

The Dead Sea Scrolls - Intro

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in eleven caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea between the years 1947 and 1956. The area is 13 miles east of Jerusalem and is 1300 feet below sea level. The mostly fragmented texts, are numbered according to the cave that they came out of. They have been called the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.

Only Caves 1 and 11 have produced relatively intact manuscripts. Discovered in 1952, Cave 4 produced the largest find. About 15,000 fragments from more than 500 manuscripts were found.

In all, scholars have identified the remains of about 825 to 870 separate scrolls.

Fragments of every book of the Hebrew canon (Old Testament) have been discovered except for the book of Esther. There are now identified among the scrolls, 19 copies of the Book of Isaiah, 25 copies of Deuteronomy and 30 copies of the Psalms .

Prophecies by Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Daniel not found in the Bible are written in the Scrolls.

The Isaiah Scroll, found relatively intact, is 1000 years older than any previously known copy of Isaiah. In fact, the scrolls are the oldest group of Old Testament manuscripts ever found.

In the Scrolls are found never before seen psalms attributed to King David and Joshua.

There are nonbiblical writings along the order of commentaries on the OT, paraphrases that expand on the Law, rule books of the community, war conduct, thanksgiving psalms, hymnic compositions, benedictions, liturgical texts, and sapiential (wisdom) writings.

The Scrolls are for the most part, written in Hebrew, but there are many written in Aramaic. Aramaic was the common language of the Jews of Palestine for the last two centuries B.C. and of the first two centuries A.D. The discovery of the Scrolls has greatly enhanced our knowledge of these two languages. In addition, there are a few texts written in Greek.

The Scrolls appear to be the library of a Jewish sect. The library was hidden away in caves around the outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66-70) as the Roman army advanced against the rebel Jews.

Near the caves are the ancient ruins of Qumran. They were excavated in the early 1950's and appear to be connected with the scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were most likely written by the Essenes during the period from about 200 B.C. to 68 C.E./A.D. The Essenes are mentioned by Josephus and in a few other sources, but not in the New testament. The Essenes were a strict Torah observant, Messianic, apocalyptic, baptist, wilderness, new covenant Jewish sect. They were led by a priest they called the "Teacher of Righteousness," who was opposed and possibly killed by the establishment priesthood in Jerusalem.

The enemies of the Qumran community were called the "Sons of Darkness"; they called themselves the "Sons of Light," "the poor," and members of "the Way." They thought of themselves as "the holy ones," who lived in "the house of holiness," because "the Holy Spirit" dwelt with them.

The last words of Joseph, Judah, Levi, Naphtali, and Amram (the father of Moses) are written down in the Scrolls.

One of the most curious scrolls is the Copper Scroll. Discovered in Cave 3, this scroll records a list of 64 underground hiding places throughout the land of Israel. The deposits are to contain certain amounts of gold, silver, aromatics, and manuscripts. These are believed to be treasures from the Temple at Jerusalem, that were hidden away for safekeeping.

The Temple Scroll, found in Cave 11, is the longest scroll. Its present total length is 26.7 feet (8.148 meters). The overall length of the scroll must have been over 28 feet (8.75m).

The scrolls contain previously unknown stories about biblical figures such as Enoch, Abraham, and Noah. The story of Abraham includes an explanation why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son Issac.

The scrolls are most commonly made of animal skins, but also papyrus and one of copper. They are written with a carbon-based ink, from right to left, using no punctuation except for an occasional paragraph indentation. In fact, in some cases, there are not even spaces between the words.

The Scrolls have revolutionized textual criticism of the Old Testament. Interestingly, now with manuscripts predating the medieval period, we find these texts in substantial agreement with the Masoretic text as well as widely variant forms.

Although the Qumran community existed during the time of the ministry of Jesus, none of the Scrolls refer to Him, nor do they mention any of His follower's described in the New Testament.

The major intact texts, from Caves 1 & 11, were published by the late fifties and are now housed in the Shrine of the Book museum in Jerusalem.

