

Dead Sea Scrolls

Dead Sea Scrolls

In January of 1947, three Bedouin boys were tending to their sheep and goats in a desert area just northwest of the Dead Sea. At that time, that area was part of British Palestine. Britain had won the area known as Palestine from the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) in WW I

Some goats had wandered into a cave on the side of a hill, and one of the boys started throwing rocks in there to run them out. To his surprise he heard a pinging sound that made him think the rocks were hitting something special in the cave, like a treasure of some kind. It was getting late so they decided to come back the next day to investigate. The youngest, Mohammed Ahmed el-Hamed, rose early before the others, and ran out to climb down into the cave. Along the wall of the cave stood a bunch of pottery jars with bowl shaped covers. He pried open the jars, but found no gold or silver, only bundles of parchment wrapped in linen cloth. What he did not understand was that he had found the greatest ancient manuscript treasure of all time. He had found the first seven manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The question people are still trying to unravel today is, "How did those scrolls get from young Bedouin goat herders to the museum known as the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem today?" We know that the Bedouins sold the scrolls to two different Arab antiquities dealers in Bethlehem for very little money, just the price of paper. Four of the scrolls were then sold to a guy named Athanasius Samuel at the St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem. The other three were sold to E.L. Sukenik, an archeologist at Hebrew University. Athanasius Samuel took his to be examined by scholars at the American School of Oriental Research. Archeologists there photographed them and announced that the scrolls dated back to 200 BC. Athanasius sensed they were worth a lot of money so he took them to America, and on June 1, 1954 he placed an ad in the Wall Street Journal offering "The Four Dead Sea Scrolls" for sale. Professor Sukenik, who had possession of the other three scrolls, had been tracking down, and trying to obtain those four as well. Through intermediaries, he was able to purchase them for \$250,000. A New York philanthropist named D.S. Gottesmaan put up most of the money with the agreement that the scrolls would be given to the Israel Museum. His heirs also put up the money to build the museum. In 1955, the Prime Minister of Israel announced that Israel had possession of the seven scrolls which would be studied and put in a special museum. The original seven scrolls now at the Shrine of the Book Museum in Jerusalem, are two manuscripts of Isaiah, a commentary on Habakkuk, the Thanksgiving Scroll, the Community Rule Book, the War Rule (apocalyptic literature), and a paraphrase of Genesis in Aramaic.

Just the Beginning

Locating the cave site and searching for additional scrolls was delayed for two years by the conflict between the Arabs and Jews. The area NW of the Dead Sea was still in British hands when the boys found those caves, but later in 1947, the United Nations issued its Partition Plan for Palestine. Britain decided after WW II that it wanted out of the area. At that time Palestine consisted of what is now Israel, Jordan, and part of Syria. The United Nations created what is now Jordan out of British Palestine. Jordan included the area west of the Dead Sea including Jerusalem and what is now called "the west bank", which refers to all the area west of the Jordan River. The United Nations gave Israel a small sliver of land where Tel Aviv is now. All the Arab nations then declared war on Israel in 1948 and invaded. Nevertheless, Israel survived. The area where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered remained in Jordan's hands until the 1967 war. As a result of the 1967 "six day war", the Israel Defense forces occupied Judea and Samaria (the west bank), the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. Part of Judea was Jerusalem and the area NW of the Dead Sea where the scrolls were found. After the 1948 war was over, the search for the caves where the Bedouins had said they found the scrolls was begun, but it had to be done by the Jordanian Antiquities Department. In 1949 the cave site was finally identified by the Jordanian representatives, G. Lankester Harding and Pere Roland de Vaux. Excavation at the original cave yielded over seventy fragments, many from the original seven scrolls. They also recovered many archeological artifacts attesting to the early dates of the scrolls. Meanwhile the Bedouins were busy searching for new caves, and the unauthorized material they were coming up with proved that other caves and other scrolls existed. Between 1951 and 1956 there was frantic activity in searching for caves, scrolls, and artifacts. Eventually hundreds of caves were searched, but only a total of eleven caves yielded manuscripts. Five of these were found by Bedouins, and six were found by archeologists

Cave 2 was discovered by Bedouins, and contained about 300 fragments including some of what we call the Old Test. Apocrypha like Jubilees and Ben Sirach. Unfortunately the Bedouins were not careful, and once you unwrap ancient papyrus or parchment it begins to disintegrate. The most intriguing scroll was found in cave 3. It was engraving on rolled up copper. The Copper Scroll records a list of 64 underground hiding places in Israel containing gold, silver, and manuscripts. Cave 4 had 15,000 fragments from 500 different texts, therefore this cave yielded the biggest haul of the 11 caves. Caves 5-11 produced modest finds although cave 11 held the Temple scroll, so called because it pertains to the Temple in Jerusalem and is the longest scroll of all at 29 feet. With the exception of cave 4, the other documents were published in a prompt manner for public inspection by 1965. Cave 4 documents were entrusted to an international team that operated under a so-called "secrecy rule" that only allowed members of the team to view the documents. The secrecy rule was clandestinely broken by Ben Zion Wacholder's publication in 1991, and by the set of photographs published by the Huntington Library in California. Israeli textual scholar Emanuel Tov published the cave 4 documents in 1995. The scrolls that are not in the Shrine of the Book Museum are housed at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, the home of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Who Were Those Guys ?

