Part I: 
Description, Discovery, and Disposition of the Dead Sea Scrolls

1. What are the Dead Sea Scrolls?

The Dead Sea Scrolls comprise a collection of several hundred texts discovered between the years 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. These scrolls are believed to have belonged to a Jewish community of Essenes (see questions 6 and 67) who lived in nearby Qumran (see question 4). However, numerous texts discovered in other locations in the Judean desert, such as Wadi Murabba’at, Masada, Nahal Hever, Khirbet Mird, Nahal Mishmar, and Wadi ed-Daliyeh, are also called Dead Sea Scrolls.

The great majority of scrolls are written in Hebrew on animal skins or papyrus. The scrolls form a significant body of literature, both secular and religious, that originated during the Second Temple period of Judaism (about 250 BC—AD 70). Unfortunately, most of the scrolls are fragmentary, having been damaged over the centuries by the natural elements and, as it appears in some cases, by individuals who trampled them underfoot.

2. How were the scrolls discovered?

In 1947 (some accounts say 1945) Muhammad ed-Dhib (“Muhammad the Wolf”), a young Arab boy of the Ta'amireh Bedouin tribe, was walking in the hills northwest of the Dead Sea, possibly in search of a stray goat, when he discovered a small cave opening and tossed small stones inside. The first stone struck something and made a plinking sound; the second stone resulted in a crash that sent the boy scurrying down the hill in terror of jinn, local spirits that were said to inhabit waste places in the wilderness.

The following day Muhammad, regaining his courage and returning with a companion, possibly his cousin Muhammad Jum’a, succeeded in penetrating the tiny opening to the cave now known as Cave 1. There he discovered a cache of clay jars, some of which contained several scrolls in a near-perfect state of preservation. He returned with several scrolls that were eventually passed on, through middlemen, to scholars who identified the scrolls as Jewish and dating to around the time of Christ. In more recent years, Muhammad ed-Dhib, who lived in Bethlehem until his recent death, stated that he was searching for hidden treasure, not looking for lost goats, and that it may not have been 1947, but perhaps months, even a year or two, earlier when he made his initial discovery of the scrolls.2

3. Where were the scrolls discovered?

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in eleven caves north and south of an ancient site called Qumran. Besides the manuscripts discovered in Cave 1, ancient writings were discovered in ten additional caves in subsequent years. Archaeologists were responsible for finding two of these caves (Caves 3 and 5), workmen at the Qumran site found four more (Caves 7, 8, 9, and 10), and the Ta’amireh tribesmen, who according to Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Geza Vermes often “succeeded in outwitting their professional rivals,”3 discovered Caves 2, 4, 6, and 11. Since 1947 other texts and documents dating from the same era as the Dead Sea Scrolls (250 BC—AD 70) have been found in other locations near the Dead Sea, including Wadi Murabba’at, Masada, Nahal Hever, Khirbet Mird, Nahal Mishmar, and Wadi ed-Daliyeh.

4. What is Qumran?
Qumran is the Arabic name for the area including Wadi Qumran and Khirbet Qumran, located one kilometer inland from the northwestern side of the Dead Sea. (The term wadi is Arabic for a "[dried-up] river bed"; khirba/beh/bet is Arabic for a "[site of] ruins.") Wadi Qumran runs to the south of a high plateau on which is located Khirbet Qumran. Some of the caves are located along cliffs on the north side of the wadi at the southern edge of Khirbet Qumran, while others are found about a kilometer north of Khirbet Qumran.

Different theories concerning Khirbet Qumran’s original use have been proposed. Before Roland de Vaux excavated the site of Khirbet Qumran in 1951, the generally accepted view was that it had been an old Roman fortress. The most widely accepted theory today, one proposed by de Vaux, is that the central building was used as a community center for a Jewish religious group. In the building complex, places have been found for dining, ritual washing, and the transcribing of scrolls.

According to most scholars, the inhabitants of Qumran probably did not dwell in the complex of buildings but, rather, resided in nearby caves, as evidenced by more than two dozen caves examined by archaeologists and found to contain signs of habitation.

The size of the cemetery located near the ruins and other archaeological evidence indicate that the community at Qumran may have numbered from 150 to 300 individuals at any one time. The building complex there appears to have first been built about 140 BC, and its final destruction dates to about AD 68. In 140 BC, when the community settled at Qumran, the building complex was much smaller in size. However, some decades later the complex was enlarged, and the community continued to grow until 31 BC. The historian Josephus recorded that there was a large earthquake in Palestine at that time, and archaeological evidence shows that an earthquake and fire caused the first destruction of the community. There is some debate about when the area was reoccupied, but the latest date was probably around 4 BC.

