

Qumran

Contributed by Stephen Langfur

On a day in 1947, toward evening, some Beduin teenagers were rounding up their flock on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. Muhammad e-Deb, 14 years old, threw a stone into a cave to scare out any goat that might have taken shelter there. He heard something break. The next morning, moved by thoughts of treasure, the young man went back and made the most exciting archaeological discovery of all time.

In the cave were jars, and in one or two of them bundles, which proved to be writings on parchment 2000 years old, preserved in the dry air of the wilderness. Thus began the modern saga of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

An archaeological team explored the other caves of the region (though the Beduin were often first), finding scrolls in a total of 11. Altogether parts of 900 documents have been recovered. The 4th cave alone yielded 16,000 fragments, extracted from dirt and guano. It was like facing an unknown number of jigsaw puzzles all mixed together. The Cave 4 scrolls were in pieces partly because they hadn't been stored in covered jars like those in Cave 1. Also, to judge from the many straight edges, the Romans may have cut them up on conquering the place in 68 AD. Out of the 16,000 fragments, parts of 600 scrolls have been restored.

Why were the Qumran scrolls so exciting? Ordinarily, archaeologists have to make do with interpreting artifacts. When they are lucky, these include inscriptions. But here they had a whole library, opening a window on a way of thinking and experiencing that characterized a Jewish group from around the time of Jesus.

There are also biblical texts. Until this discovery, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts - those that served as the basis for the translations we use - dated from medieval times; the earliest complete Hebrew Bible is the Leningrad Codex of 1008 AD (the Aleppo Codex, a few decades earlier, is not complete). With the Dead Sea scrolls, suddenly, we had manuscripts dating back well before the birth of Jesus, including pieces of every book in the First Testament (except Esther). These cast new light on the development of the Bible as we know it. More on this...

The position of Qumran A kilometer south of the first cave was a modest ruin called in Arabic khirbet qumran, the ruin of Qumran. This Arabic name, meaning double moon, may refer to the moon and its reflection in the adjacent Dead Sea. The residents of 2000 years ago would have known the place as Sekakah, mentioned in their Copper Scroll (found in Cave 3) and centuries earlier in Joshua 15:61. The name Sekakah may refer to the reeds with which roofs can be made.

In 1951, Jordan (which then controlled the area) authorized an archaeological expedition under the French scholar Roland de Vaux. The excavators of Qumran/Sekakah supposed that the site would be connected to the scrolls, and this remains the consensus. Various factors speak for a connection: (1) The dates when the site was inhabited coincide with those of the scrolls (dated by the forms of the Hebrew letters), although some scrolls are earlier by 50 years or so. (2) Five of the 11 caves holding scrolls were accessible only via the site. (3) The scrolls require frequent ritual bathing, namely, before each meal and before the nightly study of scripture; this very small site contains 10 large ritual baths. (4) In a long windowless room 4 inkwells were found, as well as a long plaster table, but it could have served for laying out the strips of written parchment and sewing them into scrolls, plus numerous oil lamps (they wrote at night, according to the scrolls); all of these probably fell from the room above when an earthquake or the Romans destroyed the second story. (5) The tall, cylindrical jars in which some of the scrolls were found are similar to jars found in pieces on the site, and such jars are not common elsewhere. These five pieces of evidence, when taken together, strongly point to a connection between the site and the scrolls. Against this view, nonetheless, a few scholars hold that the scrolls were brought from Jerusalem at the time of the First Revolt and hidden in the caves, and that the site was merely an industrial complex or emporium related to trade on the Dead Sea.

If Qumran was some sort of community or monastic center, where did the members live? The built part could not have housed more than fifty or so. In 1995, however, Eshel was one of the very few scholars who had mastered all three fields that are necessary to understand Qumran: archaeology, history, and the scrolls. Hanan Eshel noticed trails leading down into gullies near the site. He explored them with a metal detector and found hundreds of metal sandal nails, as well as coins from the period in question (the Second Temple period). Following these trails westward, he discovered that they led to caves, of which five were excavated. These contained pottery from the time. So at least some of Qumran's residents (200 at the most) had lived in caves near the site, going back and forth on these trails and occasionally losing a sandal nail. Others may have lived in tents or booths on the plateau where the community building stood.

In many of the scrolls, a group appears whose practices and beliefs resemble those of a group designated as the Essenes by Josephus Flavius (36 – 100 AD), Jewish general, one of two directing the revolt against Rome in Galilee. After Vespasian captured him, he prophesied the latter would be emperor. When this proved true, the Romans honored him. He then turned historian, writing *The Jewish War*, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and many other books.

Because of a paragraph about John the Baptist and a sentence (maybe two) about Jesus, the Church preserved his works. Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher (20 BC - 50 AD) wrote about the Essenes in two works: *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* (Every Good Man is Free) and *Hypothetica*. Pliny the Elder (23 - 79 AD) wrote a *Natural History* in 37 volumes, based on his own investigations as well as information from 2000 books. The fifth volume concerns the lands of the Near East, although Pliny himself never visited our part of it and relied on the reports of others. According to Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, New York: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 13, about 40% of the nonbiblical documents "presuppose a particular kind of [social-religious] organization and share a distinctive set of doctrines, a unique theological vocabulary, and a special perspective on history." Those who wrote these sectarian scrolls referred to themselves not by the name Essenes, however, rather as the Yahad, which is Hebrew for "unity." Here are the major similarities between the Yahad, on the one hand, and the Essenes as described by Josephus on the other (War II Chapter 8, Pars. 2-13):

