

# An Introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls

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## Lesson One

What are the Dead Sea Scrolls?

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### I. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls

A. The details of the circumstances under which the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947 are unclear. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 3)

1. During the early fall of 1946, three Bedouin shepherds were moving their sheep through an area of Palestine known as 'Ain Feshkah. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
2. One of the shepherds spotted two small openings to a cave. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
3. Throwing a rock through one of the openings, he heard the sound of shattering pottery. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
4. The shepherds did not immediately investigate. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
5. The shepherds returned to the area two days later, and one of them entered the cave, without the knowledge of his companions. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
6. The shepherd found ten tall jars in tact. He also found the remains of other jars scattered about the floor of the cave, obviously broken by rock falling from the ceiling of the cave. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
7. The shepherd also found a scroll lying on the floor, partially buried, and two scrolls inside one of the jars. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 103-104)
8. The shepherd did not know the contents of the scrolls, but John Trever would later determine that they were the Book of Isaiah, what Trever called the "Manual of Discipline," and a commentary on the Book of Habakkuk. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 78)

B. The discovery of the scrolls was not announced to the public until April 1948. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 78)

1. The Bedouins did not immediately act on their discovery. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 3-14)
2. When the Bedouins did act, they attempted to sell the scrolls to a local antiquities dealer, who had no way of recognizing the significance of the find. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 3-14)

3. A few weeks later, the scrolls were transferred to another antiquities dealer, who, likewise, did not recognize the significance of the discovery. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 3-14)

4. Metropolitan Athanasius Yeshue Samuel purchased the three scrolls in July 1947, thinking they might be early Christian documents. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 76)

5. In February 1948, Father Butrus Swomy, a monk at St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem, contacted John Trever at American Schools of Oriental Research. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 13-26)

6. Initial observations by John Trevor and William Brownlee suggested that the scrolls were authentic, and that they were very old. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 13-26, 29-37)

7. The political situation in Palestine in 1947 hampered the investigation into the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 78)

8. Nevertheless, Trever obtained sufficient information to confirm his suspicions.

9. The first public announcement in the United States regarding the discovery of the DSS was published in April 1948. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 89, 98)

C. The scholarly community greeted the news about the discovery of ancient scrolls in the Judean wilderness with skepticism. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 136)

1. Trever was not surprised by the reaction to the news.

2. Most scholars suspected that the scrolls originated in the Middle Ages. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 136; VanderKam, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 20)

3. However, as scholars examined photographs of the scrolls and learned more about their discovery, more were convinced.

4. Agreement regarding the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls was still not universal.

5. Scholars debated the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls for several years. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 147)

6. According to Geza Vermes, "Nowadays the authenticity and antiquity of the Dead Sea Scrolls are no longer in dispute, indeed they are taken for granted." (Vermes, *Introduction*, 22)

D. The cave in which the Bedouin shepherds found the first of the DSS was not the only cave in the area of Qumran to contain ancient manuscripts.

1. More scrolls were later found in the first cave in which the first three scrolls were found. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 106)

2. Bedouins and the archaeologists separately searched the area around the ruins of Qumran, hoping to find more caves that contained manuscripts and other artifacts. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 148-149)

3. Between 1947 and 1956, eleven caves were found to contain fragments and or manuscripts, as well as other artifacts. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 3-18)

## II. The origin of the Dead Sea Scrolls

A. The first scholars to study the scrolls found evidence suggesting that they were very old. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 13-26, 29-37, 64)

1. None of the scrolls found in the eleven caves between 1947 and 1956 contain dates or direct reference to the occasion on which they were written. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 25; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 23)

2. The scholars who first tried to determine the age of the scrolls relied on paleography. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 22, 24, 26, and 27)

3. Archaeologists who explored the caves around Qumran found additional artifacts that pointed to the date of the scrolls. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 27-28, 31)

4. Two other methods used to determine the date of the scrolls is radiocarbon testing and accelerator mass spectrometry. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 27, 28, and 29)