5. What types of texts were discovered among the scrolls?

The scrolls, most of which are fragmentary, belong to a variety of text types, including the following:

1. Books of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament). These books include Genesis, Exodus, 1 and 2 Samuel, Isaiah, and Malachi, to name a few. The fragmentary remains of every book of the Hebrew Bible except the book of Esther have been discovered among the scrolls.

2. Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible. Aramaic is a Northwest Semitic language similar to Hebrew. In the centuries before and shortly after the ministry of Christ, many Jews used Aramaic as their primary language. Jews translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Aramaic so they could continue to read and study it. Parts of the books of Job, Leviticus, and other biblical books written in Aramaic have been discovered among the scrolls.

3. Tephillin and Mezuzot. Tephillin (singular tephillah), also called phylacteries (see Matthew 23:5), are small boxes (made of a variety of woods or metals) attached to cords that are bound to the head and left arm. Within the boxes are very small parchments containing verses from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy (usually including Exodus 13:1—16 and Deuteronomy 6:4—6; 11:13—21). The idea of tephillin originated from Deuteronomy 6:8: “Thou shalt bind them [certain words of the Lord] for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.” Even today the tephillin are used by orthodox Jews during prayers. Approximately thirty tephillin texts have been found in the Qumran caves.
Mezuzot (singular mezuzah) are small boxes or containers attached to the right side of the doorpost of a house. Each box contains a parchment with passages from Deuteronomy (usually Deuteronomy 6:4—6 and 11:13—21). The tradition of mezuzot arose from the command in Deuteronomy 6:9: “Thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” The caves of Qumran have yielded eight mezuzot texts.

4. Biblical commentaries. Several scrolls comprise commentaries that explain books in the Old Testament. Commentaries on the books of Psalms, Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Malachi have been discovered among the scrolls.

5. Apocryphal writings. The term *apocrypha* originally meant “hidden” or “secret” and pertains to religious books that, for a number of reasons, were not included in the Hebrew Bible. Several apocryphal books have been discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, including Tobit, Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus), and Letter of Jeremiah.

Doctrine and Covenants 91:1—2 provides guidelines on how to approach apocryphal writings. The statement concerns the Apocrypha (i.e., those books found in the Catholic Old Testament—such as Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon—that are not in the Protestant Old Testament): “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you concerning the Apocrypha—There are many things contained therein that are true, and it is mostly translated correctly; there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men.”

6. Pseudepigraphic writings. The term *pseudepigrapha* is a Greek term meaning “falsely attributed writings,” or writings of questionable authorship that purport to be written by certain biblical heroes and prophets (such as Enoch, Noah, Isaiah, Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph). These writings, popular among the Qumran people and other Jews of their day, present concepts regarding the prophetic, historical, political, cultural, and religious status of institutions of the period. Pseudepigraphic writings found among the scrolls include the *Book of Enoch*, the *Book of Noah*, the *Testament of Amram*, the *Samuel Apocryphon*, *Second Ezekiel*, *Para-Danielic Writings*, *Jubilees*, *Pseudo-Moses*, and the *Testament of Levi*.

7. Writings for worship. Many texts concern the worship practices of the Qumran people, providing information about prayers, blessings, hymns, and rituals. These texts are called *Benedictions*, *Purification Ritual*, *Prayer or Hymn Celebrating the Morning and the Evening*, *Thanksgiving Hymns*, *Daily Prayers*, *Blessings*, *Prayers for Festivals*, and *Bless, My Soul*. Unfortunately, most of the texts are incomplete, as only scroll fragments remain.

8. Legal documents. The Qumran caves yielded a number of religious legal texts that describe rules and regulations belonging to the Qumran community. These texts include the *Damascus Document*, the *Community Rule*, the *Temple Scroll*, and *Some Observances of the Law* (also known as 4QMMT).

9. Business records. Few in number, business records among the scrolls reveal accounts of money and grain, the sale of property, and records pertaining to debt.

10. The Copper Scroll. This unique text contains a record of supposed treasures that were hidden in various locations throughout ancient Palestine.

11. Writings focusing on the last days. Describing events associated with the end of time, these religious texts are titled the *War Scroll*, *Words of the Archangel Michael*, and the *New Jerusalem*. 
12. Poetic compositions and wisdom literature. Many poems pertaining to the study and obtaining of wisdom were discovered among the scrolls, including The Seductress, Exhortation to Seek Wisdom, Parable of the Tree, Beatitudes, Noncanonical Psalms, Thanksgiving Hymns, and Lamentations.

