

# HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

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## PART FOUR

### RECENT DISCOVERIES

#### CHAPTER NINETEEN

#### THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Bedouin Arabs, who were carrying goods from Jordan Valley to Bethlehem, noticed a cave high up on the cliffs at the north end of the Dead Sea. They explored the cave and found some old jars containing scrolls wrapped in cloth and sealed with pitch. The Arabs after tearing off the wrappings took the scrolls, their only interest being that they might sell them to somebody and make money on the deal. 1

*Their disposition.* The Arabs contacted museum dealers and did everything they could to capitalize on their find. The results were that these precious documents did not all go to the same place. Most of them, however, came into the possession of two institutions. Some of the scrolls and fragments of scrolls were sold to the Hebrew University at Jerusalem, where they were examined by Professor Sukenik. Others were sold to a Syrian Orthodox Convent at Jerusalem, to be added to the convent's library of old books. 2

*How the world heard about the discovery.* In the spring of 1948 one of the priests from the convent took some of the old documents to the American School of Oriental Research at Jerusalem to get help in determining their age that they might be properly catalogued in the convent library. John C. Trever, acting director of the school at the time, examined the scrolls and discovered that the larger one was a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah in ancient Hebrew. Believing the documents to be very old, he secured permission to photograph the scrolls, sending prints of these to Dr. W. F. Albright, the noted archaeologist, who was at that time in America. An air-mail letter came back reading, "My heartiest congratulations on the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times." 3

Dr. Albright estimated the date of the scrolls to be 100 B.C. Thus it was in the spring of 1948 that the world first heard of the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. 4

*Careful examination of the Cave of the Scrolls.* In the winter and spring of 1949 the Arab Legion, together with the director of the Transjordan Department of Antiquities and the director of the French School of Jerusalem, made several trips to the cave and a thorough examination was the result. Other experts assisted them. They found that visitors seeking spoil had already been there. They did find pieces of linen that were coated with wax or pitch, indicating that the scrolls in which they had been wrapped had been hidden in the cave to preserve them for later use. Many fragments of earthenware were found. Some of the pottery points to the first century A.D. as a date, but others indicate an earlier date than this. The date of the hiding of these documents would naturally be later than the date of the manuscripts. About six hundred fragments of the old manuscripts were found. Clearly some of these were broken off from the scrolls already taken from the cave. This was proof then of the manuscripts' authenticity. Among the fragments found were parts of the Books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Judges. 5

*How the scrolls came to be hidden in the cave.* It is evident that the scrolls at one time formed a part of the library of an ancient religious order of Jews. When it became necessary for these men to flee from their quarters, they hid the library in caves for safekeeping, expecting at a later date to recover them for further use. Members of this sect of the Hebrews are called in the documents "adherents of the new covenant." It is now believed that the same order is referred to in the Zadokite Fragment which was discovered in Cairo, Egypt, in 1896. This document also refers to the order of "the new covenant." 6

*The significance of the discovery.* Soon after the discovery of the scrolls, Dr. Albright made the following statement concerning their importance:

The new documents when completely published and studied, will revolutionize our knowledge of the Hebrew textual criticism of the Old Testament, of Hebrew literature during the intertestamental period, and of the Jewish background of the New Testament.

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The discovery of these old copies of parts of the Old Testament in Hebrew have forever silenced those critics of the Scripture who said that a considerable part of the Hebrew Bible was written in the first century B.C. 8

*The Isaiah manuscripts.* Of the two Isaiah scrolls discovered, one now belongs to the Hebrew University and the other to the monastery of the Syrian Orthodox Church at Jerusalem. The latter was brought to America for study and publishing by the American Schools of Oriental Research. This scroll is 23 ½ feet long and contains a large number of parchment sheets sewed together. The sheets are between 10 and 11 inches wide. The size of the text column is about 5x9 inches. Several corrections were made by the scribe. For example, the scribe omitted the story of the healing of Hezekiah by a fig poultice. The corrector copied this Scripture between the lines and down the margin. There is no space between words in the Hebrew text. There is no numbering of chapters or verses. 9

The two Isaiah manuscripts, although not of the same date exactly, are to be dated approximately 100 B.C. Before the discovery of these documents, the oldest copies of an entire book of the Hebrew Old Testament were dated about A.D. 900.

