

Why the Dead Sea Scrolls Matter

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Immediately after the conclusion of World War II, the Middle East reemerged as the center of political and religious attention when two significant discoveries that would revolutionize biblical studies were revealed to the world. The first being the Dead Sea Scrolls in Israel, and the second was the Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi, Egypt. The Gnostic literature greatly informed New Testament scholars of the mysterious sect's theology and revised account of the life of Christ and His disciples. However, nothing could compare to the accidental discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) which consists of hundreds of the oldest biblical texts comprised of every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther. The remarkable discovery of these Old Testament manuscripts led famed archaeologist William F. Albright to view them as the "greatest archaeological discovery of modern times."¹ Most would agree with Albright, however, this agreement would only come after one has grasped and appreciated their theological and apologetic value to the Church.

Discovering the Scrolls

In 1947, during Israel's struggle to be reborn as a nation after nearly 2000 years of dispersion, Muhammad Ed-Dhib, a beduin goat herder from the Ta'amirah bedouin tribe, discovered the first of several manuscript caches in a limestone cave at Qumran overlooking the shores of the Dead Sea. Eventually, Ed-Dhib delivered seven scrolls to Khalil Sahin, a Christian antiquities dealer in Bethlehem, who in turn sold three of them to E.L. Sukenik of Hebrew University. In 1949, the remaining four scrolls were sold to Mar Athanasius Samuel of the Syrian Jacobite Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem, who shortly after traveled to America. On June 1, 1954, Samuel runs an advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* offering for sale the four Dead Sea Scrolls. The ad was quickly brought to the attention of former Israeli military commander, Yigael Yadin, who was the son of Sukenik. Yadin, with the help of philanthropist, D.S. Gottesman, purchased the four scrolls for approximately \$250,000 and eventually returned them to Israel to be placed along side the other three scrolls purchased earlier by Sukenik. Today, the seven scrolls are displayed on a rotating basis in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum. These include two copies of Isaiah, Habakkuk Commentary, Thanksgiving Scroll, Community Rule, War Rule, and the Genesis Apocryphon.

The ensuing excavations at Qumran from 1951 through 1956 by the Director of the French Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem, Pere Roland De Vaux, yielded hundreds more manuscripts of various Old Testament books. The texts would eventually assist scholars in determining the *quality* of the Old Testament copying process known as "transmission." In addition to the biblical finds, the non-biblical text shed light on the beliefs and practices of Rabbinic Judaism during the time of Christ such as jurisprudence, conduct (*Halakhah*), and the Qumranite's unique theological perspective. Subsequent to the initial discoveries, and despite the Arab invasion of Israel in 1948, archaeologists continued to unearth several other interesting artifacts such as coins, pottery, cloth, sundials, gravesites, dwellings, phylacteries, furniture and building structures. Many of these items would eventually aid researchers to discover the age of the manuscripts and to understand the mysterious community of people at Qumran who were the custodians of the Scriptures.

¹ J.C. Trever, "The Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Biblical Archaeologist* 11 (September, 1948) 55

The Residents of Qumran

While scholars are reasonably certain of the number of inhabitants (150-200) who functioned as a monastic community, they are not absolutely convinced of the identity of those living at Qumran (aka Sokoka). Many believe they were “Essenes,” originally an Aramaic word (*hasayya*) meaning “the pious ones.” According to Roman historian, Pliny the Elder, the Essenes lived west of the Dead Sea and North of Ein Gedi² which is consistent with the view that identifies the Essenes as the inhabitants of Qumran. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, fixes their population in Israel at approximately 4000³ and adds that the sect was flourishing in the second-century BC during the time of the Macabees and Pharisees and continued until the destruction of the Jewish temple by the Romans in AD 70.⁴ Others reject this traditional view and see the Qumranites originating either as a reaction to the moral laxity of the priesthood during the Babylonian exile (sixth-century BC) or during the second-century BC as a group separated from a yet earlier (third-century BC) apocalyptic Essene community. Some speculate this schism was due to doctrinal, moral, interpretive, ritual, and calendrical differences, which may explain the apparent variations of doctrine and practice among those within the movement. Although none of their own texts describe the group as “Essenes,” but only as “pious” and “saints,” ancient authors such as Pliny the Elder, Philo of Alexandria, and Josephus identify them as either “pious,” “Essenes,” or “Essenians.”

