

The Dead Sea Scrolls

*Some Questions and Answers
by Hugh Nibley*

What Are the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Ancient religious writings found in caves and ruins in the Judean desert.

When Were They Discovered?

The first in the summer of 1947. Other major discoveries were in 1952 and 1956. More than 200 caves have been explored, and the search still goes on.

Where Were They Discovered?

The most important finds have come from 11 caves in the precipitous walls of the Wadi Qumran, a gorge on the western shores of the Dead Sea, about a mile from the water's edge near the north end, seven miles south of Jericho. Also important are the four huge caves in the Wadi Murabba'at, 12 miles southwest of Qumran; and the ruins of Khirbet Mird, on a hilltop about five miles west-southwest of Qumran. Important finds have come from other hiding places known only to the Bedouins.

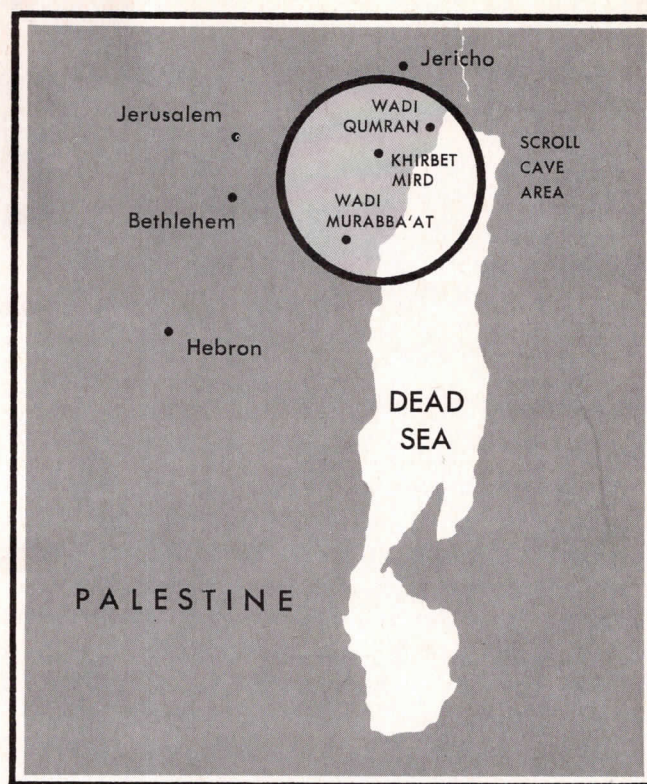
How Were They Discovered and by Whom?

The first was accidentally discovered by a shepherd boy of the semi-nomadic Arabic tribe of the Ta'amireh. Most subsequent discoveries have been made by members of that tribe, who have now become expert in the excavation and preservation of the documents. At first, clandestine digging (by dealers and monks as well as Arabs) destroyed much material.

In 1949 the experts withdrew, convinced that there was no more to be found; but the Arabs continued searching with such success that in 1951 formal expeditions were organized by the British Army and Jordan Government. The walls of the Wadi Qumran were systematically explored, leading to the discovery in 1952 of Cave IV—the richest find of all—and the disclosure by the Arabs of the great caves of the Wadi Murrabba'at.

Accounts of the discovery and procurement of the various scrolls are complicated and conflicting.

(For Course 19, lessons of September 8 and October 6: "The Bible as a Whole (the Dead Sea Scrolls)" and "The Book of Mormon—Modern Discoveries"; and of general interest.)



Caves in the precipitous walls of the Wadi Qumran have produced some of the most important finds of Dead Sea Scrolls.

How Many Scrolls Are There?

In Cave IV alone thousands of fragments of more than 382 manuscripts were found. In all more than 500 manuscripts have come from Qumran in tens of thousands of leather fragments.

Who Owns the Scrolls and How Were They Acquired?

The first four scrolls were acquired by the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Jerusalem (the story is very obscure) who took them to America and later sold them to the Hebrew University for a reputed quarter million dollars. Professor Sukenic, of the Hebrew University, picked up some fragments in a Jerusalem antique shop.

The Jordan Government has legal right to the finds, and being short of funds, has sold them at a fixed rate of one pound (\$2.80) per square centimeter. Before the owners can claim them they must go to the Palestine Archaeological Museum to be cleaned, photographed, and edited for publication.