13. Calendrical texts. These writings deal with the calendar used by the Qumran people. They are named Phases of the Moon, Calendars of Priestly Courses, Calendric Signs, and Horoscopes or Astrological Physiognomies.

6. Who wrote or possessed the Qumran texts?

Josephus, a first-century-AD Jewish military leader and historian, describes a variety of Jewish groups who were active in the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD, including the Boethusians, Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots. From contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of the beliefs and practices of these communities, scholars have noted similarities between descriptions of these groups and the writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Two groups in particular have received attention in this regard: the Sadducees and the Essenes.

A few scholars believe that the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls were Sadducees or proto-Sadducees. This judgment is based mostly on material found in a document among the scrolls now known as Some Observances of the Law (4QMMT). However, other scholars have noted that the points of comparison are not particularly strong.9

Most scholars agree that the writers and owners of the scrolls were Essenes. This conclusion is based on comparing the scrolls with statements made by Josephus and others. Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Todd Beall recently published a book that takes this approach. Although he found in the writings of Josephus six statements about the Essenes that are apparently at odds with ideas in the Qumran scrolls, he also found twenty-six other statements by Josephus that are parallel to Qumranite beliefs and practices.10 For example, Josephus made the following observations concerning the Essenes:11

1. They must be Jews by birth.
2. They “despise riches and their sharing of goods is admirable; there is not found among them any one who has greater wealth than another. For it is a law that those entering the group transfer their property to the order; consequently, among them all there appears neither abject poverty nor superabundance of wealth, but the possessions of each are mingled together, and there is, as among brothers, one property common to all.”12
3. They replace neither clothing nor sandals.
4. They avoid spitting.
5. They always dress in white.

All five of these statements accord with similar statements set forth in the Qumran sectarian writings.

Furthermore, Pliny the Elder, a Roman scholar and scientist, made the following statement regarding the Essenes:

To the west [of the Dead Sea] the Essenes have put the necessary distance between themselves and the insanlubrious shore. They are a people unique of its kind and admirable beyond all others in the whole world without women and renouncing love entirely, without money, and having for company only the palm trees. Owing to the throng of newcomers, this people is daily re-born in equal number; indeed, those whom, wearied by the fluctuations of fortune, life leads to adopt their customs, stream in in great numbers. Thus, unbelievable though this may seem, for thousands of centuries a race has existed which is
eternal yet into which no one is born: so fruitful for them is the repentance which others feel for their past lives!\textsuperscript{13}

Although this brief passage by Pliny contains some factual or historical errors, its details about the Essenes parallel ideas found in the scrolls: renouncing money, experiencing an increase in converts, and the long existence of the group. Also, Pliny’s statement places the Essenes’ geographical location at or near Qumran. However, Pliny’s comments can still be interpreted in more than one way, making positive identification of the inhabitants of Qumran nearly impossible.

7. When were the scrolls written or copied?

Scholars generally agree that the scrolls were written or copied between the years 250 BC and AD 70. This calculation is based on four scientific methods:

1. \textit{Paleographic analysis}. Paleography is the science of deciphering ancient writing styles. After a careful examination of the way that the scrolls’ Hebrew characters were written by the scribes, Professor Frank Moore Cross of Harvard University placed the scrolls in three time periods: the Archaic period (250—150 BC), the Hasmonean period (150—30 BC), and the Herodian period (30 BC—AD 68/70).\textsuperscript{14}

2. \textit{Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS)}. This method of dating the scrolls is similar to the carbon-14 dating system. Of the eight scrolls tested by AMS, seven agree generally with their paleographic dating.\textsuperscript{15}

3. \textit{Archaeological discoveries}. Archaeologists have found pottery and coins in many of the caves in which the scrolls were found. The pottery and coins can often be dated to a specific time period.

4. \textit{Historical allusions}. On rare occasions the scrolls allude to events or characters of known dates in the historical record.

8. Why are the scrolls so important?

The scrolls have been called the most important manuscript find of this century because they have greatly increased our knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism (450 BC—AD 70), the Hebrew language, and various religious texts. The scrolls have attracted so much attention that more than seven thousand books, articles, dissertations, and other writings, as well as television documentaries and news stories, have focused on them. Also, new academic journals have appeared that are dedicated to the study of the scrolls, and participants in professional conferences discuss their value.