5. Relying on paleography, radiocarbon tests, and accelerator mass spectrometry, scholars have placed the origin of most of the Dead Sea Scrolls between 200 BC and AD 70. A small group of texts may have originated as early as the third century BC. Scholars agree that most of the material in the Dead Sea Scrolls originated during the first century BC. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 11, 12, 31)

B. The location of the caves containing the scrolls raised suspicions about a connection between the scrolls and the ruins of Qumran. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 18)

1. Qumran is located on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, about eight miles south of Jericho. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 1)

2. Late in the fall of 1951, archaeologists began the first of six seasons exploring Qumran. (Trever, *Untold Story* 147)

3. Evidence uncovered during these explorations linked activity at Qumran with the scrolls. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 147)

4. By the end of 1952, the archaeological evidence convinced scholars that the content of the caves belonged to the residents of Qumran. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 150)

5. Most scholars believe that a group of Essenes lived at Qumran during at least one period of its history, and that the scrolls were their property. (Schiffman, "What Really are the Dead Sea Scrolls?" *Jewish Christian Relations*, 14 December 2002 <<http://jcrelations.net/article1/schiffman.htm>>; Vermes, *Introduction*, 12; citing Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*, 130, n. 17)

C. The scrolls originated within and outside the Qumran community. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 17)

1. Members of the Qumran community wrote some of the manuscripts. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 17)
2. People outside the community, some of whom predated the Qumran community, wrote some of the manuscripts. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 17)

### III. The contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls

A. The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of a number of manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts.

1. As of August 2002, the Dead Sea Scrolls were thought to contain 931 manuscripts. (Tov, Foreword to *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ix-x)
2. Emanuel Tov, Director of the Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project, cautions those who are inclined to count the number of manuscripts contained in the collection. (Tov, Foreword to *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ix-x)
3. Tov points out that many of the manuscripts contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls are fragments. (Tov, Foreword to *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ix-x)
4. Therefore, Tov warns, one may only approximate the number of manuscripts contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He estimates that the Dead Sea Scrolls consist of 350 "... independent compositions." (Tov, Foreword to *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ix-x)

B. The scrolls were written on three different materials.

1. Leather (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 27; Vermes, *Introduction*, 9)
2. Papyrus (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 27; Vermes, *Introduction*, 9)
3. Copper (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 27; Vermes, *Introduction*, 9)

C. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain biblical and non-biblical literature.

1. Every book of the Hebrew Bible is represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls except Esther. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 10)
2. Fragments of the entire Apocrypha are found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Apocrypha consists of "...religious works missing from the Hebrew Bible but included in the Septuagint." (Vermes, *Introduction*, 9; also see Trever, *Untold Story*, 158)
3. Pseudepigrapha is another genre of literature represented within the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are writings that "... though popular in some Jewish circles, failed to attain canonical rank either in Palestine or in the Diaspora." Some of the pseudepigraphical literature found in the caves was not known before its discovery here. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 10)

4. Some of the literature found in the caves is sectarian literature, that is, literature related to the community that possessed the scrolls. The sectarian literature includes "... rule books, Bible interpretation of various kinds, religious poetry, wisdom compositions in prose and in verse, sectarian calendars and liturgical texts ..." (Vermes, *Introduction*, 10; also see Trever, *Untold Story*, 158)

5. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain what Geza Vermes calls "... curious miscellanea." Under this category, Vermes places the Copper Scroll and a number of astrological type texts. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 10)

D. The scrolls were written in one of three languages.

1. Most of the scrolls were written in Hebrew. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 9)

2. Another group of scrolls were written in Aramaic. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 9)

3. Some scrolls were written in Greek. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 9; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 97)

## Lesson Two

### What is Qumran, and Who Lived There?

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I. The location of Qumran.

