

Dead Sea Scrolls: What are They?

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been called the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. They were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. This is an arid region 13 miles east of Jerusalem and 1,300 feet below sea level. The Dead Sea Scrolls are comprised of the remains of approximately 825 to 870 separate scrolls, represented by tens of thousands of fragments. The texts are most commonly made of animal skins, but also papyrus and one of copper. They are written with a carbon-based ink, from right to left, using no punctuation except for an occasional paragraph indentation.

Dead Sea Scrolls: Why are they Important?

The Dead Sea Scrolls can be divided into two categories—biblical and non-biblical. Fragments of every book of the Old Testament (Hebrew canon) have been discovered, except for the book of Esther. Now identified among the scrolls are 19 fragments of Isaiah, 25 fragments of Deuteronomy and 30 fragments of the Psalms. The virtually intact Isaiah Scroll, which contains some of the most dramatic Messianic prophecy, is 1,000 years older than any previously known copy of Isaiah.

In addition to the biblical manuscripts, there are commentaries on the Hebrew canon, paraphrases that expand on the Torah, community standards and regulations, rules of war, non-canonical psalms, hymns and sermons. Most of the texts are written in Hebrew and Aramaic, with a few in Greek.

The Dead Sea Scrolls appear to be the library of a Jewish sect, considered most likely the Essenes. Near the caves are the ancient ruins of Qumran, a village excavated in the early 1950's that shows connections to both the Essenes and the scrolls. The Essenes were strictly observant Jewish scribes, who appear Messianic and apocalyptic in thinking. The library appears to have been hidden away in caves around the outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt (66-70 A.D.) as the Roman army advanced against the Jews.

Based on various dating methods, including carbon 14, paleographic and scribal, the Dead Sea Scrolls were written during the period from about 200 B.C. to 68 A.D. Many crucial biblical manuscripts (such as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 61) date to at least 100 B.C. As such, the Dead Sea Scrolls have revolutionized textual criticism of the Old Testament. Phenomenally, we find the biblical texts in substantial agreement with the Masoretic text, as well as variant translations of the Old Testament used today.

Dead Sea Scrolls: Dramatic Evidence for the Reliability of Messianic Prophecy

The Dead Sea Scrolls comprise the oldest group of Old Testament manuscripts ever found, dating back to 100--200 B.C. This is dramatic, because we now have absolute evidence that Messianic prophecies contained in today's Old Testament (both Jewish and Christian) are the same Messianic prophecies that existed prior to the time Jesus walked on this earth. It goes without saying, manuscript reliability and textual criticism have taken cosmic steps forward! Check it out – There is no question that Jesus Christ was the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for

Dead Sea Scrolls - The Book of Isaiah

Over 200 fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls are housed at the Shrine of the Book Museum in Jerusalem. Remarkably, the only fully intact scroll displayed at the Shrine of the Book is the "Great Isaiah Scroll" (1QIs-a), which contains the entire book of Isaiah that we read today -- all 66 chapters! A number of scholars, from a number of religions and professional disciplines, have analyzed this major find.

The Great Isaiah Scroll was discovered in Cave 1 in 1947. It was identified as the Biblical Book of Isaiah in 1948, and purchased by the Syrian Orthodox Church at that time. Israel reacquired the Isaiah Scroll in 1954 to study it and preserve it as a national treasure. It has been displayed as

the centerpiece exhibit at the Shrine of the Book museum since 1965. A second partial Isaiah scroll (1QIs-b) was also discovered in Cave 1 in 1947. Since that time, approximately 17 other fragments of Isaiah scripture have been discovered in other caves at Qumran.

As far as dating, it appears that pieces of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIs-a) have been carbon-14 dated at least four times, including a study at the University of Arizona in 1995 and a study at ETH-Zurich in 1990-91. The four studies produced calibrated date ranges between 335-324 BC and 202-107 BC. There have also been numerous paleographic and scribal dating studies conducted that place 1QIs-a at a date range of approximately 150-100 BC. (See Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1996; Eisenman & Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered*, 1994; Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?*, 1995; Wise, Abegg & Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, A New Translation*, 1999.)

