The Qumran exhibit also included a replica of 1QS Rule of the Community, one of the first manuscripts discovered among the seven scrolls of Qumran Cave 1 in 1947. Measuring six feet two inches in length and ten inches in height, the scroll was written on five connected sheets of parchment that comprise eleven columns of text. Using paleographic analysis, scholars have dated the scroll to about 100 B.C. Fragments of additional copies of this scroll have been found in other caves near Qumran, the earliest fragment dating to about 140 B.C.

The Rule of the Community (or Manual of Discipline, as it is still popularly known) is the central organizational document relating to the Qumran community. As such it is one of many sectarian documents included in the collection at BYU. This document was written for a faithful remnant of Israel who were preparing for the kingdom of God and for God’s triumph over the forces of evil. The inhabitants of this religious community saw themselves as this faithful remnant. The document is organized with a preamble that explains the purpose of the group, followed by the community’s basic constitution, which includes the requirements for entrance into the community, the procedures for admission, the various classes or ranks within the community, the regulations governing the relations among the community members, and items concerning military service, education, eligibility for office, and the conduct of communal meals.

The community at Qumran was quite strict in terms of the conduct expected of its members and the penalties associated with disobedience. For instance, we learn the following from the Rule of the Community:

Whoever has deliberately lied shall do penance for six months.

Whoever has deliberately insulted his companion unjustly shall do penance for one year and shall be excluded.

Whoever has deliberately deceived his companion by word or by deed shall do penance for six months.

Whoever has borne malice against his companion unjustly shall do penance for six months/one year; and likewise, whoever has taken revenge in any matter whatever.

Whoever has spoken foolishly: three months.

Whoever has interrupted his companion while speaking: ten days.

Whoever has lain down to sleep during an Assembly of the Congregation: thirty days. And likewise, whoever has left, without reason, an Assembly of the Congregation as many as three times during one Assembly, shall do penance for ten days. But if he has departed while they were standing he shall do penance for thirty days.¹

In many respects this document, unique to Judaism of the period, displays parallels to community regulations for various early-Christian groups as found in specific documents like The Didache, the Apostolic Constitutions, The Didascalia, and The Rule of Benedict. Like these documents, the Rule of the Community is concerned with providing a religious community with a constitution as well as a pattern for daily living.²
This summary has been adapted from Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., Questions and Answers on the Dead Sea Scrolls for Latter-day Saints (forthcoming).

Notes


2. See ibid. 69–89.