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## The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible

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### 1. Introduction

This lecture consists of six parts: (1) Comments on the Dead Sea Scrolls. (2) The Three Favourite Biblical Books at Qumran. (3) The Scrolls and the Text of the Hebrew Bible. (4) The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Accuracy of Scripture. (5) New Biblical Readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls. (6) The Scrolls and Modern Bible translations.

After introducing the Dead Sea Scrolls, I will demonstrate their supreme importance, and show how they influence our reading and understanding of the Hebrew Bible. The lecture will end with several new readings from the Biblical Scrolls that should be considered for adoption in modern translations of the Old Testament.

### 2. Comments on the Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, near a place called Qumran, a Shepard boy threw

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a stone into a cave and heard the sound of breaking pottery. Although he did not know it, this Shepard boy-whose name was Mohammed the Wolf-had made the greatest discovery of our time, the Dead Sea Scrolls. For the clay jar he had broken, and several more jars in the cave, contained precious ancient writings now called the Dead Sea Scrolls. Two of the documents he found are the Great Isaiah Scroll and the War Scroll, which you can see on the screen.

Later that year, Professor William Foxwell Albright announced to the world the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Albright-who was America's greatest archaeologist at the time-declared that the Scrolls were the most important archaeological discovery ever made, and that they would revolutionize our understanding of the world of the New Testament.

How could Professor Albright make such an amazing claim-that the Dead Sea Scrolls are the most important archaeological discovery ever made? There are five reasons:

- (a) The Scrolls were found in the land of Israel itself. This is the land where the prophets preached and where Jesus walked, and is holy to three faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- (b) The Scrolls are written in the very languages of Scripture: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. For students and scholars of the Bible, these languages are indispensable because they enable us to study

the Scriptures and early Christianity in their earliest forms.

- (c) The Scrolls include our oldest biblical manuscripts. Copied between 250 BC and 68 AD, the Biblical scrolls are over 1,000 older than the medieval biblical manuscripts that scholars relied on for centuries. Now the Dead Sea Scrolls enable scholars to recover the earliest form of Scripture for many Old Testament books.
- (d) The Scrolls provide new information of Judaism in the days of Jesus Christ, for example on the Pharisees and Saducees. But the Scrolls also throw light on another Jewish sect known as the Essenes, whose headquarters were at Qumran and who were responsible for copying many of the Dead Sea Scrolls and hiding them in the nearby caves.
- (e) The Dead Sea Scrolls provide important insights into Christian origins. For example, some scrolls contain words almost identical to those used by Jesus a century later, and other scrolls contain key terms used by Paul.

For these five reasons, we must agree with Professor Albright that the Dead Sea Scrolls are the most important archaeological discovery ever made.

## 2.1. The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible

There are about 222 Biblical Scrolls altogether(about 25% of the total). When we study these Biblical Scrolls, four main themes emerge: The Same Three Favourite Biblical Books at Qumran and in the New Testament; the Scrolls and the Text of the Hebrew Bible; the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Accuracy of Scripture; and New Biblical Readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## 3. The Three Favourite Biblical Books at Qumran

It is interesting to note that the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls had the same three favorite Old Testament books as the early Christians. We reach this conclusion in several stages:

(a) A survey of copies Old Testament books found in the Qumran caves shows that the following five were most popular, in descending order:

### *Qumran Scrolls*

6. Leviticus(9 copies)
5. Exodus(14 copies)
4. Genesis(20 copies)
3. Isaiah(24 copies)

2. Deuteronomy(27 copies)
1. Psalms(34 copies)

(b) We can compare this list to the most popular books in Rabbinic Judaism by counting the number of times books are quoted in the Mishna, which was compiled by various Rabbis in the first two centuries of the Common Era:

<i>Qumran Scrolls</i>	<i>Quotes in Mishna</i>
6. Leviticus(9 copies)	6. Genesis(35 times)
5. Exodus(14 copies)	5. Psalms(41 times)
4. Genesis(20 copies)	4. Exodus(133 times)
3. Isaiah(24 copies)	3. Numbers(133 times)
2. Deuteronomy(27 copies)	2. Deuteronomy(234 times)
1. Psalms (34 copies)	1. Leviticus(349 times)

It is clear that the Rabbis' three favourite books were mostly from the Torah(Pentateuch), while the top three books at Qumran included the Isaiah and the Psalms. The Rabbis loved Leviticus most of all, but at Qumran this book is in sixth place, with only 9 copies.

(c) When we can compare the list of favourite books at Qumran to the most popular books in early Christianity by counting the number of times books are quoted in the New Testament, a different picture emerges:

<i>Qumran Scrolls</i>	<i>Quotes in New Testament</i>
6. Leviticus(9 copies)	6. Minor Prophets(30 times)
5. Exodus(14 copies)	5. Genesis(39 times)
4. Genesis(20 copies)	4. Exodus(44 times)
3. Isaiah(24 copies)	3. Deuteronomy(54 times)
2. Deuteronomy(27 copies)	2. Isaiah(66 times)
1. Psalms(34 copies)	1. Psalms(79 times)

Both the Qumran community and the New Testament writers had the same three favourite books: Isaiah, Deuteronomy, and Psalms. How is this common focus to be explained?

One prominent scroll is the Smaller Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1(slide provided). Much of this scroll has been lost due to decay, but what is still intact is legible. The theme in Isaiah that fascinated the Qumran community and the New Testament writers is Messiah. Both the early Christians and the people of Qumran were messianic communities living in the end times.

A second important manuscript is the “All Souls” Deuteronomy Scroll from Cave 4(slide provided). The theme in Deuteronomy that interested the Qumran community and early Christians is Covenant-the Qumranites referred to themselves as “the men who entered of the New Covenant” (Damascus Document 8:21 and 19:33); while at the Last

Supper Jesus refers to the cup poured out as the “New Covenant in my blood”(Luke 22:20).

