

## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS?

By Dr. Richard P. Myers, Lacey, WA.

Whatever happened to what many claimed to be "the greatest archeological discovery of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" – the Dead Sea Scrolls? This "find" was greeted with great excitement and fanfare. The thinking was that now we can finally find out what the Bible actually said when it was first written. Nearly all the new versions have claimed to have made use of them. However, for some time now, we've heard very little about them. What happened?

### DEFINITION

[ The scrolls are manuscripts that came to light from 1947-1956 in a number of areas lying northwest of the Dead Sea in Palestine.

### NAMES

"Dead Sea Scrolls" seems to be the most popular and easily identifiable name given these items, but it may not be the best name for them because [they are really more "fragments" than scrolls, and because the Dead Sea is too large an area to describe their exact location. The name "Qumran Manuscripts" has been suggested as being more accurate.] Qumran is the exact area where the caves containing the fragmented manuscripts were located. Other suggested names are "Scrolls from the Wilderness of Judea," "Scrolls from a Jericho Cave," "The Jerusalem Scrolls," and so on. However, the name "Dead Sea Scrolls" is now fixed by time, and its popular sound to the ear will most likely insure its permanence for some time to come.

### EXACT LOCATION

The "scrolls" were originally discovered near the northwest part of the Dead Sea, east of Jerusalem, 7½ miles south of Jericho, about 1 mile west of the Dead Sea (in the rocks) and about 1,000 feet above the surface of the Sea. The exact coordinates are 1934.1287 on a current Palestine survey map. It is near the Wadi Qumran (wadi is a seasonal river that is usually dry) and Khirbet Qumran (khirbet means old ruins). [They are presently located in Jerusalem, where they are housed in a special museum] of the Hebrew University named the Shrine Of The Book, where they can be seen today.

### STORY OF DISCOVERY

There are varying accounts of the discovery, so we will probably never be certain as to exactly how the "scrolls" were found. But the most popular story is that a young goat herder named Muhammad adh-Dhib ("Muhammad the Wolf") threw a rock into a cave near where he was herding his goats. He heard a crash, so, afraid, he went for a companion; when they returned, they found a number of jars in the cave, most of which contained leather scrolls. This took place in the spring of 1947, although one of the differing accounts places the year as 1945.

### CAVES & FINDS

Originally, eleven caves were discovered and investigated. Since the original discoveries, archaeologists have explored some 230 caves. [To date, they have found one complete scroll, a number of partial scrolls, pottery, ~~manuscript miscellany~~ and tens of thousands of manuscript fragments.]

## IDENTIFICATION

The scrolls are identified in the following manner. The first digit is an Arabic number specifying which cave. The second digit is the letter "Q" for Qumran. The third digit is an abbreviation of the name of the Bible book itself. The final digit is a "superior" letter indicating the order in which this particular manuscript came to light, as over against other copies of the same book. [Following are some examples: (1) 1QIs<sup>a</sup>, means Cave I, Qumran, Isaiah, the first copy of Isaiah to be found;] (2) 1QIs<sup>b</sup>, means Cave I, Qumran, Isaiah, the second copy of Isaiah to be found; (3) 4QSam, means Cave IV, Qumran, the books of Samuel, etc.

## MOST IMPORTANT

[Contained in the Qumran finds are both secular and religious writings. In fact, there were many more secular writings found than religious.] However, of importance to us are only religious writings.

[It is estimated that there were some 600 manuscripts found in all eleven caves, of which only 200 were Biblical.] Many of these were written in Aramaic or Greek, even Egyptian, rather than Hebrew. [There were about 400 manuscripts found in Cave IV (the most of any of the caves). However, they consisted mostly of fragments, most of which were no larger than a postage stamp]— somewhere between 60,000-75,000 fragments altogether. One scholar described their condition to be similar to ground coffee. Only about 35% have been partly or completely reconstructed. (Lloyd Streever – 75 PROBLEMS (p. 151ff)).

\* See Supplement, Part A.

\* See Supplement, Part B

Let's look at a few of the most important scrolls.

- 1QIs<sup>a</sup>. A complete scroll of Isaiah containing, of course, all 66 chapters. It is particularly significant because it is the only complete copy of a book of the Old Testament ever discovered and published. It is the earliest known copy of any complete book of the Bible and is dated as having been copied between 100-150 B.C. It belongs to the same manuscript family as the Masoretic Text (M.T.).
- 1QHb. This is the text of chapters 1 & 2 of the Book of Habakkuk, with a running interpretation or commentary. The commentary notes are interspersed between verses. It is dated at between 50-100 B.C., and stands in a very close relationship to the Masoretic Text.
- 1QIs<sup>b</sup>. This is a partial scroll of Isaiah containing portions of chapters 10, 13, 16, 19-30, and 35-66. It is dated at 50 B.C., and has a far closer fidelity to the Masoretic Text than 1QIs<sup>a</sup>.
- 4QSam<sup>b</sup>. [This is a fragment of the books of Samuel and is thought to be the oldest known piece of Biblical Hebrew, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.] It is from Cave IV, which was the most productive cave of the original eleven.