The scrolls significantly enhance scholarly research in many areas, including the following:

1. Ancient writing and scribal practices
2. How words were spelled anciently
3. Different handwriting styles
4. Old Testament studies, including the history and transmission of the biblical text and variant readings in the text
5. The making of ancient scrolls from leather or papyrus
6. Linguistic studies in the languages of Hebrew and Aramaic
7. Apocryphal and pseudepigraphic studies
9. **In what language were the scrolls written?**

The majority of the scrolls, biblical and nonbiblical, were written in Hebrew, the language of the ancient Israelites and the sacred language of the Jews.

A few of the scrolls, including the book of Daniel, the apocryphal book of Tobit, fragments of the books of Job and Leviticus, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, the *Book of Enoch*, and the *Testament of Levi* were written in Aramaic. Aramaic is a sister language to Hebrew, sharing with it the same alphabet and numerous grammatical features. A few scroll manuscripts of the Old Testament were written in Greek.

10. **How many caves have yielded scrolls?**

Eleven caves located near Qumran have yielded scrolls or scroll fragments. For convenience, scholars call these caves, in order of their discovery, Cave 1, Cave 2, Cave 3, Cave 4, and so on. Since 1956 no additional caves have yielded more than a few small fragments of scrolls.

Cave 1, located about one mile north of the Qumran ruins, was the first of the eleven caves to yield scrolls. The seven major scrolls of Cave 1 are the *Community Rule*, *Rule of the Congregation*, the *War Scroll*, the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, *Commentary on Habakkuk*, and the *Great Isaiah Scroll*. Cave 2, located near Cave 1, was discovered by Bedouins in February 1952. It yielded eighteen fragmentary Old Testament texts and fifteen nonbiblical texts, including a text about the New Jerusalem and two copies of *Jubilees*.

Archaeologists discovered Cave 3, which yielded fourteen fragmentary texts, three of them biblical and eleven nonbiblical. Cave 3 also contained the *Copper Scroll*, a twelve-column text inscribed on copper sheets that describes the location of presumed temple treasures containing massive amounts of gold, silver, and precious objects.

Cave 4, discovered in 1952, is an “artificially hewn cave” with “regularly spaced rows of holes found in the cave’s walls.” The manuscripts found there are among the most significant of the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries. Scholars estimate that between 500 and 600 different texts, all fragmented, were found in Cave 4. Of these, approximately 130 are biblical texts and the remainder are nonbiblical, including fragments of the *Community Rule*, the Damascus Document, the Testament of Levi, and Jubilees.

When archaeologists discovered Cave 5 in September 1952, it yielded eight biblical and seventeen nonbiblical texts, including fragments of the *Community Rule*, the *Damascus Document*, and an Aramaic text concerning the New Jerusalem.

Cave 6, which was located by Ta'amireh Bedouin, yielded seven biblical and more than twenty nonbiblical texts, including fragments from the books of Genesis and Leviticus, which were written in an archaic Hebrew script called paleo-Hebrew.
Archaeologists discovered Cave 7 in 1955 and recovered nineteen tiny Greek fragments, two of which have been identified as Exodus 28:4—7 and Baruch 6:43—44. The remaining fragments are too small to decipher.

During the months of February and March in 1955, archaeologists discovered Caves 7 through 10. Cave 8 yielded four biblical fragments, a phylactery, a mezuzah, and a hymnic text. Cave 9 held only a small papyrus with six Hebrew characters, and Cave 10 yielded a potsherd containing written inscriptions.

In January 1956 the Bedouin found Cave 11, which yielded the famous Temple Scroll, the longest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, measuring approximately eight meters long. Other finds in Cave 11 include the Apocryphal Psalms, which contain many psalms from the biblical book of Psalms and seven other psalms not found in our Bible, a fragmentary copy of Leviticus written in paleo-Hebrew, and fragments of the books of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. In addition, Cave 11 contained fragments of texts from the books of Jubilees, The Heavenly Prince Melchizedek, the Targum of Job, and Songs for the Holocaust of the Sabbath Sacrifice.

11. How were the scrolls stored in the caves?

The scrolls of Cave 1 were found intact, wrapped in linen, stored in jars, and sealed in a nearly inaccessible location. They appear to have been prepared for storage more carefully than the other scrolls were. The Cave 1 scrolls may have constituted part of the library at Qumran, and the difficult access to the cave suggests that it was used as a hiding place for the scrolls.