Since the late fifties, about 40% of the Scrolls, mostly fragments from Cave 4, remained unpublished and were inaccessible. It wasn't until 1991, 44 years after the discovery of the first Scroll, after the pressure for publication mounted, that general access was made available to photographs of the Scrolls. In the November of 1991 the photos were published by the Biblical Archaeological Society in a nonofficial edition; a computer reconstruction, based on a concordance, was announced; the Huntington Library pledged to open their microfilm files of all the scroll photographs.

The Scrolls From the Dead Sea have been the subject of intense public interest. Over the years questions have been raised about the scrolls' authenticity, about the people who hid them away, about the period in which they lived, about the secrets the scrolls reveal, and about the intentions of the scrolls' custodians in restricting access.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND BIBLICAL INTEGRITY

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Bible believers often are confronted with the charge that the Bible is filled with mistakes. These alleged mistakes can be placed into two major categories: (1) apparent internal inconsistencies among revealed data; and (2) scribal mistakes in the underlying manuscripts themselves. The former category involves those situations in which there are apparent discrepancies between biblical texts regarding a specific event, person, place, etc. [For a treatment of such difficulties see Archer, 1982; Geisler and Brooks, 1989, pp. 163-178]. The latter category involves a much more fundamental concern—the integrity of the underlying documents of our English translations. Some charge that the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts, having been copied and recopied by hand over many years, contain a plethora of scribal errors that have altered significantly the information presented in the original documents. As such, we cannot be confident that our English translations reflect the information initially penned by biblical writers. However, the materials discovered at Qumran, commonly called the Dead Sea Scrolls, have provided impressive evidence for both the integrity of the Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts of the Old Testament and the authenticity of the books themselves.

DATE OF THE MATERIALS

When the scrolls first were discovered in 1947, scholars disputed their dates of composition. Scholars now generally agree that although some materials are earlier, the Qumran materials date primarily to the Hasmonean (152-63 B.C.) and early Roman periods (63 B.C.-A.D. 68). Several strands of evidence corroborate these conclusions.

First, archaeological evidence from the ruins of the Qumran community supports these dates. After six major seasons of excavations, archaeologists have identified three specific phases of occupation at the ancient center of Qumran. Coinage discovered in the first stratum dates from the reign of Antiochus VII Sidetes (138-129 B.C.). Such artifacts also indicate that the architecture associated with the second occupational phase dates no later than the time of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.). Also reflected in the material remains of the site is the destruction of its buildings in the earthquake reported by the first-century Jewish historian, Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.5.2). Apparently, this natural disaster occurred around 31 B.C. a position that prompted the occupants to abandon the site for an indeterminate time. Upon reoccupation of the area—the third phase—the buildings were repaired and rebuilt precisely on the previous plan of the old communal complex. The community flourished until the Romans, under the military direction of Vespasian, occupied the site by force (see Cross, 1992, pp. 21-22). Such evidence is consistent with the second century B.C. to first-century A.D. dates for the scrolls.

The second strand of evidence is that the generally accepted dates for the scrolls are corroborated by palaeographical considerations. Palaeography is the study of ancient writing and, more specifically, the shape and style of letters. Characteristic of ancient languages, the manner in which Hebrew and Aramaic letters were written changed over a period of time. The trained eye can determine, within certain boundaries, the time frame of a document based upon the shape of its letters. This is the method by which scholars determine the date of a text on palaeographical grounds. According to this technique, the scripts at Qumran belong to three periods of palaeographical development: (1) a small group of biblical texts whose archaic style reflects the period between about 250-150 B.C.; (2) a large cache of manuscripts, both biblical and non-biblical, that is consistent with a writing style common to the Hasmonean period (c. 150-30 B.C.); and (3) a similarly large number of texts that evinces a writing style characteristic of the Herodian period (30 B.C.-A.D. 70). This linguistic information also is consistent with the commonly accepted dates of the Qumran materials.