Functionally, unlike the Sadducees who held political power and officiated daily in the Jerusalem temple, and the Pharisees who delighted in demonstrating personal virtue through pomp, the Essenes rejected the temple sacrifices and rituals. Instead, as a reaction to the priestly corruption in Jerusalem, they appear to be preoccupied with ritual cleansing and “separating themselves from the dwellings of the men of iniquity.”⁵ Their remote location in the arid desert and the presence of at least ten ritual cleansing pools excavated at the site attest to these practices. Theologically, while adopting holy behavior consistent with a mystical interpretation of the Law of Moses, the Essenes viewed life as a moral and spiritual struggle between the “Sons of Light” and the “Sons of Darkness.” This struggle would eventually climax in a messianic led war between good and evil, divine judgment and the new creation. Therefore, in preparation for that great apocalyptic day, prayers, meditation, reflection, praises, work, ritual purification, and the reading and/or development of new literature were daily activities. The extent to which the Essenes were involved in the copying of biblical manuscripts and the production of new literature remains a mystery and has been the center of debate for the last 60 years. However, support for Essene participation comes from the discovery of three *inkwells* found in the Essene scriptorium where most of their scrolls were stored. In close proximity to the inkwells, large rectangular stone library tables were unearthed and were most likely used for reading, unfolding, and copying. Furthermore, the discovery of hundreds of small flat clay saucer-bowl shaped receptacles may have been used for eating, or perhaps used as ink receptacles which would lend support to a manuscript-producing environment. Scholars have suggested a range of alternative theories attempting to explain the origin of the scrolls. Among these are suggestions that the scrolls were part of the Jerusalem temple library or authored by the various sects of Judaism.

² Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 5:17,4.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:18-22

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13:5-9

⁵ DSS: *Rule of the Community*, VIII.

In contrast to the Essene theory, there is a growing minority opinion among some archaeologists. According to Yizhak Magen and Yuval Peleg, who excavated the site from 1993 to 2003, Qumran was used as a pottery factory inhabited by only a few dozen workers. Magen sees no connection between the DSS and the Essenes or any other inhabitants of Qumran. Rather, the manuscripts were hidden in nearby caves by refugees who fled Jerusalem to escape the Roman invaders during the Jewish revolt in AD 66-70. He supports his theory by describing the evidence discovered at Qumran as being consistent with a pottery-manufacturing environment. For example, up to seven tons of clay deposits were discovered in many of the community's reservoirs and ritual baths (*mikva'ot*), unusually high amounts of industrial waste, tens of thousands of clay fragments, many pottery kilns along with fully formed vessels, and nearly 1400 coins were discovered which is consistent with a commercial atmosphere. But why store the scrolls at Qumran? For Magen, Qumran was the logical place since it lies directly on the route refugees would have taken from Jerusalem in order to arrive at the hilltop fortress of Masada. In fact, the clay jars used to store many of the scrolls were probably provided by the pottery factory, since refugees would not want to carry heavy clay storage containers during their hasty and long flight south to safety. According to this theory, it appears unlikely that the Essenes would have hidden the scrolls since many of the documents were haphazardly deposited in caves and without customary reverence. In addition, many of the DSS were discovered at various locations along the refugee escape route adjacent to the north-west end of the Dead Sea, including Masada.⁶

Deciphering the Scrolls

For the past sixty years, scholars have identified over 800 separate biblical and non-biblical texts that possess content unique to itself in complete, partial, or fragment form. Among them, every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther, and in the case of Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah multiple copies have been identified. Also included are portions of the Septuagint (i.e. Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), and even some apocryphal texts such as the *Book of Tobit* (Aramaic and Hebrew), *Letter of Jeremiah* (Greek), and the *Book of Ben Sira/Ecclesiasticus* (Hebrew) which are considered deuterocanonical by the Catholic Church. Of the complete biblical collection, however, only the Isaiah scroll has been preserved in its entirety and remains the oldest complete manuscript of any book of the Bible, being dated as early as the second-century BC.