1. Like the Essenes of Josephus, one subdivision of the Yahad practiced a kind of communism: each member gave the community all his property, in turn receiving from the others what he needed.
2. They believed in a strict form of predestination.
3. They believed in a rigid dualism of spirit and flesh.
4. They required a trial year before membership, followed by one (scrolls) or two (Josephus) years of probation.
5. They forbade spitting in the midst of the assembly.
6. There was a strong emphasis on ritual bathing. Wise, Abegg, and Cook (op. cit., pp. 25-26) also mention discrepancies between the scrolls and the descriptions by the three classical authors. These can be explained, however, without giving up the equation between the Yahad and a particular subgroup of the Essenes. For example, one of the scrolls, the Damascus Document, does not require celibacy, but the Manual of Discipline does. Philo and Pliny describe the Essenes as celibate. Josephus, however, mentions two Essene orders: one celibate and one not.

Also, the descriptions by Josephus, Philo and Pliny are not extensive (Josephus, the longest, has twelve paragraphs on the Essenes in his *Jewish War* plus one in the *Antiquities*), whereas the scrolls take up hundreds of pages. We would not expect the classical authors to mention all the points that are salient in the scrolls. An argument from silence is not persuasive. In *War...*, for instance, Josephus does not mention the leading role of the priests among the Essenes, but he does do so in the *Antiquities* (XVIII 1, 5). The three classical sources do not mention the solar calendar, so prominent in the scrolls, which stands in contrast with the lunar calendar of the Pharisees, who founded today's normative Judaism. But the classical sources do not discuss the calendar at all. Moreover, Josephus writes about the Essenes as if they identified God with the sun (War II Chapter 8, Pars. 5 and 9).

Two scrolls (the Damascus Document and the Ordinances) contain regulations about the treatment of slaves, whereas Philo and Josephus maintained that the Essenes had none. But Philo appears to be projecting his own philosophy onto the Essenes; the egalitarianism he attributes to them is contradicted by his own descriptions of their hierarchy. As for Josephus, he mentions the avoidance of slaves in the same breath with the avoidance of marriage. As with marriage, his description should probably be limited to a particular subdivision among the Essenes.

One apparent discrepancy deserves special mention. It is clear from the scrolls that the Yahad believed in the imminence of the end-time (eschaton). One finds not a whiff of this in Josephus' description. But this may have a ready explanation: Throughout his opus, Josephus buries references to apocalyptic eschatology, for he had already declared Vespasian to be the fulfilment of such prophecy. (More on this.)

In addition, consider *Natural History* (Book V 18.73), published shortly before 77 AD, Pliny's description:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of people tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus through thousands of ages -- incredible to relate -- a race in which no one is born lives on forever; so prolific for their advantage is other men's weariness of life! Lying below these (Essenes) was formerly the town of Engedi...

"Thousands of ages" is an exaggeration: the order existed, at most, from 200 BC to 68 AD (and probably only from 100 BC). And we don't know what "lying below" would have meant. But the notion that the Essenes lived on the west side of the Dead Sea fits well with the caves around Qumran, where the scrolls were found.

In summary, it seems right to identify the Yahad of the scrolls with a subgroup of the Essenes. Let us now hear more about them.

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The Essenes

1. Historical background.

Hardly ever do the scrolls refer to a person or group by a name that we recognize. The writers used code names. They saw contemporary events as fulfillments of biblical prophecy and preferred, therefore, to substitute biblical terms. The use of code names also separated those who were "in" (who knew the code) from those who were "out": the saved from the damned, the children of light from the children of darkness. It is no easy task, therefore, to figure out which bit of history is being referred to and who is being talked about.

In 1 Maccabees 2:42, a text from the initial days of the revolt against the Greek Empire, we first hear about a "congregation of the Hasidim (Assideans, "pious ones")... all of whom devote themselves to the Law." (The Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew hasidim is hasen, from which the name Essenes may derive.) At first this pious group supported the Maccabean uprising.

In 152 BC, one of the Maccabee brothers, Jonathan, was leading the revolt. He seized Jerusalem, refortified the Temple, and got himself appointed High Priest. The Maccabees (or {jtips}The Hasmoneans: family of Judah Maccabee ("the hammer") and his brothers, who revolted successfully against the Greek Empire starting in 167 BC. They purified and re-dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, establishing the festival of Hanukah ("dedication"). They ruled till 63 BC, and their domain extended almost as far as King David's. |Hasmoneans{/jtips}, to use their formal name) were a priestly family, but they did not belong to the line of Zadok, High Priest under David. Zadok's descendants had held the office whenever Israel was sovereign. Among the Hasidim, many supporters of the Zadokite line resented Jonathan's usurpation. A Greek general tricked and murdered Jonathan in 142 BC. The sole survivor among the Maccabee brothers, Simon, took over the leadership. He managed to achieve full independence, ridding Jerusalem of the last Greek garrison. A popular assembly then decreed that Simon should be their leader "and high priest forever, until a faithful prophet should arise." (1 Macc. 14) Thus the assembly recognized Simon as the founder of a new high-priestly line.