Finally, as an aside, the carbon-14 tests done on both the cloth in which certain scrolls were wrapped, and the scrolls themselves, generally correspond to the palaeographic dates. There are, however, some considerable differences. Due to the inexact nature of carbon-14 dating techniques (see Major, 1993), and the possibility of chemical contamination, scholars place greater confidence in the historically corroborated palaeographic dates (see Shanks, 1991, 17[6]:72). At any rate, the archaeological and linguistic data provide scholars with reasonable confidence that the scrolls date from 250 B.C. to A.D. 70.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SCROLLS

While the importance of these documents is multifaceted, one of their principle contributions to biblical studies is in the area of textual criticism. This is the field of study in which scholars attempt to recreate the original content of a biblical text as closely as possible. Such work is legitimate and necessary since we possess only copies (apographs), not the original manuscripts (autographs) of Scripture. The Dead Sea Scrolls

are of particular value in this regard for at least two reasons: (1) every book of the traditional Hebrew canon, except Esther, is represented (to some degree) among the materials at Qumran (Collins, 1992, 2:89); and (2) they have provided textual critics with ancient manuscripts against which they can compare the accepted text for accuracy of content.

THE SCROLLS AND THE MASORETIC TEXT

This second point is of particular importance since, prior to the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts, the earliest extant Old Testament texts were those known as the Masoretic Text (MT), which dated from about A.D. 980. The MT is the result of editorial work performed by Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes. The scribes' designation was derived from the Hebrew word *masora*, which refers collectively to the notes entered on the top, bottom, and side margins of the MT manuscripts to safeguard traditional transmission. Hence, the Masoretes, as their name suggests, were the scribal preservers of the *masora* (Roberts, 1962, 3:295). From the fifth to the ninth century A.D., the Masoretes labored to introduce both these marginal notes and vowel points to the consonantal text—primarily to conserve correct pronunciation and spelling (see Seow, 1987, pp. 8-9).

Critical scholars questioned the accuracy of the MT, which formed the basis of our English versions of the Old Testament, since there was such a large chronological gap between it and the autographs. Because of this uncertainty, scholars often “corrected” the text with considerable freedom. Qumran, however, has provided remains of an early Masoretic edition predating the Christian era on which the traditional MT is based. A comparison of the MT to this earlier text revealed the remarkable accuracy with which scribes copied the sacred texts. Accordingly, the integrity of the Hebrew Bible was confirmed, which generally has heightened its respect among scholars and drastically reduced textual alteration.

Most of the biblical manuscripts found at Qumran belong to the MT tradition or family. This is especially true of the Pentateuch and some of the Prophets. The well-preserved Isaiah scroll from Cave 1 illustrates the tender care with which these sacred texts were copied. Since about 1700 years separated Isaiah in the MT from its original source, textual critics assumed that centuries of copying and recopying this book must have introduced scribal errors into the document that obscured the original message of the author.

The Isaiah scrolls found at Qumran closed that gap to within 500 years of the original manuscript. Interestingly, when scholars compared the MT of Isaiah to the Isaiah scroll of Qumran, the correspondence was astounding. The texts from Qumran proved to be word-for-word identical to our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted primarily of obvious slips of the pen and spelling alterations (Archer, 1974, p. 25). Further, there were no major doctrinal differences between the accepted and Qumran texts (see Table 1 below). This forcibly demonstrated the accuracy with which scribes copied sacred texts, and bolstered our confidence in the Bible's textual integrity (see Yamauchi, 1972, p. 130). The Dead Sea Scrolls have increased our confidence that faithful scribal transcription substantially has preserved the original content of Isaiah.

TABLE 1. QUMRAN VS. THE MASORETES

Of the 166 Hebrew words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters in Dead Sea Scroll 1QIs^b differ from the Masoretic Text (Geisler and Nix, 1986, p. 382).