According to Qumran specialist Farah Mebarki, a summary of the entire biblical and non-biblical collection can be organized by type, language, and category. Included among the types of literature are the scrolls, decomposed volumes, phylacteries, and mezuzot, consisting of tiny roles of parchment with passages from the Torah which are usually placed on the doorpost of a Jewish home or business. By arranging the texts according to language and writing, one can expect to see Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin in the form of a seal, cryptic writing which contains encoded Hebrew messages, and possibly Nabatean indigenous to the area of Petra (southern Jordan). Among the categories are texts from the Hebrew Bible, apocryphal and pseudopigraphal writings of the protestant Old Testament, and Essene or Qumranite literature. Among these fascinating scrolls are distinguishing characteristics that make each text unique and worthy of our

⁶ Magen and Peleg offer an answer to the Essene theory in their recent report in Katharina Galor, Jean-Baptiste Humbert and Jurgen Zangenberg, eds., *The Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 55-113.

consideration. According to Norman L. Geisler and William Nix, eleven caves yielded amazing biblically related discoveries:⁷

Cave 1: Of the two Isaiah scrolls (A and B) discovered, Isaiah A is the most well-preserved complete copy of any text, containing distinctive scribal notations above the line of text or in the margin. It is currently the oldest complete book of the Bible. The Isaiah B scroll is an incomplete copy of the latter half of the book that more closely resembles the medieval Masoretic Hebrew text than does Isaiah A. In addition to these major finds, fragments of Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, and a unique section of Daniel 2:4 where the language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic were collected.

Among the non-biblical literature discovered was a commentary on the book of Habakkuk containing the first two chapters of the book and a corresponding interpretation; the Manual of Discipline articulating the rules and regulations of the sect; the War Scroll which gives an account of preparation for the end-time war between the Essenes and their enemies; the Thanksgiving Hymns which contain thirty hymns resembling the Old Testament Psalms; and the Genesis Apocryphon which preserves the accounts of the Genesis patriarchs in Aramaic. What is more, fragments of books such as Enoch, Sayings of Moses, Book of Jubilee, Book of Noah, Testament of Levi, Tobit, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Further discoveries revealed fragmentary commentaries on Psalms, Micah, and Zephaniah

Cave 2: Though the second cave was not nearly as productive, by 1952 archaeologists uncovered hundreds of fragments including two of Exodus, one of Leviticus, four of Numbers, two of Deuteronomy, one of Jeremiah, Job, Psalms, and two of Ruth.

Cave 3: The same year excavations were occurring in cave 2, researchers discovered a unique text divided into two halves known as the Copper Scroll. According to the pioneering work of De Vaux, the fragile scroll is the only one of its kind discovered at Qumran since it is written on metal and contains unique Mishanic Hebrew text. Due to its fragile composition, X-ray examinations of the text revealed that the unique text describes at least sixty locations to various treasures hidden throughout Jericho, Qumran, and Jerusalem areas, none of which have been discovered. Shortly after the X-ray examinations researchers found it difficult to unroll the crumbling scrolls, opting to cut them from top to bottom into several long strips and displaying them at the Jordan Archaeological Museum in Amman.

Cave 4: This location is seen by many to be the most productive of the eleven caves, representing a good cross section of material since it produced nearly one hundred copies of Bible books, and at least 15,000 fragments. Included among these discoveries is one of the oldest known texts of biblical Hebrew, a fragment of the book of Samuel that dates to the third-century B.C. Other texts include commentaries on the Psalms, Isaiah, and Nahum. Interestingly, a fragment of Daniel 7:28 and 8:1 was discovered showing the transition of the Aramaic language back to the Hebrew.

Cave 5: Though not as productive for archaeologists, this site contained fragments of the apocryphal book Tobit and an assortment of decayed biblical books.

⁷ Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Revised and Expanded, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, 1986), 361-364.

Cave 6: Unlike most of the other discoveries, cave 6 yielded papyrus fragments of Daniel and I and II Kings.