Around this time, the Hasidic party split into two wings: the Pharisees and the Essenes. The former included a large number of lay people who at first sought a modus vivendi with the Hasmoneans. Other Hasidim, though, led by Zadokite priests, separated themselves from the main body of the Jews. They decided to avoid the Temple service for as long as the "Wicked Priest" and his descendants presided there. This "Wicked Priest" of the scrolls is thought by many modern scholars to have been Jonathan (so holds {jtips}Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977 |Vermes, {/jtips} pp. 35-36) or Simon (says {jtips}Frank Moore Cross Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, Doubleday Anchor, 1961 |Cross, {/jtips} pp. 141-156).

The scrolls call the leader (apparently also the founder) of the Essenes "the Teacher of Righteousness." He may have been the high priest whom Jonathan supplanted in 152. Josephus claims that there was no high priest in the seven years until 152 BC, but this is implausible, considering the high priest's central role on the Day of Atonement (he alone was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement for Israel). Perhaps Josephus, himself of Hasmonean lineage, wanted to avoid blaming his ancestor for deposing the legitimate high priest and usurping his office.

Ousted from the high priesthood, the Righteous Teacher and his companions took refuge in the desert, like other famous outlaws before them (Moses, David, Elijah). The period of Jonathan and Simon is thought by most scholars to correspond in time with the founding of the complex at Qumran. The commentary on Habakkuk from Cave 1 reports that the Wicked Priest pursued the Righteous Teacher "to overwhelm him... at his house in exile."

This attack, the scroll tells us, came on the Day of Atonement: that is, the Essene Yom Kippur, not the Hasmonean. The Essenes followed a calendar based on the solar circuit, whereas the Hasmoneans (and normative Judaism later) followed a calendar based on the cycles of the moon. The question of which calendar to follow would have been crucial: the Jewish people could not retain its unity if different groups celebrated the holidays at different times.

So much for the standard version of the history. It has been brought into question by the {jtips}Deciphered by Ada Yardeni, translated by Martin Abegg in Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, New York: HarperCollins, 2005. |decipherment{/jtips} of a short text from Cave 4, numbered 448 (4Q448). This contains the lines: "Awake, O Holy One, for Jonathan the king, and all the congregation of Your people Israel that is (dispersed) to the four winds of the heavens, let peace be on all of them and Your kingdom." Now, {jtips}Reigned 103 BC - 76 BC |Alexander Jannaeus{/jtips} was the {jtips}The first was his older brother Aristobulus I. Both were sons of John Hyrcanus, son of Simon, brother of Judah Maccabee. |second{/jtips} Hasmonean to take the title of king. His Hebrew

name was Jonathan, and he is thought to be the "Jonathan" of this passage (but Geza Vermes, who starts Essene history earlier, thinks it was Jonathan, brother of Judah Maccabee). Of course that doesn't square with the notion that the Essenes were anti-Hasmonean.

The decipherment of 4Q448 has led some scholars to a further revision of the standard history. Another text from Cave 4, numbered 169 and called the Commentary on Nahum, refers to identifiable figures, including Alexander Jannaeus, who "used to hang men alive [a gap occurs here] in Israel in former times..." This refers to a time when Jannaeus crucified eight hundred Jews who had invited a Greek king to invade his realm. Following the standard version of the history, scholars filled the gap with the words "which had never been done...", as if the author of the scroll were expressing outrage at Jannaeus. In the Temple Scroll, however, published in 1977, crucifixion is favored for traitors; this led its interpreter, Yigal Yadin, to fill the gap quite otherwise: "as it was done" in Israel in former times. The positive attitude toward Jannaeus, as reflected in 4Q448, has led some scholars to adopt Yadin's suggestion. What is more, according to the Commentary on Nahum many of those crucified by Jannaeus were the "Flattery Seekers," a name applied in other sources to the Pharisees. It was already known that the Yahad hated the Pharisees, but now it appeared "that Alexander, the sworn enemy of the Pharisees, during his reign, was a hero to the sect" (Wise, Abegg and Cook, p. 28). The point so far is this: if the Yahad could side with Jannaeus, "then clearly they need not have disapproved of any Hasmonean leader on principle" (Ibid.).

After the death of Jannaeus, his widow, Queen Salome Alexandra, took over the rule of Judaea. She appointed her older son, Hyrcanus II, to be high priest. (Wise, Abegg and Cook suggest that he was the "Wicked Priest" of the scrolls - op. cit., p. 31.) As for the Pharisees, she reversed her husband's position and favored them. The reason may have been that she had to choose sides between the two big groups, the conservative Sadducees and the Pharisees, who were liberal in interpreting Jewish law; because they had the support of the people, she opted for them. "While she ruled the people," wrote Josephus, "the Pharisees ruled her" (War I 5.2). But these Pharisees artfully insinuated themselves into her favor by little and little, and became themselves the real administrators of the public affairs: they banished and reduced whom they pleased; they bound and loosed [men] at their pleasure...Accordingly, they themselves slew Diogenes, a person of figure, and one that had been a friend to Alexander; and accused him as having assisted the king with his advice, for crucifying the eight hundred men [before mentioned.] They also prevailed with Alexandra to put to death the rest of those who had irritated him against them. Now she was so superstitious as to comply with their desires, and accordingly they slew whom they pleased themselves. But the principal of those that were in danger fled to Aristobulus....

This Aristobulus was her younger son, a conservative and supporter of the Sadducees.

[Aristobulus] persuaded his mother to spare the men on account of their dignity, but to expel them out of the city, unless she took them to be innocent; so they were suffered to go unpunished, and were dispersed all over the country.