10 letters = spelling differences

4 letters = stylistic changes

3 letters = added word for “light” (vs. 11)

17 letters = no affect on biblical teaching

CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP, DANIEL, AND THE SCROLLS

The Qumran materials similarly have substantiated the textual integrity and authenticity of Daniel. Critical scholarship, as in the case of most all books of the Old Testament, has attempted to dismantle the authenticity of the book of Daniel. The message of the book claims to have originated during the Babylonian exile, from the first deportation of the Jews into captivity (606 B.C.; Daniel 1:1-2) to the ascension of the Persian Empire to world dominance (c. 536 B.C.; Daniel 10:1). This date, however, has been questioned and generally dismissed by critical scholars who date the final composition of the book to the second century B.C. Specifically, it is argued that the tales in chapters 1-6 as they appear in their present form can be no earlier than the Hellenistic age (c. 332 B.C.). Also, the four-kingdom outline, explicitly stated in chapter 2, allegedly requires a date after the rise of the Grecian Empire. Further, these scholars argue that since there is no explicit reference to Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-164 B.C.), a Seleucid king clearly under prophetic consideration in chapter 11, a date in the late third or early second century B.C. is most likely (see Collins, 1992a, 2:31; Whitehorne, 1992, 1:270).

The apparent reason for this conclusion among critical scholars is the predictive nature of the book of Daniel. It speaks precisely of events that transpired several hundred years removed from the period in which it claims to have been composed. Since the guiding principles of the historical-critical method preclude a transcendent God’s intervening in human affairs (see Brantley, 1994), the idea of inspired predictive prophecy is dismissed *a priori* from the realm of possibility. Accordingly, Daniel could not have spoken with such precision about events so remote from his day. Therefore, critical scholars conclude that the book was written actually as a historical record of events during the Maccabean period, but couched in apocalyptic or prophetic language. Such conclusions clearly deny that this book was the authentic composition of a Daniel who lived in the sixth century B.C., that the Bible affirms.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have lifted their voice in this controversy. Due to the amount of Daniel fragments found in various caves near Qumran, it appears that this prophetic book was one of the most treasured by that community. Perhaps the popularity of Daniel was

due to the fact that the people of Qumran lived during the anxious period in which many of these prophecies actually were being fulfilled. For whatever reason, Daniel was peculiarly safeguarded to the extent that we have at our disposal parts of all chapters of Daniel, except chapters 9 and 12. However, one manuscript (4QDan^c; 4 = Cave 4; Q = Qumran; Dan^c = one of the Daniel fragments arbitrarily designated “c” for clarification), published in November 1989, has been dated to the late second century B.C. (see Hasel, 1992, 5[2]:47). Two other major documents (4QDan^b, 4QDan^a) have been published since 1987, and contribute to scholarly analysis of Daniel. These recently released fragments have direct bearing on the integrity and authenticity of the book of Daniel.

INTEGRITY OF THE TEXT

As in the case of Isaiah, before Qumran there were no extant manuscripts of Daniel that dated earlier than the late tenth century A.D. Accordingly, scholars cast suspicion on the integrity of Daniel’s text. Also, as with Isaiah, this skepticism about the credibility of Daniel’s contents prompted scholars to take great freedom in adjusting the Hebrew text. One reason for this suspicion is the seemingly arbitrary appearance of Aramaic sections within the book. Some scholars had assumed from this linguistic shift that Daniel was written initially in Aramaic, and then some portions were translated into Hebrew. Further, a comparison of the Septuagint translation (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) with the MT revealed tremendous disparity in length and content between the two texts. Due to these and other considerations, critical scholars assigned little value to the MT rendition of Daniel.

Once again, however, the findings at Qumran have confirmed the integrity of Daniel’s text. Gerhard Hasel listed several strands of evidence from the Daniel fragments found at Qumran that support the integrity of the MT (see 1992, 5[2]:50). First, for the most part, the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts of Daniel are very consistent in content among themselves, containing very few variants. Second, the Qumran fragments conform very closely to the MT overall, with only a few rare variants in the former that side with the Septuagint version. Third, the transitions from Hebrew to Aramaic are preserved in the Qumran fragments. Based on such overwhelming data, it is evident that the MT is a well-preserved rendition of Daniel. In short, Qumran assures us that we can be reasonably confident that the Daniel text on which our English translations are based is one of integrity. Practically speaking, this means that we have at our disposal, through faithful translations of the original, the truth God revealed to Daniel centuries ago.

