



One of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Isaiah text, found in a cave near Qumran.

More Voices from the Dust

By Hugh Nibley

EVEN if it were only fiction, the story of the finding of the Qumran Manuscripts (also called the Dead Sea Scrolls and the 'Ain Feshkha manuscripts) would be exciting reading. In a hundred journals the tale has now been repeated of how in June, 1947, an Arab shepherd looking for a lost sheep came across the all but invisible entrance to a cave in which reposed "the first major biblical manuscripts of great antiquity" ever found — "older by more than a millennium than the Hebrew texts which are the basis of our biblical translations."¹

In the same cave with the now famous Isaiah text were found fragments of Genesis, Judges, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, the apocryphal

book of Jubilees, and extensive writings dealing with the doctrines and practices of an ancient Jewish sect that had inhabited that part of the desert in the time of Christ. Small wonder that "the little world of biblical scholarship has been turned topsy-turvy by the discoveries," or that "the howling wilderness of Ta'amireh also has been turned upside down in consequence of the finds."² As a result of this feverish search more than forty caves have now come to light, many of them containing ancient writings; for example, the first six caves opened around Qumran "have produced manuscript material representing an original collection of some four hundred to five hundred works that included all of the Old Testament books, numerous apocrypha, both known and unknown, and Sectarian documents of all kinds."³ From an-

other group of caves nearby, two of which are described as nothing less than "mighty caverns," even richer treasures came forth in 1952. The now famous Cave No. 4 at Qumran has yielded three hundred fragments of writings, some of which are thought to go back to the fourth century B.C. As a result of these finds "we now have larger or smaller fragments of every book of the Old Testament except Esther, most of the known Apocrypha and many new ones."⁴

Thanks to this material, the conventional ideals of Christian and Jewish religion are even now undergoing major revisions. We are told, for example, that "one conclusion is difficult to avoid: John, so far from being the creation of Hellenistic Christianity, has exceedingly close

¹F. M. Cross, in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Feb. 1954, p. 3. The fullest general description of the finding of the scrolls is still H. H. Rowley, *The Zadokite Fragments and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford, 1952.)

²Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³C. T. Fritsch, in *Journal of Biblical Lit.* 74 (Sept., 1955), p. 174.

⁴G. L. Harding, in the *Illustrated London News*, Sept. 3, 1955, p. 379.

ties with sectarian Judaism, and may prove to be the most 'Jewish' of the Gospels."⁵ At the same time we learn that the all but discredited Septuagint is really a very ancient and reliable text, "a literal and faithful translation of its Hebrew predecessor."⁶ As to Church History, "all the problems relative to primitive Christianity—problems examined for so many centuries—all these problems henceforth find themselves placed in a new light, which forces us to reconsider them completely."⁷

The texts are packed with matter of greatest interest to Latter-day Saints. The people who wrote and hid these records had our own conception of continued revelation, of this life as a probation, of the pre-existence and resurrection, of the dispensations of the Gospel with falling away and restoration; their covenants and ordinances closely resemble ours; and their book of Doctrine and Covenants (now called the *Manual of Discipline*) is surprisingly like our own, as are their ideas of priesthood, prophecy, heaven and earth, marriage and eternal progeny, etc. To go through the scrolls illustrating these things point by point would require a whole book. Here one significant illustration must suffice.

Speaking of the Qumran manuscripts, *Time* magazine recently reported:

Most startling disclosure of the Essene documents so far published is that the sect possessed, years before Christ, a terminology and practice that have always been considered uniquely Christian. The Essenes practiced baptism and shared in a liturgical repast of bread and wine presided over by a priest. They believed in redemption and in the immortality of the soul. Their most important leader was . . . a Messianic prophet-priest blessed with divine revelation. . . . Many phrases, symbols, and precepts similar to those in Essene literature are used in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of John and the Pauline Epistles. . . .⁸