A. The ruins of Qumran are near Jericho. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 1)

1. They are found eight miles to the south of the city. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 1)

2. They are found on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 1)

B. The desert environment of Qumran is uninviting. (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 271-273)

1. It is hot.

2. It is dry.

C. The scene around the ruins of Qumran is dominated by the Dead Sea. (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 272-273; "Dead Sea," *Microsoft Encarta 2000*)

1. It is 1,340' below sea level.

2. It is 50 miles long and 11 miles wide.

3. It is fed by the Jordan River, which enters the lake on its northern end, and by several streams, most of which are on the east side.

4. It has no outlet.

5. It is a source of bitumen, potash, and minerals.

6. It prevents sinking.

7. It stinks.

## II. The inhabitants of Qumran.

A. The archaeologists who explored Cave 1 in 1949 suspected that the scrolls found in the cave were related to the nearby ruins of Qumran.

(Trever, *Untold Story*, 147)

1. The archaeologists explored Qumran and concluded that it was nothing more than a first-century AD Roman fort. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 147)

2. The archaeologists concluded that it was irrelevant to the scrolls. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 147)

B. The discovery of other caves closer to Qumran would later force archaeologists to reexamine the site.

1. Cave 4 is less than 500 m. from Qumran. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 44)

2. Caves 7, 8, and 9 are cut into the southern side of the plateau on which Qumran is located. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 44)

C. The archaeological evidence found in the caves around Qumran and at Qumran linked the scrolls found in the caves with the people who lived in this place. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 43, 44)

1. According to Jodi Magness, the pottery found in the caves matches the pottery found at Qumran. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 43)

2. Among the pottery found in the caves is a type of pottery that has been found in few other places in Palestine other than Qumran. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 44)

D. The people who lived at Qumran had a short but eventful history.

1. People first settled at Qumran between 100 and 50 BC. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 65)

2. In 31 BC, an earthquake damaged some of the buildings in the settlement. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 67; Josephus, *Jewish War*, 77-78)

3. The residents repaired the buildings that could be repaired. However, they did not clear away those buildings that were beyond repair. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 67)

4. A fire forced the residents of Qumran to briefly abandon the site no later than 9 or 8 BC, or shortly after. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 67)

5. The Qumran community returned to Qumran in or shortly after 4 BC. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 68)

6. The Qumran community inhabited Qumran until the summer of AD 68, when Roman soldiers under the command of Vespasian, the future emperor, destroyed it. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 68; Vermes, *Introduction*, 16; Trever, *Untold Story*, 160; Josephus, *Jewish War*, 270-272)

7. Following the conquest, a garrison of Roman soldiers occupied the site until AD 73. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 68, 5-63)

E. The "...correspondence..." between the archaeological, historical, and documentary evidence suggests that the Qumran community "... should be identified as Essenes." (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 43)

1. The archaeological evidence connects the scrolls found in the caves with the people who lived at Qumran.
2. The historical writings of Josephus, a Jew, and Pliny the Elder, a Roman, place a group of Essenes in this area at the time Qumran was inhabited.
3. The scrolls contain sectarian writings that reflect the beliefs and practices of the Essenes.

### III. The rule of the Qumran community.

A. Josephus describes three "... schools of thought ..." within Judaism in the first-century BC.

1. One of these was the Pharisees.
2. Another was the Sadducees.
3. The third was the Essenes.

B. The Essenes originated in the second century BC, when the "sons of Zadok" lost control of the priesthood. (Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran*, 36-37)

1. They rejected the Hasmonean dynasty.
2. They refused to worship in the Temple.
3. They withdrew to Qumran, led by the Teacher of Righteousness.

C. The Essenes created a community at Qumran that followed a strict, semi-monastic lifestyle dictated by the "Community Rule." (Wise, et. al., *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 122-143)

1. They joined the community through repentance and commitment.
2. They strove for purity.
3. They maintained strict discipline.
4. They concentrated on the study of Scripture.
5. They looked forward to the final battle between good and evil.
6. They believed that God would win the final battle.
7. They anticipated a future resurrection.
8. They held to a blessed hope.

D. However, the Essenes who lived at Qumran were not the only Essenes living in Palestine. (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 133, 137)

1. Josephus suggests the existence of Qumran communities throughout Palestine. (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 133)
2. Josephus also identifies a second group of Essenes who agreed with the first group in everything except marriage. (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 137)

## Lesson Three

What are the Controversies Surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls?

