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Editor's Introduction

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Abstract Introduction to the current issue.

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present this issue dedicated to Latter-day Saint (LDS) scholarship and the Dead Sea Scrolls for the broader “community of general LDS readers who study and teach the Bible and who wish to better understand both the biblical text and its world.”¹ This issue comes thirteen years after the appearance of *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*² and also marks the completion of the massive project (forty volumes) titled *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (DJD), which serves as the official scholarly publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls.³ Therefore, we felt it appropriate to publish a special issue of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* that focuses particularly on LDS scholarship and the scrolls.

Latter-day Saints have been interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls since their discovery during the years spanning 1947–56, in which

1. “Editors’ Introduction,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): vii.

2. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike, eds., *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997). See also M. Gerald Bradford, ed., *Ancient Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997); Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Questions and Responses for Latter-Day Saints* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). These three publications are freely available online at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/.

3. The DJD volumes contain texts, translations, and commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Four BYU scholars have served as members of the international team of editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls and have contributed to select DJD volumes: Donald W. Parry, Dana M. Pike, David R. Seely, and Andrew C. Skinner.

over 900 ancient documents were found “amid the crumbling limestone cliffs that line the northwestern rim of the Dead Sea, in the area of Qumran.”⁴ The documents have been categorized according to three types of texts: Hebrew biblical scrolls, containing portions of all the books of the Old Testament except for Esther; apocryphal or pseudepigraphal texts (for example, Enoch, Jubilees); and sectarian texts (for example, the *Community Rule* and *War Scroll*). Before the discovery of the scrolls, the earliest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) dated to the ninth or tenth century AD, but the Dead Sea Scrolls provide manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible dating approximately one thousand years earlier (that is, from the third century BC to the first century AD). Significantly, this has allowed textual critics of the Hebrew Bible to examine the accuracy of its transmission.

In “The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible,” Donald W. Parry introduces readers to the scrolls as they relate to the Hebrew Bible, parabiblical texts, and to the sectarian documents. He explores particularly the significance of the scrolls for our understanding of scribal transmission, variant readings between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, and how the Dead Sea Scrolls sectarians understood scripture. Parry’s article provides an important discussion of these topics from an LDS scholarly perspective.

One of the challenges for Latter-day Saints curious about the Dead Sea Scrolls is finding accurate information. Dana M. Pike, in “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Latter-day Saints: Where Do We Go from Here?,” argues that too many Latter-days Saints rely on outdated information and flawed methodologies. Pike gives several suggestions for keeping up to date and countering misinformation. He also proposes a framework for approaching the Dead Sea Scrolls within their proper historical, textual, and religious contexts.

Andrew C. Skinner sheds light on the connection between the Dead Sea Scrolls and first-century Christianity in “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the World of Jesus.” Skinner takes a measured and cautious approach in exploring certain parallels between the scrolls and

4. *Ancient Scrolls from the Dead Sea*, 1.

the earliest Christian texts, such as similar terminology and phrasing, temple ideology, and messianic expectations.

While there is great utility in the rigorous textual and historical approaches to the scrolls that characterize contemporary scholarship, Latter-day Saints have found the scrolls compelling from their first publication for the resonances they exhibit with our own religious tradition. A number of LDS studies have highlighted these correspondences, though too often (as Pike notes) with more enthusiasm than scholarship. A number of the better studies are cited in the select bibliography of LDS scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls included in this issue. But few match in vision or vigor Hugh Nibley's "From the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS)," which first appeared in 1975 as appendix 1 to *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*.⁵ His translation of this text, as Stephen Ricks's introduction notes, retains a "clarity and simplicity" that "does stand the test of time." Even if more critical translations are now available, it serves here to introduce readers directly to one of the most famous of the scrolls. More important, Nibley's translation and commentary (and all translation, at a certain level, *is* commentary) are a seminal example of a sympathetic LDS reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

We hope this issue of *Studies* will aid interested Latter-day Saints in better understanding and appreciating the Dead Sea Scrolls and their place within LDS scholarship.

5. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 255–62; 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 461–75.