This was not only a "startling disclosure" but also a very disturbing one. Many Jewish and Christian scholars heaped scorn on the scrolls years after their discovery, or even refused to consider them at all, call-

ing them a hoax, a "conglomeration of words . . . written by an uneducated Jew in the Middle Ages," "a garbage collection," and what-not,⁹ for as Dupont-Sommer pointed out from the first, if the scrolls are genuine, then the scholars have been wrong all along in their conception of Christianity and Judaism. Worst of all is the maddening habit these writings have of "jumping the gun" on the New Testament. The Gospel of John, for example, "employs the vocabulary characteristic of the DSD," that is, of the *Manual of Discipline*, written years before the Gospel.¹⁰ Much of this literature is biblical, and yet it is not biblical: thus "the hymns in the collection are reminiscent of the latest biblical

part of both ministers and rabbis who become familiar with it."¹²

Forced to accept the proofs that something like a New Testament Church was in full bloom before New Testament times, Mr. G. L. Harding, who has been the most active figure in the discovery and preservation of the scrolls, can only conclude that John the Baptist and even Christ must have acquired much of what they taught in the bosom of the Qumran community itself:

John the Baptist (he writes) . . . must have studied and worked in this building (i.e., the main assembly hall of the sect, near the Qumran caves): he undoubtedly derived the idea of ritual immersion or baptism, from them. Many authorities consider that Christ himself also studied with them for some time. . . . These, then, are the very walls He looked upon, the corridors and rooms through which He wandered and in which He sat, brought to light once again after nearly 1900 years."¹³

Now with the discovery and admission of the existence of typical New Testament expressions, doctrines, and ordinances well before the time of Christ, the one effective argument against the Book of Mormon collapses.¹⁴ Within the past year a distinguished European scholar has written an ambitious study on the Book of Mormon, in which he praises it as the most significant work of historiography to appear in America, but at the same time denounces it as a fraud and forgery, stating as his proof that "the character of the forgery is made clear by the revamping of biblical accounts and expressions, especially in the founding of the Church, baptism, and sacrament as accompanying the appearance of Christ in America."¹⁵

That is exactly what was held against the scrolls when they first appeared and almost up to the present moment: they were accused, like the Book of Mormon, of being nothing but a phony rehash of the Bible, with a new slant on particulars and a totally incongruous setting. And had not the evidence continued to pour forth, year after year and cave after cave ("discoveries tread on the heels of discoveries," says Mr. Cross), the learned could never have been persuaded to admit that the docu-

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hugh Nibley has attained recognition as a historian of note. His careful and painstaking research have won for him an enviable position as an authority in history. Dr. Nibley's discovery of unusual source material adds an element of excitement and adventure to his writing.

A graduate from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1934, he earned his Ph.D. degree in ancient history from the University of California at Berkeley. Following his graduation, Dr. Nibley taught school in California until 1946 when he joined the faculty at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where he is now serving as professor of history and religion.

psalms, and more especially the psalm in the prologue of Luke. They draw heavily on the Psalter and Prophetic poetry for inspiration, and borrow direct phrases, cliches, and style. However, neither in language, spirit, or theology are they biblical.¹¹ That is to say, they are not "biblical" in the sense that *modern* critics use the word, though they were obviously believed by their authors to be completely biblical. Either those ancients did not understand the Bible, or else the moderns don't. Yet Dr. Brownlee is willing to concede that *their* rendering of the scriptures "greatly enriches and improves upon the original form (sic)," and that "it will no doubt receive considerable usage on the

¹²Brownlee, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹³G. L. Harding, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴We pointed this out last year (note 9 above), but the recent admissions of such authorities as Cross, Brownlee, and Harding now lend real force to the argument.

¹⁵P. Meinhold, in *Saeculum V* (1954), p. 86.

⁵Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 18. It should be noted that the Inspired Version of the Bible as we have it from Joseph Smith greatly favors the Septuagint.

⁷A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (N. Y., Macmillan, 1952), p. 96. Time has vindicated this verdict, which Dupont-Sommer has repeated in his latest work, see *Time* magazine, Sept. 5, 1955, p. 34.