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### I. The authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls.

A. Early on, scholars theorized that the Dead Sea Scrolls originated in the late Second Temple Period. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 147; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 381)

B. When the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was announced to the world, many scholars were skeptical. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 381)

1. They did not want to be victims of a hoax.
2. Although some scholars rejected the Dead Sea Scrolls before all the evidence was available, most withheld final judgment.

C. After scholars had an opportunity to examine the evidence, they affirmed their colleagues' theory regarding the origin of the scrolls. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 381)

1. Paleography
2. Archaeology
3. Radio carbon dating

D. The evidence, however, did not convince everyone. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 381)

1. Solomon Zeitlin rejected the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls from the beginning.
2. Even after scholars published the evidence supporting the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls, he continued his protest.
3. Apparently, Zeitlin never accepted the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls.

### II. The publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

A. The scholars who worked with the first seven scrolls found near Qumran published the results of their research in a reasonable length of time. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 382)

1. This group of scholars knew that publication of the scrolls was essential.
2. All but a portion of one of the scrolls removed from Cave 1 were published within eight years of discovery.
3. Scholars had access to photographs, transcriptions, and, in some cases, introductory notes within a reasonable amount of time.

B. Manuscripts removed from Caves 2-3 and 5-11 were also published in an acceptable length of time. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 382)

1. The scrolls removed from Caves 2-3 and 5-6 in 1952 were published in 1962.



2. The scrolls removed from Caves 7-10 in 1955 were published in 1962.
  3. The scrolls removed from Cave 11 were published between the 1960s and 1980s.
- C. However, the publication of the material removed from Cave 4 in 1952 was frustratingly slow. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 385, 386, 388, 398)
1. Cave 4 contained the largest find.
  2. The condition of the Cave 4 materials did not allow them to be handled in the same manner as the materials removed from the other caves.
  3. In 1952, the Palestinian Archaeology Museum in East Jerusalem appointed Roland de Vaux to head an international and interdenominational editorial committee.
  4. Between 1953 and 1954, seven scholars were appointed to the editorial committee.
- D. The controversy regarding the publication of the material removed from Cave 4 centered on the editorial committee. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 6, 7; (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 383)
1. The editorial committee published the Dead Sea Scrolls at an excruciatingly slow pace. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 382)
  2. By the mid-1980s, scholars and other interested people were growing restless. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 389)
  3. Frustration over the pace at which the scrolls were published reached a crisis in 1991. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 389; Miller, "War of the Scrolls," 38)
  4. Publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls proceeded at a pace that silenced the impatient scholars. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 398)
- E. Several factors slowed the pace of publication. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 6; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 384-387)
1. The task was tedious.
  2. The editorial committee was understaffed.
  3. Regional politics slowed the project.
  4. The task suffered from "mission creep."
  5. The grant supporting some of the members of the editorial committee ran out in 1960.
  6. Tensions among the committee members distracted them from their work.

### III. The sensational interpretations.

- A. John Allegro's sacred mushroom cult (1970). (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 324)

In 1970, John Allegro published *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity Within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East*. “Allegro proposed that early Christianity was an orgiastic fertility cult that made use of a hallucinogenic mushroom containing the drug psilocybin. Moreover, Jesus never actually existed, but was invented by early Christians under the influence of this drug. (Two additional tidbits: the name *Jesus* means ‘Semen, which saves,’ and *Peter* means ‘mushroom.’) The absurdity of the allegations led fourteen prominent British scholars (including his mentor Godfrey Driver) to repudiate *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, and the publisher apologized for issuing the book.” (VanderKam/Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 324)

B. Barbara Thiering’s *riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1992). (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 326)