The scrolls found in the other caves seem to have been placed there very hastily, without protection against the elements. The Cave 4 scrolls, for instance, were found among centuries of accumulated debris that, at the time of their discovery, reached a height of nearly three feet. As a result, the Cave 4 scrolls exist only in fragmentary condition.

12. Have there been scroll discoveries in recent years?

Since 1956 there have been no significant scroll discoveries, although many people have searched the Dead Sea coastline and the Judean hills in the hope of finding more scrolls and other artifacts. Israeli archaeologists Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel, for example, led an expedition to the Qumran area in 1995 and 1996 and examined seven caves located in the plateau northwest of the Qumran ruins. They found hundreds of pottery shards from jars, dishes, and jugs and concluded that some of the caves served as residences for members of the Qumran community. No scrolls were recovered from the seven caves.17

13. What is the value of the scrolls?

Once it was determined that the scrolls and fragments were of great monetary value, many were purchased and then resold at higher prices. Antiquities dealers, collectors, museums, and universities played various roles in the acquisition of the scrolls. Some transactions were for profit, while others resulted in the acquisition of scrolls by universities for academic study and publication. The following Wall Street Journal advertisement, dated 1 June 1954, illustrates the manner in which the scrolls were treated by dealers shortly after their discovery.

Despite the buying and selling of the scrolls during the early years subsequent to their discovery, today, fortunately for the world community, most of the scrolls are in museums where they are stored in climate-controlled depositories or displayed for viewing.

14. Where are the scrolls stored now?
Most of the scrolls are presently housed in two museums in Jerusalem. The seven major scrolls from Cave 1 are located in the Shrine of the Book, part of the Israel Museum. The Shrine of the Book is unique because its roof resembles the shape of an earthenware lid, similar to the lids that were on the jars of Cave 1. The inside of the building is underground, designed to resemble the interior of a cave. Displayed within this museum are numerous scrolls and scroll fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, including a high-quality facsimile of the Great Isaiah Scroll.

Thousands of scroll pieces and fragments from Caves 1, 4, and 11 are found in the "scrollery" of the Rockefeller Museum (formerly called the Palestine Archaeological Museum), located in East Jerusalem. These have been photographed and set in humidity-controlled areas under protective plates of glass. The Copper Scroll from Cave 3 and a number of fragments from Cave 1 are located at the Museum of the Department of Antiquities in Amman, Jordan.

15. What is the state of preservation of the scrolls?

The state of preservation of the scrolls varies considerably. Although eleven nearly complete manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls have been discovered, fragments of several hundred other scrolls are in various stages of deterioration, some the size of a postage stamp or smaller.

Scholars believe that the scrolls of Cave 4 were once stored on wooden shelves that eventually rotted, split, and collapsed, leaving the scrolls for centuries exposed to the moisture, dirt, insects, and worms on the cave floor. Almost two thousand years later, when the Bedouins discovered the cave, they found the thousands of scroll fragments buried in debris.

Frank Moore Cross, a Harvard University professor emeritus and one of the first translators of the scrolls, describes his experience with the scrolls:

On arrival at the Palestine Museum, purchased groups of fragments were in unbelievable disorder. Many large, well-preserved fragments came in each lot. But large or small, well or ill preserved, most had to be exposed to a process of humidification, cleaned of incrustations and dirt, and repaired or reinforced before being pressed flat between glass plates. Fragments in advanced decay, especially lumps of coagulated layers of leather, require more energy and patience and special techniques, though the same general procedure is followed. Often a fragment will exhibit an area of acute decay and shrinkage in the midst of otherwise pliable leather. The bad spot may draw the entire fragment into a crinkled or scalloped ball, so that the fragment is almost impossible to flatten. The script in such an area of decay may be shrunk to half or less the size of that in good areas. Often such decomposition in sheets of leather has caused splitting and fragmentation, and the problems of fitting into one manuscript healthy, light fragments alongside of wizened and blackened scraps are, to say the least, tedious.\(^{18}\)

Many of the scrolls in Cave 1, in contrast to those described above from Cave 4, were found in a much better state of preservation because they were wrapped in cloth and then stored in jars. The Copper Scroll of Cave 3 was also fairly well preserved because of its metal content.

Notes

2. Stephen Pfann mentioned this in a personal conversation with Stephen Ricks, 31 May 1993.


7. See ibid.

8. See LDS Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Apocrypha,” for a discussion of these and other apocryphal books.


11. See Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2.8.2 (paragraph 119), 2.8.3 (122, 123), 2.8.4 (126), 2.8.9 (147).


