THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

One might ask what do the Dead Sea Scrolls have to do with the Holy Spirit? We shall see! The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at Khirbet Qumran NE of the Dead Sea in 1947. Before the finding of Old Testament scriptures in Hebrew among these scrolls, the oldest copies of the Old Testament in the Hebrew language were the Masoretic texts from about 900 AD. This means the time between the completion of the writing of the Old Testament in Hebrew in 452 BC, and the date of the Masoretic scrolls was almost 1400 years. While some could have claimed that the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah were written after the fact, after the above finding this was no longer possible. Withsome of the Dead Sea Scrolls dating to 200 BC there became available Old Testament copies that were a thousand or more years older than the Masoretic texts.

One is moved to ask why there was such a gap between the writing of the Old Testament and the existent Hebrew manuscripts. In this writer's opinion the best answer is the fact that the Jews put more emphasis on the freshness and readability of the Old Testament scriptures, than they did on their date. When a scroll began to be faded, wrinkled, and torn a new copy was made to replace it. While we do not know when this first occurred, we do know that in later times the worn out copy would be placed in an especially prepared container called a Gheniza (a large jar or box), and buried in the ground. Given the weather conditions of Palestine it did not take long for a scroll to be destroyed. As a result, over a period of time the older scrolls were destroyed as new ones replaced them. There are burial places forGhenizas in Egypt whose contents have been preserved due to the dry weather conditions in Egypt. However, none of them contained anything like the findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

At the date stated above, in the spring of 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy was looking for a strayed goat in an area called Khirbet Qumran, NE of the Dead Sea and very near the ruins of the former dwelling place of the Essenes. As he was climbing up a steep hillside to catch a goat, he noted an opening in the wall of the cliff and threw a stone through the hole. He heard the stone hit something and break it, so in the afternoon of the same day he returned with a friend to see what he had broken. They were hoping that the opening might lead to some gold, but when they lowered themselves into a kind of a cave, they found the stone had hit ajar and broken it. Its content proved to be a long rolled up scroll. They also discovered there were more containers and scrolls and they gathered some of them and took them home, hoping they might have some value. A short time later they took the scrolls to a business man in Bethlehem. A number of people looked at the scrolls but as none of them knew the language written on them, they had no idea either of their nature or their value. Eventually the man acting in behalf of the boys found an individual who dealt in scrolls who paid him $97.20 for three of them, of which the Bedouins received $32.40 each.

As word spread that the scrolls did have value, locals and others combed the hillsides looking for other scrolls and eventually 972 scrolls of the Old Testament were found in eleven caves which included at least portions of every book of the Old Testament except the book of Easter. These scrolls were written on different materials including vellum (animal skins), copper, and papyrus (leaves). They were also written using the modern square Hebrew letters. In addition other scrolls were found containing information about the Essenes who at one time lived nearby where the scrolls were found.

The above news hit the Judeo/Christian world like a spiritual atomic bomb. There were multiple copies of a number of the books of the Old Testament including 19 copies of the book of Isaiah. The first scroll found in cave No. 1 contained a complete copy of the book of Isaiah 24 feet in length. Incidentally, I was guiding a small group to Palestine and entered Israel just a few days after the six day war in 1967, and together with my two sons, we were allowed to enter some of the caves including cave No. I. Our temporary guide was Joseph Shullum, resident minister of a church of Christ in Jerusalem.

I have to think the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls was providential! Isaiah is replete with prophetic statements about the coming Messiah. There are 28 quotes from Isaiah in Romans alone. Of course all of the Biblical content was initially the result of the Holy Spirit guiding the prophets of the various times which makes the Holy Spirit the author of the content of the Dead Sea Scrolls. As Peter has written, "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Picking up again on the marketing of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a good portion of them was eventually bought by the Israeli Government through a third party for $250,000 in New York. The Israeli Government then constructed a museum in Jerusalem which they named, "The House of the Book". The finders of the Dead Sea Scrolls received little for their efforts, even though the scrolls would bring untold millions on the open market today.

As already stated, the Dead Sea Scrolls included copies of all the books of the Old Testament except Esther. Therefore, the messianic prophecies we are acquainted with today were also found in these scrolls which date from 250 BC to 50 AD and are believed copied by the Essenes, an ultra conservative Jewish sect which believed all other Jews were unfaithful. The first scroll found in the caves at Qumran was a complete copy of the book of Isaiah dated by some at 100 BC, if not older (The Origin of the Bible, by Bruce, Packer, Comfort,& Henry, Tyndale Pub., Wheaton, IL., 2003. p. 166). Hauer and Young in their comments on IQ Isaiah A, say it is the oldest complete copy of any Biblical book in Hebrew claiming it dates from 200 B.C.E. (An Introduction to the Bible, Prentice Hall, p.

1). It seems the Essenes fled the area in about 66-68 AD at the beginning of the Jewish/Roman war, and never returned.

What is the importance of this discovery?

1. It gives a wonderful confirmation of the accuracy of the work of the Masoretic copiest. The few variations that are there were not found in doctrinal issues, but rather differences in the spelling of words. etc. "The Dead Sea scroll of Isaiah, which seems to be more than a thousand years older than the Masoretic text, is so close to the later text that the assumption of careless copying is groundless. This scroll supports the essential integrity of the text and opposes the assumption of the superiority of the versions" (The Gospel Guardian Vol.5, No. I3, p. 6, 1953). "The Masoretic text has been established by Jewish Biblical scholars of the early Christian centuries and since then has been transmitted with almost incredible accuracy by copyist down to the present day. This explains why hundreds of Hebrew manuscripts in existence today show practically no variants" (Shick, Concordia 'Theological Monthly', Jan. 1943, p. 11).

2. Just keep in mind that Jesus never spoke negatively of the Biblical sources of His day from which he taught and quoted!

3. Samuel Davidson describes some of the disciplines of the Talmudists in regard to the Scriptures:

(a) a Synagogue role must be written on the skins of clean animals,
(b) prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew,
(c) these must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals,
(d) every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex,
(e) the length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines, and the breadth must consist of thirty letters,
(f) the whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless,
(g) the ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe,
(h) an authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate,
(i) no word or letter, not even a yod must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him,
(j) between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants,
(k) between every book, three lines,
(1) the fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so,
(m) besides this, the copiest must sit in full Jewish dress,
(n) wash his body,

(o) not to begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, (p) and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him." (on line Angelfire, the Reliability of the Bible, p.4).

4. Sir Frederic Kenyon put it this way, "that the Christian can take the whole bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries", (Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell, p. 86).

5. An old Rabbi is said to have written the following to a young scribe, "Take heed how thou doest do thy work, for thy work is the word of heaven, lest thou drop or add a letter to the manuscript and so become the destroyer of the world. " (author unknown).

6. Not only the Jews, but contemporaries such as the Samaritans were looking for the coming of the Messiah (John 4:25). In fact both before and after the birth of Christ, there were many claims that someone had been born to be the Messiah. Only Jesus had the credentials to prove that He was in deed the Messiah that was to come. When some of the Jewish leaders of His day claimed that Jesus was blaspheming when he said, "I am the Son of God," His response was, "If I do not the works of my Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand, that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (John 10:36-38)." "Now He said to them, these are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things which are written about Me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44—45).

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