The archeologists gradually realized the need to identify the people who stored the scrolls as well as a habitation site close to the caves. They found the ruins of Qumran which was about 80 by 100 meters. The structures were communal in character meaning the stores of food and water and meeting places. Archeological evidence indicates Qumran was founded in the second half of the second century BC. It was abandoned about the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. The scrolls themselves are carbon 14 dated from 300 to 100 BC. From the very beginning of the discovery, Professor Sukenik advocated the now accepted theory that the scrolls were remnants of the library of the Essenes. Our information on the Jewish sect called the Essenes is provided by their contemporary historians, Josephus, Philo, and Pliny the Elder. Josephus wrote about the political/religious divisions of the Jews being in three orders: the Saducees, Pharisees, and the Essenes. The Essenes were a separatist group, part of which formed an ascetic monastic like community in the wilderness. The word Essenes is never used in the Dead Sea Scrolls, instead they refer to themselves as Judah, but they divide Israel into Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah. It seems clear in their writings that Ephraim and Manasseh refer to the Saducees and Pharisees, therefore the Essenes referred to themselves as Judah. Pliny the Elder wrote that the location of the sect known as Essenes was in the Dead Sea area. The principles of Essene way of life are found in the scrolls, and the communal ascetic way of life proven by archeology conforms to Essene rules.

So What Have We Got ?

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a large collection of hundreds of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts consisting of leather and papyrus scrolls which are in a varying state of preservation. The scrolls consist of two complete books of Isaiah, fragments of every book in the Old Test. except Esther, manuals of discipline, hymnbooks, commentaries, and apocalyptic writings. There are also several books of the Apocrypha like Tobit, Sirach, Jubilees, and Enoch. The documents were written (copied) between 200 BC and 68 AD.

Intrigue and Mystery: Indiana Jones

The Copper Scroll found in cave 3 at Qumran is one of archeology's most interesting and mysterious documents. In 1952 archeologists found 14 scrolls in cave 3, but in the very back of the cave, alone were two copper rolls off by themselves. They could not unroll them because they were over 2000 years old and corroded. The Jordan Department of Antiquities took possession of the copper scrolls, and has them still. It took five years for them to decide to try and cut the scrolls into sections so they could examine them. It then became clear that the scrolls were part of the same document. There is Hebrew engraving in the copper, but it has proven difficult to work with. Many photographs have been taken, and examined by experts. The text is a listing of 64 locations, 63 of which are buried treasures of gold and silver. The 64th listing gives directions to another document called the Silver Scroll which is a document that has more complete information on the treasures. Unfortunately archeologists are still searching for the Silver Scroll with the needed details of the treasure. The 63 listings of gold and silver add up to tons of gold and silver estimated in value in the area of two billion dollars. It is theorized that this was done in copper so that it would last a longer time than parchment. The directions are difficult because the writers assumed a knowledge of local people and places. For instance one listing says, "In the cistern of Shaveh, in the outlet that is in it, buried at eleven cubits is 70 talents of silver. In the cave next to the fountain belonging to Hakkoz, dig six cubits for six bars of gold." Anybody know Shaveh or Hakkoz? We could get rich! Some think the Copper Scroll is a hoax, a joke, but don't forget who you are dealing with here---the Essenes were serious hyper religious, ascetic people with no sense of humor.

Possibilities: 1. It was normal well known behavior for city leaders, when their walled city was under siege by a powerful enemy, to hide the wealth of the city. Therefore the treasure could be that of the Second Temple which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. However, the historian Josephus stated that the main treasure of the Temple was still in the building when it fell to the Romans.

2. The treasure could be from the First Temple built by Solomon. The descriptions in the O.T. of his wealth were more than enough to add up to the amounts listed on the scroll. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in 587-8, and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC. Many problems exist with this theory. Why weren't the treasures uncovered when the Jews came back in 537 BC ? Perhaps the scroll was left in the cave during the Babylonian Exile and never recovered.

3. Perhaps Joel Rosenberg has the answers in his novel, THE COPPER SCROLL published in 2006. His theory is that the treasures will be found in the End Times to refurbish the Third Temple. The Silver Scroll which is the 64th listing will provide the clues to find the Ark of the Covenant

The Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls

The most significant part of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the many ancient Biblical manuscripts which were discovered. Before this discovery, the oldest Old Test. Hebrew manuscripts we had were the Masoretic Texts from the 9th century AD. Therefore, there was at least a thousand year gap between the copies we were using to translate our Bibles from and these new discoveries. Scholars could not wait to examine them and compare them to the Masoretic Text. Amazingly these manuscripts were almost identical, and any differences did not change the meaning of the text. We can have confidence that our Old Testament faithfully represents the words written by the original authors. The Masoretic Text was copied by a group of Jews known as the Masoretes who distributed the Old Test. between the 7th and 10th centuries AD from schools in Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee.

Before this great discovery, critics were saying that the Bible had been changed after the time of Christ to make it appear that the prophets like Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah had written their prophecies about Jesus after the fact. Others said Isaiah did not write Isaiah, but sure enough on the copies of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Isaiah is the author and nothing of any significance had been changed or added. It is a great testimony to the care and skill of the Jewish scribes, but most of all it is a testimony to the provenance of God to give us assurance that the many prophecies were fulfilled like, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, by His scourging we are healed. All of us have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."(Isa.53:5-6)

CHARLIE TAYLOR