Another prominent manuscript is the Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11(slide provided). The Psalms were especially important to the Qumran community and the New Testament writers because both groups quoted some Psalms to praise God, and interpreted others as referring to the Messiah and the end times.

#### 4. The Scrolls and the Text of the Hebrew Bible

The ancient world yielded more than one edition of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, several scholars focused on the Biblical Scrolls. Professor Frank Moore Cross, following W. F. Albright, developed the theory of local texts, which states that there is not one, but three, editions of the Hebrew Bible:

\*The Masoretic Text, which is used by Jews today and also by Christians when translating Bible into modern languages such as Korean or English.

\*The Septuagint or Greek Bible, which was the Old Testament of the early Church and the one quoted in the New Testament.

\*The Samaritan Pentateuch, an ancient form of the text still used today by the Samaritan sect living in Israel.

Cross identified Hebrew copies of all these three editions among the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, a Jeremiah scroll from Cave 4 at Qumran(4QJer-a) is like the Septuagint version (or “preseptuagintal”) by containing a shorter text of Jeremiah than the Masoretic version of this prophetic book.

This line of research has been followed by Emanuel Tov, who has reached more nuanced conclusions. According to Tov, of the Biblical Scroll that preserve enough material to be studied, about 46% are like the Masoretic Text(or “proto-Masoretic”), about 5% are like the Septuagint version (or “preseptugintal”), another 5% like the Samaritan version (or “pre-Samaritan”), and about 44% are textually mixed (“non-aligned”).

## 5. The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Accuracy of Scripture

The Dead Sea Scrolls are dated from 250 BC to 70 AD, and are thus up to 1,250 years older than the Hebrew Bibles that we have previously. Modern Bibles are translated from a medieval Hebrew manuscript called the Leningrad Codex, which is dated to 1008 AD. But now we have the Biblical Scrolls, which offer a scientific basis for comparing the accuracy of the Biblical text that has been handed down to us.

The overall result of this comparison is that the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that our Bible(the Old Testament) is 99% accurate, and over the ages scribes have taken every care to

copy and hand down the Scriptures as accurately as possible.

The illustration I use in the PowerPoint presentation is from Isaiah 40 from the Great Isaiah Scroll. When we compare the passage in the Masoretic Text and Great Isaiah Scroll, about 10 differences emerge, which at first is quite shocking. I then explain that almost all these differences involve orthography or spelling, with no difference in meaning (compare in English the words honour [British spelling] or honor [American spelling]).

## 6. New Biblical Readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls

### 6.1. The missing verse in Psalm 145

The Dead Sea Scrolls sometimes provide the original or better reading than found in the Masoretic Text. Some of these readings are so powerful that they have been adopted by many new translations of the Bible, in English and other languages.

My first example is from Psalm 145, which is an acrostic Psalm, which each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, we would expect 22 verses to Psalm 145—but there are only 21. Scholars have speculated for centuries over why verse 13 (beginning with the Hebrew letter mem) is followed

by verse 14(beginning with samek). There should be a verse beginning with nun after the mem verse, but it is missing!

When we turn to the Psalm scrolls, an important result emerges-in the Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 the missing verse is there: “God is faithful in all his works, and gracious in all his deeds!”

This verse from the Scrolls is so convincing that it has now been included in most modern English Bible translations.

## 6.2. A New Reading in Isaiah 53

The Dead Sea Scrolls sometimes provide important new readings that affect our understanding of key Biblical passages. One such passage is in Isaiah 53, which deals with the Suffering Servant of the Lord. This passage is interpreted differently in Jewish tradition, which views the Servant as Israel, and in Christian tradition, which regards the Servant as Jesus Christ. The traditional Hebrew text is translated as follows:

Isaiah 53:10-11

<sup>10</sup> Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup> *He shall see of the travail of his soul*, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

In this passage, the first part of v11 is difficult to interpret: He *shall see of the travail of his soul*.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, the text is different, adding the additional word “light”:

#### Isaiah 53:10-11 in the Great Isaiah Scroll

<sup>11</sup>*Out of the suffering of his soul he will see light*, and find satisfaction. And through his knowledge my servant, the righteous one, will make many righteous, and he will bear their iniquities.

The additional word “light” changes the exegesis of Isaiah 53:11, by introducing the idea of light. This new reading has important implications for exegesis of the verse, since it hints at life, or even resurrection. This longer reading is found in all three Scrolls that contain vnamely 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, 1QIsa<sup>b</sup>, and 4QIsa<sup>c</sup>. This reading is so powerful that many English translations now feature the longer reading “he will see light” as the original or preferred reading.

#### 7. Conclusion: The Scrolls and Modern Bible Translations

My lecture concludes with some thoughts on the Scrolls

and Modern Bible translations. The Dead Sea Scrolls confirm the accuracy of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament by 99%.

This means that our Bible should remain virtually unchanged in the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which provides reassurance to some who may see the Scrolls as a threat to traditional Christian faith. On the contrary, the Dead Sea Scrolls provided scientific evidence that the Hebrew Bible has been handed down with great accuracy.

But what of the other 1% of cases, where the Dead Sea Scrolls offer clearly better readings for Bible translations? For Jewish scholars, who accept only the Masoretic Text as God's Word, different reading from the Scrolls cannot be accepted as part of Scripture, no matter how convincing they may be.

Christian scholars, however, are more open to adopting new and better readings from the Scrolls as Scripture, since we seek to have God's Word as originally given. Although we follow the Masoretic Text most of the time, there are many examples where Christian Bible scholars have accepted other readings from the Septuagint.

Now we have at least 100 reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls that should be considered for Bible translations. I have shared two with you in this lecture.