DATE OF THE BOOK

The Daniel fragments found at Qumran also speak to the issue of Daniel’s authenticity. As mentioned earlier, conventional scholarship generally places the final composition of Daniel during the second century B.C. Yet, the book claims to have been written by a Daniel who lived in the sixth century B.C. However, the Dead Sea fragments of Daniel present compelling evidence for the earlier, biblical date of this book.

The relatively copious remains of Daniel indicate the importance of this book to the Qumran community. Further, there are clear indications that this book was considered

“canonical” for the community, which meant it was recognized as an authoritative book on a par with other biblical books (e.g., Deuteronomy, Kings, Isaiah, Psalms). The canonicity of Daniel at Qumran is indicated, not only by the prolific fragments, but by the manner in which it is referenced in other materials. One fragment employs the quotation, “which was written in the book of Daniel the prophet.” This phrase, similar to Jesus’ reference to “Daniel the prophet” (Matthew 24:15), was a formula typically applied to quotations from canonical Scripture at Qumran (see Hasel, 1992, 5[2]:51).

The canonical status of Daniel at Qumran is important to the date and authenticity of the book. If, as critical scholars allege, Daniel reached its final form around 160 B.C., how could it have attained canonical status at Qumran in a mere five or six decades? While we do not know exactly how long it took for a book to reach such authoritative status, it appears that more time is needed for this development (see Bruce, 1988, pp. 27-42). Interestingly, even before the most recent publication of Daniel fragments, R.K. Harrison recognized that the canonical status of Daniel at Qumran militated against its being a composition of the Maccabean era, and served as confirmation of its authenticity (1969, p. 1126-1127).

Although Harrison made this observation in 1969, over three decades before the large cache of Cave 4 documents was made available to the general and scholarly public, no new evidence has refuted it. On the contrary, the newly released texts from Qumran have confirmed this conclusion. The canonical acceptance of Daniel at Qumran indicates the antiquity of the book’s composition—certainly much earlier than the Maccabean period. Hence, the most recent publications of Daniel manuscripts offer confirmation of Daniel’s authenticity; it was written when the Bible says it was written.

A final contribution from Qumran to the biblically claimed date for Daniel’s composition comes from linguistic considerations. Though, as we mentioned earlier, critical scholars argue that the Aramaic sections in Daniel indicate a second-century B.C. date of composition, the Qumran materials suggest otherwise. In fact, a comparison of the documents at Qumran with Daniel demonstrates that the Aramaic in Daniel is a much earlier composition than the second-century B.C. Such a comparison further demonstrates that Daniel was written in a region different from that of Judea. For example, the Genesis Apocryphon found in Cave 1 is a second-century B.C. document written in Aramaic—the same period during which critical scholars argue that Daniel was composed. If the critical date for Daniel’s composition were correct, it should reflect the same linguistic characteristics of the Genesis Apocryphon. Yet, the Aramaic of these two books is markedly dissimilar.

The Genesis Apocryphon, for example, tends to place the verb toward the beginning of the clause, whereas Daniel tends to defer the verb to a later position in the clause. Due to such considerations, linguists suggest that Daniel reflects an Eastern type Aramaic, which is more flexible with word order, and exhibits scarcely any Western characteristics at all. In each significant category of linguistic comparison (i.e., morphology, grammar, syntax, vocabulary), the Genesis Apocryphon (admittedly written in the second century B.C.) reflects a much later style than the language of Daniel (Archer, 1980, 136:143; cf. Yamauchi, 1980). Interestingly, the same is true when the Hebrew of Daniel is compared

with the Hebrew preserved in the Qumran sectarian documents (i.e., those texts composed by the Qumran community reflecting their peculiar societal laws and religious customs). From such linguistic considerations provided by Qumran, Daniel hardly could have been written by a Jewish patriot in Judea during the early second-century B.C., as the critics charge.

CONCLUSION

There are, of course, critical scholars who, despite the evidence, continue to argue against the authenticity of Daniel and other biblical books. Yet, the Qumran texts have provided compelling evidence that buttresses our faith in the integrity of the manuscripts on which our translations are based. It is now up to Bible believers to allow these texts to direct our attention to divine concerns and become the people God intends us to be.

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