In the Dead Sea Scroll known as the Commentary on Habakkuk, we read that the Wicked Priest pursued the founder of the Yahad, called the Teacher of Righteousness, "to his place of exile." Could it be that the Essenes were among those dispersed by Salome - and that therefore we find them, according to Josephus and Philo, "living in villages"? Wise, Abegg and Cook (op. cit. p. 32) maintain that given these new assessments, our bits of knowledge fall into place. The Teacher of Righteousness flourished around the start of the 1st century BC - not during the Hasmonean revolt seventy years earlier. As long as the conservative Jannaeus was in power, his group thrived. But when Jannaeus died and his widow took over - Salome, ruled by the Pharisees - the members of the Yahad were exiled from Jerusalem to the countryside, where they were persecuted by Hyrcanus II. This revision also fits four documents from Cave 4 that are collectively dubbed Fragmentary Historical Writings, which, rather uniquely, mention historical figures and events without code names. Among them are Salome Alexandra and her sons, as well as the Roman general Aemilius Scaurus, who first led a Roman army, that of Pompey the Great, into Judaea in 63 BC. Indeed some of the scrolls, such as the Habbakuk Commentary, no longer see the Wicked Priest or the Pharisees as the primary enemy, rather the Romans.

As to those scholars who maintain what is still the standard view of the Essenes' early history, how do they account for the scroll that prays for the welfare of King Jonathan (4Q448)? They hold that a new member of the sect brought it with him, and so it wound up in the Cave 4 library. Alexander Jannaeus' code name, they hold, is "the last lion cub," and he is hated in the scrolls.

2. Their Central Idea

We have seen various pieces of evidence connecting the Yahad of the scrolls, the Essenes of the ancient historians, and the site of Qumran. But why would they have chosen to live here at the place they knew as Sekakah? Among the motives was a theological one: The members of the Yahad thought of themselves as the true Israel, and they expected God to renew the covenant, which had originally been made in the desert. They took to heart Isaiah 40:3 - "Prepare the way of in the wilderness!" (Manual of Discipline, Columns 8: 15 and 9:20; since the Manual is a secular document, the scribes did not write out the name of God, putting four dots instead).

The members saw themselves as living in the wilderness to prepare a way for the Lord. They had already been there fifty years or so when John the Baptist appeared at the Jordan nearby, attracting the same verse from Isaiah (cf. Mark 1:2).

They expected the Lord to come soon. They were the first major Jewish group to advance the notion that the end time - eschaton - was near: that God was about to intervene directly in the world, defeat the forces of evil, and establish His order forever. Here is the debut of "Apocalypticism," writes Frank Moore Cross Jr., "sees world history in the grip of warring forces, God and Satan, the spirits of truth and error, light and darkness. The world, captive to evil powers and principalities which have been given authority in the era of divine wrath, can be freed only by the divine might. But the day of God's salvation and judgment dawns. The old age has moved to its allotted end and the age of consummation is at hand, the age of the vindication of the elect and the redemption of the world. Current events signal the approach of the end. The final war, Armageddon, has begun. The Messiah is about to appear, 'bringing a sword.' The Satanic forces, now brought to bay, break out in a final, defiant convulsion, manifest in the persecutions, temptations and tribulations of the faithful. In the earnestness of his faith and the vividness of his hope he [the apocalypticist] is certain that God is about to act. The faithful will be given the gift of salvation." Frank Moore Cross Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, Doubleday Anchor, 1961, p. 77. [apocalyptic eschatology.]

Elsewhere we have discussed the forces that gave rise to this idea. (See *Covenant Faith vs. Roman Pincers*.) Briefly: The divine covenant provided that if Israel worshipped God alone, renouncing idolatry, it would thrive (Deut. 11: 13-17). After the return from the Babylonian exile, the Jews no longer worshipped the idols of yore, such as Baal or Asherah. Yet things did not go well. The Hasmoneans: family of Judah Maccabee ("the hammer") and his brothers, who revolted successfully against the Greek Empire starting in 167 BC. They purified and re-dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, establishing the festival of Hanukah ("dedication"). They ruled till 63 BC, and their domain extended almost as far as King David's. Hasmoneans, initially welcomed as saviors, sometimes proved to be cruel despots, persecuting first the Pharisees and then the Essenes. In addition, we have seen, they usurped the high priesthood. In 63 BC, the Romans exploited a conflict between the two Hasmonean brothers whom we met above, Hyrcanus II and Aristobolus II, and conquered the land. Once again the Jews were under foreign rule, although no longer worshipping idols! How to explain this? Was the covenant a fairy tale? Mere wishful thinking?

The response of the Yahad appears to have been as follows: These are the sufferings of the Last Days, the times of tribulation foreseen by the prophets, the last desperate struggle by the powers of evil, the necessary and painful prelude to God's re-entry into history. His Messiah is about to appear and lead us to victory over the Sons of Darkness. And here we are, God's chosen Sons of Light, preparing the way.

This apocalyptic eschatology is the central idea of the Yahad. It appears throughout its literature, but especially in the commentaries on the prophets and in the scroll the scholars have dubbed, *The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*. Remarkably, in his detailed discussion of the Essenes, Josephus fails to mention it. (Why?)

Apocalyptic eschatology contains a strong Hebraic element: the notion that God steers history toward salvation. The paradigm is the Passover story, in which He intervened to rescue His people from slavery in Egypt. In the same way (so the thinking went), now that our troubles have reached such a pitch, God will re-enter history according to His predetermined plan, defeating the wicked and exalting the righteous. Thus the covenant will be fulfilled.