Caves 7-10: In 1955, while nearing the end of excavations, archaeologists found very few items such as eighteen Greek fragments, one ostraca (clay shard with writing), along with materials used for the storing and bundling of scrolls.

Cave 11: Despite it being the last cave excavated in 1956, it produced a partial copy of the Psalms, including the apocryphal Psalm 151. As a result, scholars now possess thirty-six canonical texts ranging from Psalm 90 through 150, many of which are attributed to King David. Also found was a partial copy of Leviticus, Apocalypse of the New Jerusalem, and an Aramaic paraphrase (known as a “targum”) of Job. Furthermore, two of three non-biblical Temple Scrolls were discovered, which describe various themes relating to the temple in Jerusalem and the book of Deuteronomy such as laws addressing the construction of the temple, purity rules, regulations regarding judges, idolatry, slaves taken in war, curses, false prophets, incest, and betrayal. This scroll has also been recognized as the longest of the DSS measuring almost 28 feet in length.

Fortunately for the general public, and especially the Christian church, some of the biblical texts may be observed first hand at the San Diego Natural History Museum through December 31, 2007. It is particularly important for Christians to understand and appreciate the enormous testimony of Scripture the Lord has providentially preserved for our benefit, especially as it pertains to reliability of the Old Testament.

The Scrolls and Old Testament Reliability

When addressing the question of reliability we are essentially asking if the copying process (transmission) of biblical books through the centuries accurately preserved the original text known as the *autograph*. Since the originals have been lost, we rely on handwritten manuscript copies called *apographs* to form the basis of our modern English Old Testament. Consequently, we must address the crucial topic of whether our modern English translation of the Old Testament, as well as the Masoretic Hebrew text⁸ from which it was translated, is a trustworthy reflection of the originals. When answering this question, there are at least three areas worthy of consideration: dating, quantity of manuscripts, and the quality of the textual content. The issue of *dating* is vitally important since the longer the time interval between the original and the subsequent handwritten copy, the greater chance of corruption, interpolation, distortion, and embellishment exists. On the other hand, the shorter the interval implies greater chance of textual integrity. Moreover, a greater *quantity* of manuscripts assist scholars in cross-referencing and comparing texts that often originate from different groups of scribes (copiers) from various geographical locations. This is especially valuable since no two biblical manuscripts are identical, giving researchers adequate information to supply content from one manuscript to another that is lacking. When approaching the quality of *internal content* scholars must evaluate the substance of what is written. That is to say, if they are consistent with other manuscripts describing similar events, and there is no obvious evidence of distortion, contradiction, or factual error, then the text is deemed reliable.

⁸ The Masoretic Text (MT), from “masora” meaning “traditions,” is the body of Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) which was copied by several Jewish families from the 5th century AD to approximately AD 1000. These manuscripts provide the basis for translating our English Old Testament.

When applying these tests to the Old Testament there is no reason to doubt its trustworthiness. In fact, the Old Testament is among the most reliable documents of ancient history. There are several reasons for this conclusion. Prior to the DSS scroll discovery in 1947, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts available to scholars translating our English Old Testament was the Cairo Codex (AD 895) containing the former and latter prophets, the Aleppo Codex (AD 950) which contains the complete Hebrew text of the Old Testament, and the Codex Leningrad (AD 1008) containing the complete Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Though it is always helpful to have manuscripts of any date and number, these texts were 1300 to 2400 years removed from the originals, which left some scholars skeptical of the reliability of the transmission process. The discovery of the DSS changed this predicament in significant ways. First, the biblical texts have been dated as early as the third and second-century BC (e.g. Samuel and Isaiah) and as late as AD 68. These dates closed the interval gap from the originals by 1000 years. Second, textual evaluators analyzed the quality of internal content of the Isaiah A scroll making a startling discovery. They found the text is approximately 95% word for word identical to the medieval Masoretic text of Isaiah, with the remaining 5% difference being attributed to minor differences such as variations in spelling, word order and obvious slips of the pen.⁹ Similar types of evaluations were performed in varying degrees for all the biblical books of the Old Testament discovered at Qumran with essentially the same results. Gleason Archer declares that although fragments from Deuteronomy and Samuel “point to a different manuscript family from that which underlies our received Hebrew text do not indicate any differences in doctrine or teaching. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.”¹⁰ Furthermore, contributing evidence from early inscriptions such as the sixth-century BC Ketef Hinnom Silver Amulet,¹¹ Septuagint manuscripts and Chester Beatty Papyri converge to give confidence that scribes have accurately, even fanatically and zealously, preserved the entire Old Testament as it was originally written. The unbroken chain of manuscripts extending from the sixth-century BC and ending before mechanical type was developed in the AD 1400’s is ample evidence to give anyone confidence that God’s voice has been remarkably preserved through the centuries.