Barbara Thiering was lecturer at the Sydney University School of Divinity in Australia from 1967 to 1993. In her book *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, she “... understands the Gospels as coded Essene documents, which can be read on two levels. The events depicted in the Gospels are on the surface level, which is meant ‘for babes in Christ,’ whereas the real events that took place are on a deeper level, which can only be understood by her *peshar technique* ... Thiering maintains that her *peshar technique* is required to unlock the real meaning of the Gospels, thereby revealing the events that actually took place. This is because the New Testament was written in a cryptic code, with the aim of deliberately concealing historical events and persons.” (VanderKam/Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 326)

Thiering’s reading of the Gospels leads her to the following conclusions: “*John the Baptist* was the Teacher of Righteousness; *Jesus of Nazareth* is his opponent the Wicked Priest (also called the Man of the Lie); and the Essene group split into two factions, the first led by John (the Teacher) and the second by Jesus (the Wicked Priest).” (VanderKam/Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 326)

## Lesson Four

### Why Are the Dead Sea Scrolls Important?

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#### I. The Dead Sea Scrolls are important for the study of Jewish history during the Intertestamental Period.

A. The Dead Sea Scrolls do not provide significant information about general Jewish history, or the history of the Qumran community. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 15)

1. Allusions to historical events and figures are found in some of the writings belonging to the Qumran community. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 15)

2. However, as of yet, archaeologists have not found evidence of history books among the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 15)

B. The literature of the Qumran community adds to our understanding of Jewish history during the Intertestamental Period. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 19, 31)

1. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal the various ways Jews interpreted Jewish law and theology during the Intertestamental Period. (Schiffman, "What Really are the Dead Sea Scrolls?" 14 December 2002 <<http://www.jcrelations.net/article1/Schiffman.htm>>)

2. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the Messianic hope was almost universal among Jews during the Intertestamental Period. (Schiffman, "What Really are the Dead Sea Scrolls?" 14 December 2002 <<http://www.jcrelations.net/article1/Schiffman.htm>>)

3. The Dead Sea Scrolls add to scholars' knowledge about the origins of the Pharisees and the rabbinic tradition. (Schiffman, "What Really are the Dead Sea Scrolls?" 14 December 2002 <<http://www.jcrelations.net/article1/Schiffman.htm>>)

4. The Dead Sea Scrolls confirm the reports found in the writings of Josephus and later Rabbis regarding the origin of the rabbinic tradition. (Schiffman, "What Really are the Dead Sea Scrolls?" 14 December 2002 <<http://www.jcrelations.net/article1/Schiffman.htm>>)

#### II. The Dead Sea Scrolls are important for the study of the Old Testament.

A. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain all the books found in the Old Testament except Esther. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 119)

1. Their availability does not mean the Qumran community accepted them as Scripture. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 103)

2. The Jews did not canonize the books of the Hebrew Bible until the end of the first century AD. (VanderKam, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 156; “Bible,” *Microsoft Encarta*)
  3. Which manuscripts the Qumran community accepted as Scripture is not entirely clear. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 104)
- B. The Old Testament texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls have pushed back our knowledge about the Old Testament “... another one thousand years or more ...” (Vermes, *Introduction*, 172)
1. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has enabled scholars to learn more about the development of the Hebrew Bible. (Schiffman, “What Really are the Dead Sea Scrolls?” 14 December 2002 <<http://www.jcrelations.net/article1/Schiffman.htm>>; Trever, *Untold Story*, 157)
  2. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has also affirmed the accuracy of the standard Hebrew text from which we obtain our English translations. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 174-175; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 162)
- C. The variants between the biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls and the standard Hebrew text from which we obtain our English translations are minor. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 157; Vermes, *Introduction*, 174)
1. James VanderKam and Peter Flint report that “almost all modern English translations of the Old Testament are based on a single manuscript – the Leningrad, or St. Petersburg, Codex. Copied in 1008 or 1009 CE, this is our earliest complete example of the traditional Hebrew Bible, or Masoretic Text.” (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 87)
  2. The Masoretic Text is “... the standard text of the Hebrew Bible that was finalized by the Masoretes of Tiberias ...” (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 88)
  3. The Masoretes were scholars who copied the biblical text for liturgical and scholarly use between the early Christian centuries until the Middle Ages. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 88; “Bible,” *Microsoft Encarta*)
  4. The Masoretes added punctuation, vowel points, and notes to the text. (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 89; “Bible,” *Microsoft Encarta*)
  5. Although scholars have found variants between the biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text, the variants do not detract from the accuracy of the standard Hebrew text (Trever, *Untold Story*, 157), nor do they require changes in the translation of the Old Testament of such significance that they affect religious belief. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 174)
- D. The differences between the texts used by the Qumran community as Scripture and the Hebrew Bible cannot be ignored.