\* See Supplement, Part C

## VALUE & RELEVANCY

Like so many of these ancient Biblical "finds", at first, there is great joy and ecstasy, especially by the "finders." Exaggerated adjectives and phrases have been used to describe the "finds." However, as time goes along, the exaggeration and ecstasy dim considerably and the value, relevancy and importance seem to lose their brilliance. There seem to be, < however, [two primary items of value concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls.]

The first deals with the time factor. Geisler and Nix in their work, *A General Introduction Of The Bible* (p. 260), state, ["There can be no reasonable doubt that the Qumran Manuscripts came from the century before Christ, and the first century A.D." This is 1,000 years earlier than the present extant Hebrew manuscript] (Leningrad Codex of the

Prophets, A.D. 916), and does make them ancient and seems impressive. But age alone is not always as decisive as some would make it.

The second value seems to be the most important. Millar Burrows, an "expert" on the Dead Sea Scrolls, but a modernist theologically, writes: "Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition." Gleason Archer, on page 25 of his book, *A Survey Of Old Testament Introduction* observes that the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave I "proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." Before 1947, the Hebrew text was based on three partial and one complete manuscript dating from about 1000 A.D. [The Kittel Masoretic Text of 1967/77 is the Old Testament text upon which most of the English Bibles today are based. But the King James Version Old Testament is based upon the 1524-1525 Bomberg (ben Chayyim) Masoretic Text<sup>1</sup>.] The latter seems to be the time-honored and God-honored Hebrew text. However, some of the modern Bibles have left the Masoretic Text, at least in places, and used different texts, such as the so-called Septuagint. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) of 1952 did this, which is why they changed "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 to "young woman". The point is, [if the Bomberg Masoretic Text is indeed the God-honored text, then the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that date all the way back to 100 B.C., within 600 years of Isaiah's original prophecy.] Therefore, if the text goes back 2100 years from today, then it could be an exact copy of the original. If this is true, then beware of any modern-day bibles that use any text other than the Bomberg Masoretic Text.

\*See pg. 38 footnote

\*See Supplement, Part D

#### UPDATE

[The Roman Catholic Church has controlled the translating and supervision of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the past 40 years.] The *New York Times* (September 1991) reported that the [Dead Sea Scrolls translating] committee's "cloak and dagger scholarship long ago exhausted its credibility with scholars and laymen alike." A secular book, *The Dead Sea Scroll Deception*, written by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh (Summit Books, NY 1991) accuses the Roman Catholic Church of hiding research and tampering with anything they don't like, and credibility was not enhanced when news came out that Father de Voux, the [Dead Sea Scroll translating committee's] head translator, was an alcoholic.

\*See Supplement, Part E

[Conclusion – the Dead Sea Scrolls offer nothing against the God-approved Masoretic Text. If they did, the critics would be screaming about it at the top of their lungs. (Gail Riplinger, *The Language of The King James Bible*, p. 129-130;)]

#### WHAT HAPPENED?

What happened to the interest and excitement about the Dead Sea Scrolls? The scholars were looking for something radically different from the God-honored Masoretic Text; they were hoping the Dead Sea Scrolls would provide something new. Instead, the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the Masoretic Text. When the scholars realized this, they basically lost interest.

#### CAUTION

One needs to be very careful about jumping on the bandwagon of ancient biblical discoveries. The vital question is – can anything new actually be discovered? When one thinks this question through, one realizes the answer is "NO!"

If something "new" is discovered and acclaimed to be inspired and authentic (concerning the Word of God, of course), then what have we had all these years? It certainly means that we haven't had all of the inspired Word of God. And since something "new" has been found now, what is to prevent some other "new" from being found ten years from now, and so on.

No, the answer is that either we have had the inspired, completed Word of God all these centuries, or else we never will have it. Solomon was right, "There is nothing new under the sun," and this includes the relevancy of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They do have some value -- but that value is limited.

*There are two Masoretic texts for the Old Testament, just as there are two textual lines for the New Testament (the traditional Byzantine text generally referred to as the Textus Receptus; and the Alexandrian text generally called the Westcott-Hort Critical Text). The Hebrew text the 1611 Authorized Version is translated from is the Daniel Bomberg (1524-1525) ben Chayyim edition. The current Masoretic text from which all other Bibles in English are translated from is the Rudolph Kittel (1967/77) ben Asher text, generally referred to as the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). The Kittel text changes the Bomberg text between 20,000-30,000 places.*

Note: Bracketed areas are those sections that you need to know for the test, along with the red font text in the Supplement.