The evidence accumulated from archaeology this century has added to the already growing opinion that the people, places and events mentioned in the scrolls are historical. Recent discoveries of artifacts in Jordan and Israel have strongly suggested that many of the more “mythical” figures are actually historical. For example, in 2005 at Tel es-Safi (Gath), Aren Maeir of Bar-Ilan University unearthed a six inch pottery shard (ostraca) dating from the tenth-century BC with two Philistine names inscribed on the surface. Upon further study, the names appear to be etymologically similar/identical to the Philistine name of “Goliath.” Though we will never know if this shard is referring to *the* biblical Goliath, it does historically confirm that his name was in usage in Philistine territory during the time he and David fought their historic battle. Another difficult biblical figure was the controversial Balaam and his talking donkey mentioned in Numbers 22-24. Liberal scholars had previously been skeptical of his existence until 1967 when a lengthy plaster inscription was found in Deir Alla, Jordan, bearing his name. The inscription was discovered in an ancient building most likely destroyed during the great eighth-century BC

⁹ Archer Jr., Gleason L., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Revised and Expanded, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, 1974, 1994), 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The four inch long silver amulet is the oldest fragment of the Hebrew Bible which records the priestly benediction of Numbers 6:24-26. It was discovered by Gabriel Barkay in 1980 on the outskirts of Jerusalem overlooking the Valley of Hinnom as he excavated several 6th century BC tombs.

earthquake. After further analysis, epigraphers found that the black and red ink (for emphasis) was faded indicating the text was much older than the eighth-century BC, placing it closer to the time in which Balaam lived (1400 BC). The inscription reads in red ink: “Warnings from the book of Balaam son of Beor, a seer of the gods” (cf. Num 22:5). When examining all the archaeological and historical evidence supporting the Old and New Testament there are over 25,000 artifacts that either directly or indirectly affirm some aspect of the people, places, customs, laws, economics and daily life. In the Old Testament alone, there are over 60 biblical figures historically confirmed by archaeology or non-Christian historians.¹² These recent successes have posed a problem for scholars who deny the supernatural since many of these confirmed historical figures are interwoven within miraculous events.

The Scrolls and the New Testament

Usually the New Testament is not associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls since the vast majority of the texts were written in Hebrew and are copies of sectarian literature and various Old Testament books. However, of the eighteen Greek papyrus fragments found in cave 7, nine of them may be tiny portions of six New Testament books: the Gospel of Mark 4:28; 6:48; 6:52-53; Acts 27:38; Romans 5:11-12; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1,3, James 1:23-24; and 2 Peter 1:15. Since 1972, Spanish paleographer, Jose O’Callaghan, has championed the scholarship in support of identifying the fragments as belonging to the New Testament.¹³ He believes that most of the Greek fragments date from AD 50 to approximately AD 70, and only 1 Timothy dating to c. AD 100. According to O’Callaghan, each fragment, though very small, can be verbally and grammatically placed in the six books. If O’Callaghan’s conclusions are correct, the liberal dating scheme which places the formation of the New Testament *after* AD 70 must be completely revised to reflect earlier dates *prior* to AD 70. Moreover, since these fragments are *copies* and not originals, the autographs would be dated even earlier. The implications for New Testament scholarship, or more precisely, *liberal* scholarship is enormous. The changes would be nothing short of a paradigm shift calling for the erasure of nearly 150 years of negative critical literature on the subject. Why? Because they would have to conclude the New Testament is historical and written by eyewitnesses within a few decades of Christ’s death. Historians, myth writers and near eastern experts such as C.S. Lewis and D.J. Wiseman have concluded that even one generation is usually not enough time to allow myth and embellishment to contaminate the text. Another thorny issue for liberal scholars is the question of the supernatural since Matthew 24 contains clear predictions of the future. Because of these weighty implications and the minuscule texts available for analysis, O’Callaghan has been met with a flurry of opposition.¹⁴ Some have concluded the tiny fragments are much too small to give any certainty since only five complete words are clearly visible and several other fragments contain disconnected or partial letters.¹⁵ However, this is not entirely satisfying since on other occasions ancient texts have been confidently identified with less material. Besides, O’Callaghan