Thus we see that these Isaiah manuscripts are about one thousand years older than other Hebrew manuscripts of a similar nature. Outside the Nash Papyrus containing the Ten Commandments and the Shema (“**Hear O Israel,**” etc.), we have formerly been dependent upon the Massoretic text of the Hebrew Bible dated A.D. 900 for our knowledge of Old Testament Hebrew. With this new discovery we are brought a thousand years nearer the source of our Hebrew text of Isaiah and parts of other Old Testament books. And it will be of interest for Bible students to know that scholars who have studied the old copies of Isaiah declare that the old Hebrew text agrees to a remarkable degree with the Massoretic text which has been the basis for our English translations of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup>

Conservative Bible students who believe in one writer of the prophecy of Isaiah should feel encouraged, because the manuscripts of these rolls of Isaiah have the whole of the book in one copy and particularly because there is no break between the end of chapter 39 and the beginning of chapter 40. The farther back we get toward the time of Isaiah, the stronger is the presumption against more than one Isaiah writer, although some critics still cling to their cherished theory of a dual or multiple authorship. <sup>11</sup>

*The Sectarian Manual of Discipline.* Of the other scrolls found in the cave the Sectarian Manual of Discipline was one. This contains the ritual of initiation, obligations of the society, virtues to be practiced, ceremony of taking the oath, etc., of the adherents of the new covenant. The question is naturally asked, “What was the Jewish order referred to so often as being connected with ‘the new covenant’?” Most scholars agree that it must have been the Essenes. It was composed of men who did not marry. They had strict discipline. Some have thought that John the Baptist was an Essene. The Essenes were the Puritans of the Jews. <sup>12</sup>

*Commentary on the Book of Habakkuk.* Because this document reproduces the text of all but the last few verses of the prophecy of Habakkuk, it gives us a much older Hebrew text than we have ever had before. But the exegesis of the prophecy is of interest because it is of an entirely allegorical nature. The text is explained in terms of happenings of the age in which the commentary was written. Thus we have the Jewish background for the political situation of the Roman period of control of Palestine that began in 64 B.C. <sup>13</sup>

*The War Scroll.* This document was called the “Rule of Battle for the Sons of Light.” Here are rules for a holy war, the battle cry for a righteous crusade against the enemy. When a date is sought for the writing of this scroll, it would appear that the Jewish Wars of Independence of the Maccabean period and the Hasmonean period that followed fit into the picture. The dates would be from 165 B.C. to 64 B.C. <sup>14</sup>

*Psalms of Thanksgiving of the new covenant.* The style of these writings is an imitation of the Hebrew Psalms. Their many Biblical reminiscences and quotations from the Psalms show that that book of the Bible had already had a wide circulation by the time of the Maccabees. <sup>15</sup>

*Fragments of other Old Testament books.* Fragments of the Book of Leviticus were written in an archaic script indicating an early date. Fragments of more than one copy of the Book of Daniel

were found, showing it had been published long before 100 B.C. Small fragments of other Old Testament books were also discovered. 16

*Excavation of the Essene Community Center.* The ruin of the plateau between the plain of the Dead Sea and the cliffs where the Cave of the Scrolls was located was excavated beginning in November of 1951 and extending from time to time into the year 1954. This work was undertaken by the Transjordan Department of Antiquities, the *Ecole Biblique*, and the Palestine Archaeological Museum. The place was found to be the Community Center of the Essenes who lived in this district of the desert south of Jericho. The discovery of identical types of pottery to that found in the original Cave of the Scrolls shows a relationship between the two localities. 17