Dead Sea Scrolls - Isaiah 53

The Dead Sea Scrolls have provided phenomenal evidence for the credibility of biblical scripture. Specifically, the nearly intact Great Isaiah Scroll is almost identical to the most recent manuscript version of the Masoretic text from the 900's AD. (Scholars have discovered a handful of spelling and tense-oriented scribal errors, but nothing of significance.) In light of Isaiah's rich Messianic prophecy, we thought it would be rewarding to reproduce a portion of the English translation of the actual Hebrew text found in the Great Isaiah Scroll. Specifically, the following corresponds to Isaiah 53 in today's Old Testament. Remember, this text was dated 100 to 335 years before the birth of Jesus Christ!

Translation of the actual Great Isaiah Scroll (Isaiah 53), beginning with line 5 of Column 44:

5. Who has believed our report and the arm of YHWH to whom has it been revealed And he shall come up like a suckling before him
6. and as a root from dry ground there is no form to him and no beauty [+to him+] and in his being seen and there is no appearance
7. that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and knowing grief
8. and as though hiding faces from him he was despised and we did not esteem him. Surely our griefs he
9. is bearing and our sorrows he carried them and we esteemed him beaten and struck by God
10. and afflicted. and he is wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities, the correction
11. of our peace was upon him and by his wounds he has healed us. All of us like sheep have wandered each man to his own way
12. we have turned and YHWH has caused to light on him the iniquity of all of us He was oppressed and he was afflicted and he did not
13. open his mouth, as a lamb to the slaughter he is brought and as a ewe before her shearers is made dumb he did not open
14. his mouth. From prison and from judgment he was taken and his generation who shall discuss it because he was cut off from the land of
15. the living. Because from the transgressions of his people a wound was to him
16. And they gave wicked ones to be his grave and [a scribbled word probably accusative sign "eth"] rich ones in his death
17. although he worked no violence neither deceit in his mouth And YHWH was pleased to crush him and He has caused him grief.
18. If you will appoint his soul a sin offering he will see his seed and he will lengthen his days and the pleasure of YHWH
19. in his hand will advance. Of the toil of his soul he shall see {+light+} and he shall be satisfied and by his knowledge shall he make righteous
20. even my righteous servant for many and their iniquities he will bear. Therefore I will apportion to him among the great ones
21. and with the mighty ones he shall divide the spoil because he laid bare to death his soul and

with the transgressors

22. he was numbered, and he, the sins of many, he bore, and for their transgressions he entreated.

Dead Sea Scrolls - The Comparison to Today's Biblical Text

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a powerful tool for answering textual critics of biblical scripture. Even though the first scrolls were discovered in 1947, it was only recently that much of the research and many of the translations were released to the public. Here's Isaiah 53 from the King James Version of the Bible, which was translated from the Masoretic text of the Hebrew scripture. Compare it to the portion of the Great Isaiah Scroll reproduced on the prior page - it's dramatic!

Isaiah 53 in the King James Version of the Holy Bible:

1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Dead Sea Scrolls - A Remarkable Time in History

The Dead Sea Scrolls sat untouched in a perfect, arid environment for approximately 2,000 years. In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd stumbles upon arguably the most important archaeological find in history, and then, one year later, the Jewish people return to their homeland as a formal nation for the first time since 70 AD. As prophetic events in the Middle East appear to be accelerating, it's remarkable to read prior Messianic prophecy with absolute assurance like no other time in history. We now have utmost confidence that the Old Testament (Jewish Tanakh) that we read today is the same as existed in 100 to 200 BC. This means that the over 300 Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah preexisted the birth of Jesus Christ. It's up to each of us to determine what to do with this reality!