⁸*Time*, *loc. cit.* Courtesy *Time*; copyright Time Inc., 1955.

⁹See our article in the *Improvement Era*, March 1954, pp. 148ff.

¹⁰W. H. Brownlee, in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Sept. 1950, p. 72.

¹¹Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 3, cf. Brownlee, in *Bibl. Archaeologist*, Sept., 1951, p. 58.

"One of the first and most keenly interested visitors was my good friend, the late Elder Matthew Cowley. The length of each of his many visits was measured by his numerous appointments. He has shown a great interest in this statue and has been most appreciative toward all who have contributed to its successful completion."

Brother Cowley's last visit was in December, 1953, the day before he left for California with a group of Church Authorities to attend the laying of the cornerstone ceremonies of the Los Angeles Temple.

During his last visit, Elder Cowley walked slowly around the statue, viewing it from every angle. He returned to where the sculptor stood. "Well, my good friend," said Brother Malin, "now that the modeling of the statue is finished, how do you like it?"

Elder Cowley, his face radiant, replied with enthusiasm, "It is superb! I like it—like everything about it."

"Then," said Brother Malin, "put your initials on it, and I will see that they remain there."



On the lower part of the apparel at the back, Elder Matthew Cowley hand-carved his initials.

Brother Cowley asked for a modeling tool and with exacting care and in warm heartedness carved out his initials, "M C," as if in benediction, on the lower part of Moroni's apparel at the back.

Elder Cowley died in his sleep of a heart attack a few days later—in Los Angeles.

Cloak of Mayan Design

Brother Malin's Moroni figure has Lamanite features and the cloak is of Mayan design and complements the architecture of the temple. The statue, stands at a commanding 257 foot 8½ in. elevation on the 151 foot 8½ in. tower that arises above the roof of the 106 foot high reinforced concrete building. A ¾ inch metal rod, 8½ feet long, runs through the center of the trumpet connecting it with a 5 inch metal pipe.* The latter is flush with the top of the head of the statue and continues down through the statue, and is doweled into the tower.

Under the supervision of President David O. McKay the Angel Moroni statue was hoisted to the top of the temple, located on Santa Monica Boulevard between Selby Avenue and Manning Avenue, on October 19, 1954. Workmen labored three hours to hoist the huge figure, which weighs 2,100 pounds.

"On this occasion," said sculptor Malin, "just as the statue was lifted to go into place on the temple spire—I took a special look to see that the initials of Brother Cowley were still visible. They were perfect."

*These figures supplied by Church Historian's office.

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ments were anything but clumsy forgeries.

Dr. Cross, eager to allay the misgivings that must inevitably follow the overthrow of accepted ideas of Church History and doctrine, explains the resemblance between the Christian and pre-Christian churches as traceable to a common tradition: both "draw on common resources of language, common theological themes and concepts, and share common religious institutions. . . ." ¹⁶ But

¹⁶In the *Christian Century*, Aug. 24, 1955, p. 971.

this common tradition was not that of conventional Judaism, let alone Hellenistic philosophy; it was the ancient tradition of the righteous few who flee to the desert with their wives and children to prepare for the coming of the Lord and escape persecution at the hands of the official religion. Qumran seems to have been the camping-place of such holy fugitives as early as the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., that is, as early as the days of Lehi.¹⁷ The Book of

¹⁷Jas. L. Kelso, in *Jnl. Bibl. Lit.* 74 (Sept., 1955), p. 145. ". . . the roots of the Sect undoubtedly do go back to the pre-Maccabean Hasidim. . ." according to Fritsch, *ibid.*, p. 177.

Mormon clearly states that its people consider themselves to be in this particular and peculiar line of Israelite tradition.¹⁸ The discoveries at and near Qumran now prove that such people not only existed, but that they also produced a peculiar type of literature, and it is to the Book of Mormon that one may turn for some of the most perfect examples of that literature. And so the voices whispering out of the dust on the shores of the Dead Sea may yet provide some of the most powerful confirmation of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

¹⁸See our discussion in the *Era*, May 1954, pp. 326-330.

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