Dead Sea manuscripts have been acquired by McGill, Manchester, and Heidelberg Universities; by the McCormick Theological Seminary, and the Vatican Library. New finds are acquired from the Arabs through the agency of intermediate dealers; the channels are devious and often shady.

What Is the Age of the Scrolls?

It ranges from the seventh century B.C. (one fragment), to A.D. 68. Texts of Samuel, Jeremiah, and Exodus may date from about 200 B.C.; but most of the Biblical scrolls come from the first century B.C.

(Continued on following page.)



View of Khirbet Qumran on the northwestern shore of Dead Sea and 1 mile inland. It is 7 miles south of Jericho.



Cave No. IV, the "Essenes Main Library," contained thousands of fragments from more than 382 manuscripts.



Essenes lived in individual tents and caves, but studied and worked in these communal quarters on top of the cliffs.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS (Continued.)

What Are the Subjects Treated in the Scrolls?

A quarter of all the manuscripts are Biblical, every book of the Old Testament except *Esther* being represented. The most numerous manuscripts are of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms. The first discovery was a Hebrew text of Isaiah, 1,000 years older than any known. The Apocryphal works are richly represented, including two books in cryptographic writing, a Book of Enoch, and a treatise on the Book of Moses. The most famous non-Biblical scrolls are the Manual of Discipline, the Habakkuk Commentary, the Thanksgiving Psalms, the ancient ritual Order of Battle, the Genesis Apocryphon (a fuller story of Genesis, including a new account of Abraham in Egypt), a "Description of the New Jerusalem," and a lost Commentary on Job. The investigation and publication of such writings has just begun.

Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?

A society of pious "apocalyptic" Jews, now generally identified with the Essenes.

What Light Do the Scrolls Throw on the Subject of Christian Origins?

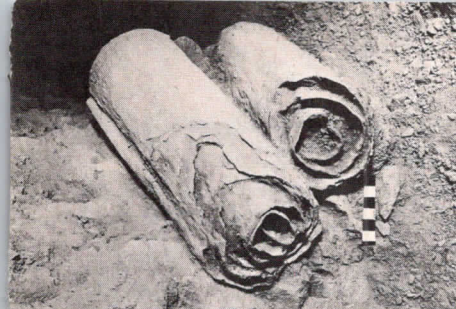
That is largely a matter of interpretation, but by now scholars are generally agreed that the scrolls teach us for the first time: (1) the background of John the Baptist; (2) the exact date of Easter; (3) the nature and origin of the organization of the Primitive Church; (4) the significance of the strange language and teachings of John; (5) the origin of Gnosticism; (6) the nature of the Church as a continuation of an ancient apocalyptic and Messianic tradition ignored by Rabbinic Judaism; (7) the nature of the strange terminology of the New Testament as continuing an ancient tradition; (8) of the Christian community as following the pattern of earlier apocalyptic communities in the desert; and (9) the ancient Hebrew-apocalyptic background of the writings of Paul.

What Light Do the Scrolls Throw on The Book of Mormon?

This, too, is a matter of interpretation. But if there is any validity to the thousands of studies

appearing on parallels between the scrolls and various Biblical and historical writings, the perfectly staggering parallels between The Book of Mormon and the scrolls cannot be brushed aside nor explained away. Here are a few:

1. Nine years ago this writer pointed out (*Improvement Era*, September, 1954) that the peculiar manner of burying the scrolls indicated that they were laid away for the purpose of coming forth in a future Dispensation. Since then a number of scholars (e.g., Malik, Danielou) have confirmed this impression. The tradition of the sacred buried record meets us full-blown in the similar preservation of the scrolls and The Book of Mormon.
2. Lehi is clearly described as one of the prophets driven from Jerusalem because of his Messianic preaching, and seeking refuge in the desert, where he intended to found a community. The community of Qumran was led into the desert by such a man centuries later, and there is considerable evidence that this was an established and traditional routine of great antiquity.
3. In a heretofore unparalleled situation we find the Qumran people offering animal sacrifice and observing the Law of Moses under the direction of legitimate priests, and yet at the same time observing ordinances of a strangely Christian nature. It is a situation "difficult to visualize" (Cross), and yet its counterpart is found in The Book of Mormon.
4. The Qumran people denounce the Jews at Jerusalem for their corruption and laxity in observing the Law. They respect the temple and its traditions but despise the leaders of the Jews who have driven them from Jerusalem. This is exactly the attitude of Nephi.
5. They keep the Law of Moses but in everything *anticipate* the coming of the Messiah and the New Covenant. Their sacrament is "a liturgical anticipation of the Messianic banquet" (Cross), as are their baptisms and their white garments—all belong to "a church of anticipation." This parallels The Book of Mormon situation exactly.