We can also find a Hebraic element in the strong distinction between holy and profane. The Essenes were led by priests, for whom this distinction was cardinal. In the First Testament, however, the profane does not appear as a force in its own right. Where must we look to find such a thing?

Perhaps to Persian Zoroastrianism. It conceives the cosmos in terms of a struggle between light and darkness, a conflict that is also featured in some of the Dead Sea scrolls. Zoroaster's teachings were part of the spiritual atmosphere in the Persian realm, including Mesopotamia, which included a great many Jews. Most of those exiled by Babylon had chosen to remain there, forming a large community, including great scholars. On hearing about the successful Maccabean revolt against the Greeks (the Seleucids), many Jews returned to the Holy Land - and we may hazard the assumption that they had been unwittingly influenced by Persian dualism. If this is correct, it would be no wonder that such dualism became a major influence.

With the Greek and Roman conquests, Plato's dualism of spirit and matter had also entered the region. Thus two dualistic systems converged on the "land bridge," where they encountered the Hebrew scriptures, which are not dualistic: those scriptures that precede Alexander the Great (332 BC) contain no mention of "this world" versus "another." (What is dualism?)

The Essenes, who already laid stress on the priestly distinction between sacred and profane, were especially open to dualism. We see the result, for example, in their doctrine of two spirits, from the *Manual of Discipline*: "He (God) has created man to govern the world, and has appointed for him two spirits in which to walk until the time of His visitation: the spirits of truth and injustice. Those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of injustice spring from a

source of darkness. All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness." (1QS3, 18-22.) (Vermes, Geza. The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977. Vermes, p. 73) we experience reality in terms of a fundamental distinction between two realms, sending everything either upstairs or down, then what shall we do with sex? Shall it go to the realm of the spirit or to that of the flesh? It goes to the latter -- and so we find one Essene order consisting of Jewish celibates. For these Jews, then, dualism overcame the divine command to be fruitful and multiply.

Likewise, the renunciation of creature comforts and egotistical greed is suitable for people who wish to live already in the community of the spirit. The most pious among the Essenes gave all they had to the community and received from it what they required. There were Essene colonies, however, in the towns throughout Judaea, and not all members were purely communistic. Some gave up only a portion of their wages each month.

3. Essenes and Christians

The Essenes preceded the Christians. They were "the bearers, and in no small part the producers, of the apocalyptic tradition in Judaism." (Frank Moore Cross Jr., The Ancient Library of Qumran, Doubleday Anchor, 1961, p. 198, his emphasis). From them the Christians may have inherited their apocalyptic eschatology. It is possible, however, that both groups drew from a common earlier tradition. (So Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977 and The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, Fourth edition, Penguin: 1995, pp. 211-221.) Either way, it is now clear that Christian eschatology did not originate in a vacuum. Compare, for example, the following passages from 1 John with the doctrine of two spirits in the Manual of Discipline, quoted above:

1 John 3:7-10

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 4:1-6

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The same dualistic eschatology produced a similar attitude toward marriage. It is good not to marry at all, said Paul, but better marry than burn. And why is it good not to marry at all? Because "the time has been shortened." (1 Corinthians 7:29. Compare Now concerning the things about which you wrote to me: it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But, because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection owed her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife doesn't have authority over her own body, but the husband. Likewise also the husband doesn't have authority over his own body, but the wife. Don't deprive one another, unless it is by consent for a season, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and may be together again, that Satan doesn't tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But this I say by way of concession, not of commandment. Yet I wish that all men were like me. However each man has his own gift from God, one of this kind, and another of that kind. But I say to the unmarried and to widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I am. 1 Corinthians 7:1-8) and Jesus said to them, "The children of this age marry, and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. For they can't die any more, for they are like the angels, and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:34-36.)

In their attitude toward property, too, the early Christians were like the Essenes, probably for the same apocalyptic reasons. The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. Not one of them claimed that anything of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. With great power, the apostles gave their testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Great grace was on them all. For neither was there among them any who lacked, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to each, according as anyone had need. (Acts

4:32-35{/jtips2}).

This is not to say that there weren't momentous differences! Jesus taught people to love even their enemies, and early Christianity was an open society, persuading others to join. The Essenes taught hatred of the Sons of Darkness; they do not seem to have proselytized. Because of their priestly leadership, the Essenes laid a heavy stress on ritual law; in this they were stricter than the Pharisees. They had no doctrine of incarnation, and the notion of a crucified Messiah would probably have shocked them.

What is more, unlike the early Christians, the Essenes prepared for war.

4. Their End

Philo wrote that the Essenes refused to traffic in weapons, a statement that has led some to think they were pacifists. But if Philo was correct, he must have meant that they rejected the usual kind of war, for spoils or territory. God's final war was to be a different matter. The so-called War Scroll presents the line-up for battle against the Sons of Darkness. The latter are called by the code name "Kittim." In the Commentary on Habakkuk (VI, 5), they are said "to sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons" (clearly a reference to the Romans). During the first revolt, in fact, one of the top Jewish generals was John the Essene. Josephus writes: "...our war with the Romans gave abundant evidence what great souls they had in their trials, wherein, although they were tortured and distorted, burnt and torn to pieces, and went through all kinds of instruments of torment, that they might be forced either to blaspheme their legislator, or to eat what was forbidden them, yet could they not be made to do either of them" (Josephus Flavius, *The Wars of the Jews*, translated by William Whiston|War{/jtips} II 8.10). The Romans did not behave this way toward those who did not resist them. Finally, archaeologists date the destruction of Qumran to 68 AD, in the midst of the Jewish revolt; within the blackened debris they discovered the iron arrowheads used by the Roman legions.