This community center was occupied by the Essenes from early Hasmonean times in the second century B.C. down to the time of the First Jewish Revolt. The site was later occupied by the Romans as a military garrison, and again by Jews in the Second Revolt of A.D. 132-135.18 The remains of a scriptorium found here were of great interest. It would seem that at least some of the Dead Sea scrolls were copied here. It consisted of a long plaster table, some inkpots, and then a low plaster shelf, and a basin where probably the scribes performed certain ritual washings before or after their work. The Palestine Museum now has these on display. 19

*Finds leading to an exploratory expedition.* The Arabs of the Dead Sea area became very manuscript-conscious, and began hunting for caves and possible finds of value. They discovered another cave, and its contents were sold to the Palestine Museum. These included fragments of the Books of Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, and Exodus, and some non-Biblical documents. An expedition which included the American School of Oriental Research was immediately organized in order to explore the whole area. Many caves were examined. Two of these contained inscribed material, but it is of interest to note that 25 caves had pottery remains of a common type with the first cave. There was a cemetery with a thousand tombs. All of these facts would indicate that the Essene community was a large one, with its members living in these caves surrounding the central buildings where food and water were obtained and where business was conducted; there was also an opportunity for study and worship. 20

In the meantime the Arabs discovered more material from caves. Included among these finds was a fragment of "The Zadokite Work." This confirmed the fact that this document originated from the Essenes. In 1951 some documents were found in one cave belonging to the period of the Second Revolt of the Jews of A.D. 132 to 135. 21

A few Biblical fragments included among them were of parts of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah. These show a text identical with the Massoretic Hebrew manuscripts. Discoveries in other caves were made, among them a version of the Minor Prophets in the Greek language. 22

*Discoveries from cave four.* Among the more recently discovered caves, the largest number of important finds have come from cave four, and have been under study at the Palestine Museum. Over sixty fragmentary Biblical manuscripts have come from this cave. Most of these are from the Pentateuch and Isaiah. Also there are many fragments from the Psalms, Daniel, and Jeremiah. Practically all the canonical books of the Old Testament were represented in the finds. Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah were not thus far included, but these books were quoted in the

non-Biblical texts, and so were known to the Essenes. All of these fragments will be of great value in a study of the text of the Hebrew Old Testament. 23

In a number of striking cases the text of these fragments follows the Septuagint Version rather than the Massoretic text. This is of great interest, since the New Testament writers made large use of that version of the Old Testament. These latest discoveries from the Dead Sea territory have confirmed the early date for the Dead Sea Scrolls given by most of the best scholars at the time of their first discovery. 24

1. John C. Trever, "The Discovery of the Scrolls," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, published by American Schools of Oriental Research, XI, No. 3, Sept. 1948, pp. 46-57.
2. A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, ch. 1.
3. Trever, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
4. *Loc. cit.*
5. Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 15; Solomon Birnbaum, "Notes on the Internal and Archaeological Evidence Concerning the Cave Scrolls," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. LXX, Part III, Sept. 1951, pp. 227-232.
6. Dupont-Sommer, *ibid.*, ch. 5; also see H. H. Rowley, *The Zadokite Fragments and the Dead Sea Scrolls*.
7. W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 222.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
9. Trever, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
10. Millar Burrows, "The Contents and Significance of the Manuscripts," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XI, No. 3, Sept. 1948, pp. 57-61.
11. Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (ed. 1949), pp. 257, 258.
12. Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, ch. IV.
13. *Ibid.*, ch. III.
14. *Ibid.*, ch. VII.
15. *Ibid.*, ch. VI.
16. A. Rendle Short, *Archaeology Gives Evidence*, pp. 35-37.
17. Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Manuscripts of the Dead Sea Caves," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XVII, No. 1, Feb. 1954, pp. 4, 5.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.
19. *Loc. cit.*
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 17, 18.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 18, 20.

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