Two oxidized copper scrolls are being uncovered from the protecting dirt of the cave which had provided shelter.



The sectarian "Manual of Discipline" is an example of one of the scrolls written on leather in ancient Hebrew script.



The "Scroller" at the Palestine Archaeological Museum where scroll fragments are gathered, restored, examined.

6. They see a peculiar significance in going out into the wilderness and in choosing a site where they can establish a large and elaborate system of tanks and basins for washings and baptisms. One thinks immediately of Alma's community in the wilderness at the Waters of Mormon.
7. There they were organized into a general congregation with a council of twelve laymen headed by three priests. Scholars have agreed that we have here a definite tie-in with the organization of the Early Church. Its closest parallel is in Christ's organization of the Church in 3 *Nephi*.
8. The Dead Sea writings are full of angels, prophets, ancient writings, and prophecies of things to come, especially the coming of the Messiah, the literal resurrection of the dead, and the destruction of the world by fire. These things are treated in a peculiar "apocalyptic" way that is much closer to The Book of Mormon than to the Bible.
9. Some scholars believe the greatest single revelation of the scrolls is the existence of a great prophetic tradition that has been completely forgotten. Its greatest representative is the mysterious "Teacher of Righteousness" or "Righteous Teacher," a major prophet whose very existence was unknown until 1950. How could a figure of such immense importance both to Christians and Jews have been completely forgotten? It was because his name was blotted out by Rabbinical or "official" Jews, who persecuted him severely and drove him into the desert because he preached the coming of the Messiah.

He was of priestly descent, being of the line of Zadok, another mysterious prophet, whom some believed lived at the time of Moses and who is the type of the true priest who looked forward to the Messiah. Allegro believes that the Teacher of Righteousness himself may have been called Zadok. The important thing is the discovery not of controversial individuals but an undeniable tradition of a line of persecuted Messianic prophets. This is in perfect agreement with the Zenock and Zenos tradition in

The Book of Mormon. Since one of the commonest phenomena in the apocryphal literature, including the scrolls, is the frequent duplication and corruption of proper names, it might not be too much to suggest that Zadok might even be a corruption of Zenock, since of course in Hebrew the vowels are not written and the Hebrew "d" resembles the "n" closely enough (in the archaic script) to have been confused by an early copyist—a very common type of mistake. Be that as it may, the peculiar type of prophet represented by Zenock and Zenos is now fully established by the scrolls.

10. For the first time we now learn of the ancient Jewish background of (1) the theological language of the New Testament and Christian apocrypha. (2) their eschatological doctrines, and (3) their organizational and liturgical institutions. (Cross). All three receive their fullest exposition in 3 *Nephi*, where the Messiah himself comes and organizes His Church on the foundations already laid for it.

The strongest accusation against The Book of Mormon in the past has always been the presence in it of New Testament language, doctrines, and ordinances among people living in pre-Christian times. Today this objection not only vanishes but now furnishes powerful evidence supporting The Book of Mormon. The scrolls show a highly developed Messianism, very close to that of the New Testament. For example, it is now seen that Paul writes in the authentic Qumran pre-Christian style.

The most read, most available current books on the Dead Sea Scrolls are the following paperbacks, from which the above information was gleaned:

- Allegro, John Marco, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Pelican, 1956).
- Cross, Frank M., *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Anchor Books, 1961).
- Danielou, Jean, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* (Mentor, 1958).
- Davies, A. P., *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Signet, 1956).
- Gaster, Theod. H., *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English* (Doubleday Anchor, 1957).
- Schonfield, Hugh J., *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (A. S. Barnes, 1957).

Library File Reference: Dead Sea Scrolls.