All these considerations point one way: the Essenes must have viewed the revolt against Rome as the war they had been waiting for. They went into it expecting God to intervene. He did not. The disappointment did not prevent other Jews in this land, sixty years later, from fomenting an even less feasible revolt under the false Messiah, Bar Kokhba.

{mospagebreak title=Scrolls and Bible}The Scrolls and the Biblical Text

The caves around Qumran have yielded 170 Hebrew scrolls of books that also appear in the First Testament. Represented are all except Esther. Frank Moore Cross gives an example of one case where a scroll enables us to fill a gap, and solve some puzzles, in the Biblical text (Hershel Shanks, ed. *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York: Vintage, 1993.|Shanks,{/jtips} pp. 156-161).

The scroll in question contains the books of Samuel. It was found in Cave 4 and dates from the 1st century BC. Until this find, Cross points out, there was something puzzling about 1 Samuel 11:1-5. In the standard Biblical text, it goes like this:

Now Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us and we will serve you." But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "I will make it with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel." The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Let us alone for seven days, that we may send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to deliver us, we will come out to you." Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and spoke these words in the hearing of the people, and all the people lifted up their voices and wept.

Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen, and he said, "What is the matter with the people that they weep?" So they related to him the words of the men of Jabesh. (In the sequel, Saul gathers an army and defeats Nahash, rescuing the people of Jabesh.)

There are two puzzles here. First, Jabesh Gilead was not in the domain of Nahash: he had no claim to it. Mutilation, however, was standard treatment for rebels within one's realm (long-standing enemies or treaty violators), not for newly-conquered territory.

Second, in the books of Samuel and Kings, whenever a king is introduced, we hear his title in the form, "x, King of y." Here, uniquely, we bump into "Nahash the Ammonite" without royal title.

In the version of Samuel assembled from the fragments of Cave 4, however, the passage cited above has an introduction, absent from all extant versions of the Bible:

[N]ahash, king of the children of Ammon, sorely oppressed the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, and he gouged out a[ll] their right eyes and struck ter[r]or and dread in Israel. There was not left one among the children of Israel bey[ond the Jordan who]se right eye was no[t put o]ut by Naha[sh king] of the children of Ammon; except that seven thousand men [fled from] the children of [A]mmon and entered [J]abesh-Gilead. About a month later Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-Gilead.

The rest follows as in 1 Samuel 11:1-5, quoted above.

(Note: Gad and Reuben were within the domain that Nahash claimed as his. When Jabesh-Gilead sheltered the refugees, he threatened its men with the same punishment he had inflicted on those within his realm.)

How did this passage get left out of our Bible? A scribal eye, moving back and forth between the original and the copy he was making, jumped from the first "Nahash" to the third, inadvertently omitting a section.

When did the mistake occur? The passage from Cave 4 is also missing from the Septuagint. The scribal lapse must have occurred before then. Quite apart from the faulty version, however, the more complete text of 1 Samuel 11 still existed two centuries later -- and found its way into Cave 4, disappearing under guano and dirt for 2000 years.

Why didn't this passage find its way into some other Hebrew version of the Bible? Because there was none. There was only the standard. Josephus, writing in the 90's AD, recognizes just one version, which he calls immutable. (Against Apion, I. 37-41.) In expeditions south of Qumran, archaeologists found biblical scrolls dating from between the revolts (70 AD-132 AD); only one version is represented: the texts are basically those of the First Testament as we know them. By this time, in other words, one Hebrew version had become definitive, sweeping all others into oblivion until 1947.

Here we can appreciate the importance of the Dead Sea scrolls for biblical scholarship. Until 1947, there were, broadly speaking, only two versions of the Bible in manuscript: the Greek Septuagint and the standard Hebrew text (the Masoretic). Where these differed, scholars assumed that the Hebrew was the more authoritative. (Both {jtips}Origen (ca. 185-254 AD). A Christian thinker, the greatest to appear after Paul, who thought through the Christian faith from what he called "First Principles." He did most of his work at Caesarea Maritima. |Origen {/jtips} and {jtips2}Jerome (a.k.a. Hieronymus) (ca. 347 – 420 AD), the learned Church father (and favorite saint of Christian painters after the Holy Family), spent the last 34 years of his life in Bethlehem, where he translated both the Hebrew First Testament and the Greek Second Testament into Latin, the so-called "Vulgate." It remained the authoritative version of the Bible for Western Christendom for a thousand years. He took part in the great theological controversies of his day, and his influence was tremendous. From what remains of his vast correspondence, he appears to have kept his faith at the cost of struggle with his own impulses; his bitter, combative disposition (perhaps a result of that struggle) often seems far from the teachings of tolerance found in Jesus, Paul and Origen.|Jerome,{/jtips2} for example, changed their copies of the Greek translation to fit the Hebrew.) With the 170 biblical scrolls from the caves, we now see that in the places where the Septuagint differs, the Greek translators were working from Hebrew versions that varied from those that later became the standard.

On the basis of the scrolls from the Book of Exodus, Cross has distinguished three Hebrew textual "families." All derive from a common archetype of the 6th century BC, the turbulent time of exile and return. Then different versions began to appear.

