their book⁷ are not consistent with an objective view of all of the evidence.

⁷ Robert H. Eisenman and Michael O. Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: The First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents Withheld for over 35 Years* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1992).

On the other hand, the scrolls do shed some light on the Palestinian Jewish background of some Pauline teachings, on titles used for Christ (e.g., “son of God”), on certain Gospel passages, and on Melchizedek’s role in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Recommended Reading

Davies, Philip R., George J. Brooke, and Phillip R. Callaway. *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2002. — Beautifully illustrated with full-color photographs and charts, this volume is a coffee table delight packed with helpful information across the full scope of topics related to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Freedman, David Noel, and Pam Fox Kuhlken. *What Are the Dead Sea Scrolls and Why Do They Matter?* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007. — As the newest publication on the subject and directed specifically to visitors to the display of the scrolls in San Diego, I highly recommend this volume as the latest of many fine volumes written by David Noel Freedman.

Hodge, Stephen. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Rediscovered: An Updated Look at One of Archaeology’s Greatest Mysteries*, 2nd ed. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2003. — Hodge engagingly deals with the intrigue surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls’ origins, discovery, publication, and interpretation.

Magness, Jodi. *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003. — Magness presents a careful evaluation of the archaeological evidence and offers a reasoned solution to some of the puzzling questions regarding the scriptorium and regarding the cemetery.

VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. — This volume is an excellent up-to-date introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls, providing an informative evaluation of such debates as those surrounding potential New Testament materials in Cave 7.

_____ and Peter Flint. *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002. — Some of the most eminent Dead Sea Scrolls scholars (e.g., Emanuel Tov, David Noel Freedman, James Sanders, and James Charlesworth) recommend this volume as the best introduction for discerning readers.

Dr. Barrick’s Reviews of Books about the Dead Sea Scrolls

Yizhar Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence*. *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 17/2 (Fall 2006): 241-43.

Peter W. Flint, ed., *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*. *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 15/2 (Fall 2004): 256-57.

William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*. *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13/1 (Spring 2002): 103-5 [especially, the comments about the essay by David A. Sapp regarding the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran].

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins. The Master's Seminary Journal* 11/2 (Fall 2000): 249-50.

Internet Resources

The following web sites provide information and graphics regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls:

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/scrolls/> — The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. maintains this web site about their own exhibition of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

<http://www.imj.org.il/eng/shrine/> — The Israel Museum, Jerusalem presents information about their Shrine of the Book. Includes a scrollable view of the entire Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran Cave 1 and explanation of the exhibit about “A Day at Qumran.”

<http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/> — The Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature is under the auspices of Hebrew University, Jerusalem. In the near future the site will provide an online virtual tour of Cave 1.

http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational_site/dead_sea_scroll/ — This web site is part of the University of Southern California School of Religion's West Semitic Research Project.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/intro.html> — ibiblio is a conservancy of public information in collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Resources/Texts/dss.html> — The School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia) maintains this information site.