1. They have opened an entirely new era in the textual history of the Hebrew Scripture. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 14)
2. They provide new details about "... Jewish intellectual and religious history." (Vermes, *Introduction*, 175)

### III. The Dead Sea Scrolls are important for the study of the New Testament.

- A. In 1972, José O'Callaghan, claimed that fragments found in Cave 7 were from Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy, James, and 2 Peter. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 155; also see D. Estrada, and W. White, *The First New Testament*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978.)
- B. However, "... the Dead Sea Scrolls were written and copied too early to provide much information on the New Testament canon." (VanderKam, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 154)
- C. Furthermore, the fragments on which O'Callaghan based his thesis are difficult to read. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183)
- D. In the early 1990s, Carsten Thiede tried to convince scholars that O'Callaghan was correct, but none of the leading scholars working with the Dead Sea Scrolls have been persuaded to accept the thesis. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183; Munro, The Greek Fragments of Enoch from Qumran Cave 7 [7Q4, 7Q8, & 7Q12 = 7QEn gr = Enoch 103:3-4, 7-8] 16 February 2003 <<http://www.breadofangels.com/7qenoch/article1.html> #THE%20GREEK>)

### IV. The Dead Sea Scrolls are important for the study of early Christian history.

- A. Christians are interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls because the community that owned the scrolls existed at the time of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostles. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 158)
  1. Was John the Baptist an Essene?
  2. Did Jesus have contact with the Qumran community?
  3. Were the Apostles influenced in any way by the theology, practices, or organization of Qumran.
- B. According to Geza Vermes, Essenism and Christianity may be related in one of three ways. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 182-183)
  1. One, they may be the same.
  2. Two, Christianity may be an "... offshoot ..." of Essenism.
  3. Three, they were two separate movements arising out of the same cultural context.
- C. Vermes evaluates each of these possibilities. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183)
  1. He quickly dismisses the possibility that Essenism and Christianity are the same due to the differences in time and ideology, and the absence of fragments of New Testament documents at Qumran. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183)
  2. Almost as quickly, he dismisses the possibility that Christianity may be an offshoot of Essenism. Although he admits that this

theory is within the realm of possibility, it is unlikely for the same reasons that Essenism and Christianity are not the same. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183)

3. He agrees with those scholars who have theorized that Essenism and Christianity were two separate movements arising out of the same cultural context. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183)

D. Vermes' conclusion does not negate the possibility that Essenism influenced Christianity. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183)

1. At first glance, the beliefs of the Essenes and Christians appear similar at several points. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183-193)

2. However, further comparison believes that the beliefs of the Essenes and Christian differ at key points. (Vermes, *Introduction*, 183-193; Trever, *Untold Story*, 161-164)

E. Whatever influence Essenism may have had on early Christianity, Christianity quickly distinguished itself as a distinct movement. (Trever, *Untold Story*, 161)

“Anyone who may be concerned about the possibility that this discovery [the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls] may undermine the foundations of Christianity needs only to remember these simple facts: the Qumran community died; Christianity lives. A more important question is, Why did the Qumran community die, while Christianity lives? The answer seems to be found in the narrow focus of that ancient community's faith, with its intensely eschatological orientation: it was not broad enough to embrace the possibility of suffering and defeat. It is not the similarities between the Qumran sect and Christianity, therefore, upon which one should dwell, but rather the differences if he would gain the lesson this discovery teaches.” (Trever, *Untold Story*, 161)

### Selected Resources

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