1. One he calls the "Babylonian textual family," because he thinks it arrived from there. Under the influence of the sage Hillel, who immigrated to Palestine from Babylon in the early 1st century BC, this version became definitive for the Hebrew Bible as we know it.
2. Another he calls the "old Palestinian textual family." This was the dominant group at Qumran. The Samaritan Pentateuch also derives from it.
3. Out of the Palestinian textual family grew a third, which took hold in Egypt in the 3d century BC, becoming the basis for the Greek translation (Septuagint).

See Cross in {jtips}Hershel Shanks, ed., Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls, New York: Vintage, 1993. |Shanks,{/jtips} ed. p. 148.

As to why the Rabbis insisted on standardizing the Hebrew version, Cross points out that at the time of the Maccabean victories, Jews swarmed to Jerusalem from Babylonia and Syria, as well as from Egypt. They brought competing local texts of the sacred books, "causing considerable confusion, as reflected in the library at Qumran" (Ibid., p. 149). When party strife developed among Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, each group adducing proofs from different versions, it was clear to the rabbis that an authoritative text was needed. When the Temple too went up in smoke (70 AD), there was nothing but scripture to hold the Jewish people together. For the sake of unity in dispersion, the founders of normative Judaism could no longer tolerate variant texts.

{mospagebreak title=The Site }The Site

The earliest structure here was an Israelite fortress called Sekakah (Joshua 15: 61), abandoned since the 6th century BC. (Many think that the round cistern in the photo below belonged to it.) The first archaeologists here deduced the site's later dates on the basis of coins. A new complex was founded, they thought, in the 2nd century BC - although when exactly is disputed. As to the end, the Romans conquered and occupied the site in 68 AD while quelling the first Jewish revolt. The place was in use for a few more years under Roman occupation.

{maps}images/stories/Rift_Valley/qumran/qumran-riverbed.jpg|Qumran's water supply|right{/maps}1. The water system. When we climb the tower (the sole structure standing to its original height), we can see numerous plastered chambers joined by channels. Some were cisterns, but ten have been identified as ritual baths. One can identify a ritual bath or mikveh by its broad staircase, which usually has a divider running down its length in the middle. (A cistern does not require a broad staircase, which takes up space and involves much labor in the cutting.) The divider separated those coming up, who had purified themselves by total immersion, from the impure going down.

So many big ritual baths on so small a site! We may understand this by looking at the Manual of Discipline (the sect's "constitution"); we read, "They [the men of injustice] shall not enter the water to partake of the pure Meal of the men of holiness..." (V 13 in {jtips2}Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. Fourth edition. Penguin, 1995. |Vermes{/jtips2}, p. 76); {jtips2}Josephus Flavius (36 – 100 AD), Jewish general, one of two directing the revolt against Rome in Galilee. After Vespasian captured him, he prophesied the latter would be emperor. When this proved true, the Romans honored him. He then turned historian, writing *The Jewish War*, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and many other books. Because of a paragraph about John the Baptist and a reference (maybe two) to Jesus, the Church preserved his works. |Josephus{/jtips2} describes this combination of bathing, followed by eating. (While the site was active, a man named John baptized other Jews about six miles away at the Jordan River.)

{maps}images/stories/Rift_Valley/qumran/qumran-mikveh.jpg|Ritual bath near refectory|left{/maps}{maps}images/stories/Rift_Valley/qumran/qumran-mikveh2.jpg|Crack in another ritual bath|right{/maps}Qumran has no spring, and it rains less than 100 mm. per year (four inches, a fifth of what Jerusalem gets). Looking west, however, we see the gorge of Wadi Qumran (enlarge picture, above right). Its drainage basin spreads westward in the desert for about three miles. The inhabitants dammed this gorge near its mouth. (Pieces of the dam are visible from within the canyon.) On a rare rainy day in the desert, the accumulated water flowed into an aqueduct, the line of which is visible on the north side of the path leading westward from the site. The water filled the baths and cisterns one after another. (Given the intense evaporation here, the baths and cisterns must have been covered.) Nowadays, however, only one or two flash floods reach this place in a year; the climate was slightly wetter 2000 years ago, but not dramatically so. The conclusion is inescapable that the group repeatedly used the same water for immersion!

But why so much ritual bathing? In the regular Jewish practice of the time, a ritual bath was necessary only to cleanse oneself from impurity before entering the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem. Impurity, be it noted, should not be identified with sin. It may be the case that the Essenes at Qumran considered themselves to be the proper priests and conducted themselves accordingly, as if their settlement were a substitute Temple, pending their return to a purified Temple in Jerusalem. This theory would also explain the ritual meals and the careful disposal of the animal bones, as mentioned below.

2. The scriptorium (?). Likewise southeast of the tower is a long narrow windowless chamber, into which things had fallen from the second floor. Among them was an object interpreted to be a narrow table or tables, which could have been used for laying out pieces of parchment before sewing them into a scroll. (Scribes wrote, as said above, with tablets on their laps.) The diggers also found four inkwells here, one with dried ink - a rare find for this country at the time.

{maps}images/stories/Rift_Valley/qumran/qumran-refectory.jpg|The Qumran dining hall|right{/maps}3. The assembly and dining hall. In this passage from Josephus, the Essenes are said to have bathed and then gone into a dining room, where they ate a solemn meal. A day would come, they thought, and soon, when the priestly and the lay Messiahs would join them in this banquet, as preparation for God's great victory over the "sons of darkness." According to those who connect Qumran with the Essenes, this long hall was the room -- and note the ritual bath beside its entrance. (See picture above.) We see a channel from a cistern leading into the room, to keep it clean. There is also a stone dais, on which, perhaps, the priest used to stand to bless the food or conduct the assembly. In a small adjacent chamber, archaeologists found more than a thousand plates, bowls, serving dishes, water vessels, wine flasks and cups, all

cracked from the earthquake of 31 BC. In the rebuilding that occurred in the time of Herod the Great, the part of the room that contained these dishes was sealed off, and so they remained for the archaeologists.