¹² For archaeological data related to the Bible see John McCray, *Bible Archaeology: An Exploration of the History and Culture of Early Civilizations*; Randal Price, *The Stones Cry Out*; Joseph M. Holden, *Archaeology and the Bible: A Pictorial Guide to the Amazing Discoveries of the Bible*.

¹³ O’Callaghan, Jose, “Papiros neotestamentarios en la cueva 7 de Qumran?” in *Biblica* 7:1 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972), 91-104. For the English translation see supplement to the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972), 1-14.

¹⁴ VanderKam, James and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 313-314.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

offers a plausible accounting for all the words and letters using normal rules of analysis. Some have calculated the odds of these letter sequences belonging to non-biblical texts at about 1 in 2.25 x 10⁶⁵,¹⁶ which is statistically impossible. Alternatively, many of the critical theories offering alternative explanations have had to change the number of letters on a line of an ancient text from the twenties to the sixties in order to make it fit which is highly unusual.¹⁷ Nevertheless, there are those who see the fragments as portions belonging to either the Septuagint, Apocrypha or 1 Enoch. Archer makes an insightful comment regarding the papyrus fragments when he notes that “only Christians used *papyrus* for their Scriptures, whereas the Jews preferred parchment or leather.”¹⁸ At this point, we may reasonably conclude that O’Callaghan’s conclusions are at the very least *possible* and at most *probable*. Below is an example of O’Callaghan’s accounting of one of the largest fragments of Mark 6:52-54 (7Q5).¹⁹

7Q5 Fragment (AD 50)²⁰

[⁵²For they did not]
 [understand] a[bout the loaves],
 [but t]heir [hearts were harden-]
 [e]d. ⁵³And [when they had] cr[ossed over],
 [they came to Ge]nnes[aret and]
 [moored the] b]oa[t. ⁵⁴And when they disem-]
 [barked from the boat, people straightaway]
 [recognized him.]

Mark 6:52-54

⁵²For they did not
 understand about the loaves,
 but their hearts were harden-
 ed. ⁵³And when they had crossed over,
 they came to the land at Gennesaret and
 moored the boat. ⁵⁴And when they disem-
 barked from the boat, people straightaway
 recognized him.

As a rule, experts who analyze such texts for a proposed reconstruction must accompany it with a known piece of literature that will accommodate all the words and letters and remain intelligible. O’Callaghan has accomplished this, whereas many of his critics have not. If his analysis of the letters are correct, and if they fit the text of Mark 6:52-54, it appears that there would be no reason to doubt his conclusions.

The Scrolls and History

In recent times the church has been challenged by the rise of religious fictions such as Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code* and the growth of radical scholarship reflected in Robert Funk’s Jesus Seminar. However, instead of rising up like Ireneus did in the second-century to combat Gnosticism, the ever-present temptation before the modern Church is to slump into an apathy which can only lead to greater biblical and historical illiteracy. This retreat seems to be a symptom stemming from a lack of understanding the crucial relationship between history and Christian doctrine. Not only is this understanding of importance in establishing biblical reliability, it is

¹⁶ Geisler, Norman L., *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 547.

¹⁷ Ibid. See Comparison of views with comments in VanderKam and Flint, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 316.

¹⁸ Archer Jr., Gleason L., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, 1974, 1994), 561. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁹ “7” means cave 7, “Q” means Qumran, and “5” means the fifth fragment catalogued. Comparison from VanderKam and Flint, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 315.