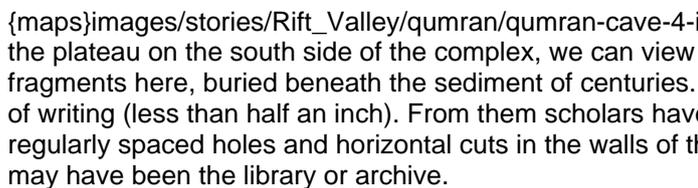
The Manual of Discipline (1QS) makes many references to an assembly room in columns VI and VII. For example:

"Wherever there are ten men of the Council of the Community there shall not lack a Priest among them. And they shall all sit before him according to their rank and shall be asked their counsel in all things in that order. And when the table has been prepared for eating, and the new wine for drinking, the Priest shall be the first to stretch out his hand to bless the first-fruits of the bread and new wine." (Josephus) The Dead Sea Scrolls in English. Fourth edition. Penguin, 1995. (Vermes) p. 77

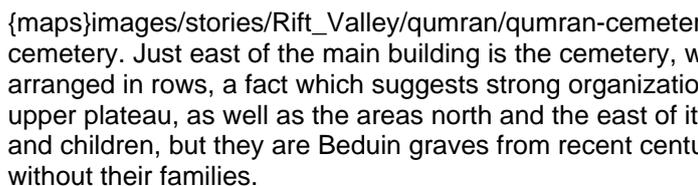
A variant text of the Manual (1QSa II, 11-22) talks about this common meal as "a liturgical anticipation of the Messianic banquet" (Frank Moore Cross Jr., The Ancient Library of Qumran, Doubleday Anchor, 1961) pp. 88-90).

4. Sacrifice (?) In the open areas of the complex (for example, in the plateau south of the main building) the diggers found carefully buried deposits containing the bones of kosher animals (sheep, goats and cattle, but no poultry). Some of the deposits were in jars, while others were covered with fragments of pottery. These, thinks Cross, "are the remains of the sacral feasts of the community" (Cross, op. cit., p. 70) - an idea first proposed by the chief excavator, Roland de Vaux.

They may have been sacrifices. One may translate a passage in Josephus to read, "they offer sacrifices by themselves" (Josephus Flavius, Antiquities of the Jews, translated by William Whiston) XVIII 1.5). For a discussion, see (Frank Moore Cross Jr., The Ancient Library of Qumran, Doubleday Anchor, 1961) pp. 101-102.

5. The archive (?) From the plateau on the south side of the complex, we can view the entrance to Cave 4. The Bedouin found thousands of fragments here, buried beneath the sediment of centuries. They sold them to the archaeologists for \$5.60 per centimeter of writing (less than half an inch). From them scholars have reconstructed parts of some 600 documents. There are regularly spaced holes and horizontal cuts in the walls of the cave, perhaps indicating the placement of shelves. If so, this may have been the library or archive.

Under Jordanian auspices, eight scholars divided the fragments among themselves. For 40 years they had exclusive access, and the rate of publication was extremely slow. These years included the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, when de facto control passed from Jordan to Israel. In late 1991 the Biblical Archaeological Society obtained photographs of the unpublished fragments and, against the will of the Israel Antiquities Authority, published them. For the Society's view of this controversy, see (Shanks, Hershel, ed. Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls, New York: Vintage, 1993. pp. xxiv-xxxiii.

7. The cemetery. Just east of the main building is the cemetery, which contains more than 1100 graves. They are neatly arranged in rows, a fact which suggests strong organization. Of the 46 that have been excavated, all except three on the upper plateau, as well as the areas north and the east of it, were the graves of men. Those to the south include women and children, but they are Bedouin graves from recent centuries. It would seem that the vast majority of men lived here without their families.

Each grave on the upper plateau, six feet deep, is marked by an oblong heap of small stones, surrounded by a row of larger unhewn stones, with still larger stones standing upright at either end. The head is on the south side. Since the apocryphal Book of Enoch (of major importance to the Essenes) has the Messiah arriving from the north, the idea may have been that the dead members of the Yahad would rise from their graves and greet him. The heaps of stones may reflect general Jewish practice at the time: when people were buried in the earth (and not in a family cave-tomb), it would have been important to mark the grave so that the living would not unwittingly walk over it, an act that would render them ritually impure (cf. "Woe to you [Pharisees], because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it." Luke 11:44). Perhaps this is behind the Jewish custom of placing a stone on the grave.

At Ein Feshka, about two miles south on lower ground, there are freshwater springs. Here archaeologists found agricultural installations that fit the time-frame of Qumran.

{mospagebreak title=Logistics}

Logistics

Qumran is a national park.

Telephone: 02-994223502-9942235

Nature Reserves and National Parks (Main office: 02/500-5444)

Opening hours:

April 1 through September 30, from 8.00 - 17.00. (Entrance until 16.00)*

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*On Fridays and the eves of Jewish holidays, the sites close one hour earlier. For example, on a Friday in March one must enter by 14.00 and leave by 15.00.

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