²⁰ Bold letters represent O’Callaghan’s translation of the Greek letters and words based on the Greek fragment 7Q5. The bracketed portions are missing from the fragment but are present in our English Bibles.

crucial doctrinally since many of the precious doctrines within Christianity are dependent upon historical events only known to us through an accurate reconstruction of the text. That is to say, since we cannot go back in time our historical knowledge and credibility is only as good as the biblical text in which it is revealed. For example, forgiveness is dependent upon Jesus dying on the cross *historically* in time and space (2 Cor 5:21) *as revealed in the Scriptures*. Justification before God depends on Christ's physical resurrection from a real historical tomb (1 Cor 15:12-19; Rom 4:25). In addition, the doctrine of marriage depends on the creation event of a historically real man and woman (Mt 19:1-4). Moreover, the certainty of Christ's resurrection is said to be as certain as Jonah's past history (Mt 12:40), and the functional order established in the church between man and woman is contingent upon the historical order of their respective creation (1 Tim 2:11-13). Without an accurate and reliable record to support these doctrines, Christianity in the eyes of others sinks into personal preference instead of reliable truth. In other words, God's redemptive history forms the basis on which Christian doctrine is objectively anchored. Certainly, history itself cannot save anyone, however, without God's redemptive plan unfolding *in history* we would never possess salvation, it would remain "theoretical." Though a complete knowledge of history is not necessary, it may help evangelistically or apologetically to render our faith *credible* and *believable* to those on the outside (1 Pet 3:15). Jesus' words to Nicodemus rings with fresh application to the importance and role of historical knowledge when He says "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). It appears that Jesus viewed confirmed history as a legitimate stepping stone justifying belief in the spiritual things (i.e. forgiveness, morality, afterlife, filling of the Spirit, etc) that cannot be tested by empirical means.

Knowledge of history yields a *practical* benefit, namely, a guard against *deception* and an *example* to follow (1 Cor 10:11; 1 Pet 2:21). It has been said that ignorance of the past makes one susceptible to repeat its mistakes. Unfortunately, a quick perusal of the Bible shows this to be true as it is strewn with those who made mistakes that could have been avoided. In another sense, history aids in understanding the meaning and significance of scripture. Each biblical writer had a cultural milieu and vocabulary that was influenced to some extent by the times in which he lived (1 Chronicles 12:32). Therefore, the degree to which we are familiar with the writer's vocabulary and practice will largely be determined by the degree to which we know the relevant historical background.

Knowledge of history also yields *spiritual* benefits. Being familiar with God's work among mankind is sure to build *faith* and help us grasp the lengths to which He will go to reveal His sacrificial love. Whether it is remembering God's deliverance of Noah's family from the flood; guiding Abraham on his journey with God; delivering Job from his afflictions; reestablishing Israel as a nation; or providing humanity with an acceptable sacrifice in Jesus Christ; it can only aid the believer in forming correct thoughts of our benevolent and wise God. A.W. Tozer rightly observes that "the most important thing about us is our concept of God," since our worship and faith can rise no higher than our thoughts we entertain of Him (Psalms 115:4-8).

In retrospect, due to the timing of the scrolls discovery it is not difficult to see God's loving hand being extended once again to Israel on the eve of their restoration to the land. It is as if God desired the Jewish nation to be spiritually reinvigorated through the reading and study of His Word in order to spark fresh perspective on crucial messianic passages and God's plan for them. Ironically, the only book that was *not* found was Esther, as if God wanted to say to the nation that he is not hidden from them but is able to deliver in the worst of circumstances. For both Christians and the general public, the coming of the DSS to our region of the world for the first time should

not be viewed merely as a “religiously” significant event, it is a *cultural* milestone with spiritual benefits. As any cultural event will attest it affords all people an opportunity to forge valuable common ground through appreciating the antiquity and remarkable preservation of the Scripture that has for centuries provided comfort and spiritual direction to millions. With this comes an opportunity to build bridges of communication with the community to discuss the content, influence, and faith of those who looked forward to Christ as the long awaited Messiah. It is my hope and prayer that any discussion on how clay jars preserved these remarkable scrolls will inevitably lead to deeper conversation of how the Messiah of the scrolls preserves men of clay.