Part V:
The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Old Testament

33. Which Old Testament books were discovered among the scrolls?

Approximately two hundred of the Dead Sea Scrolls represent books from the Old Testament, such as Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Most of these scrolls were damaged over time and now exist as fragments. In some cases, multiple copies of portions of a single work have been found, including fifteen copies of Genesis, eight copies of Numbers, two copies of Joshua, three copies of Judges, twenty-one copies of Isaiah, six copies of Jeremiah, six copies of Ezekiel, thirty-six copies of Psalms, two copies of Proverbs, and four copies of Ruth. All of the books of the Old Testament, except the book of Esther, were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some scholars, noting that Purim (the festival celebrating the deliverance of the Jews exiled in Persia) is conspicuously absent from Qumran’s calendrical texts, have suggested that the book of Esther may have been deliberately excluded from the Qumran community because (1) its theme of retaliation is contrary to teachings in the scrolls, (2) it makes no reference to God, and (3) Esther, a Jew, married a Persian king, a union that may have been repugnant to the conservative group at Qumran.

34. What is the Great Isaiah Scroll?

The Great Isaiah Scroll was one of the initial seven Dead Sea Scrolls discovered, and because of its beauty and completeness, it is perhaps the most famous of the biblical scrolls. It was found wrapped in a linen cloth and concealed in a large clay jar in Cave 1. Containing all sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah, the scroll consists of seventeen pieces of sheepskin sewn together to form a scroll measuring 24.5 feet in length and 10.5 inches in height. The scroll was prepared in approximately 150 BC. The scribe who copied the book of Isaiah onto the scroll was quite careless in his work, erring in numerous places. The first error is located in the first line of text, where the scribe misspelled Isaiah’s name. He corrected his own errors on a number of occasions by writing the corrections between the lines or in the margins. The scroll contains numerous scribal markings that may mark passages that were important to the Qumran community. The scroll shows much evidence of use, as it was well-worn before it was stored in the jar. This scroll is extremely important to the study of the Bible because it is approximately one thousand years older than other Hebrew copies of Isaiah. Although most of the readings of the scroll are the same as those of the traditional Hebrew Bible (the Masoretic Text), there are a number of important variant readings that have been included in modern translations of Isaiah. For example, Isaiah 33:8, as translated in the King James Version of the Bible, reads:

The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man.

The Isaiah scroll reads:

The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the witnesses, he regardeth no man.

The Isaiah scroll reads witnesses rather than cities, thus presenting a more accurate, superior reading.
35. Does the text of the Great Isaiah Scroll support the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon that differ from those in the King James Bible?

The Book of Mormon contains lengthy quotations from Isaiah (see, for example, 2 Nephi 12—24). In many instances the wording of corresponding Isaiah passages in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) and in the Book of Mormon differs. To date, no one has completed a comprehensive study comparing the Isaiah scroll from Cave 1 with the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon Isaiah. In 1981, however, John Tvedtnes\(^37\) conducted a serviceable preliminary study by comparing the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon with those in the KJV, the Hebrew Bible, the scrolls found at Qumran (notably the Great Isaiah Scroll, which contains all sixty-six chapters of Isaiah), and other ancient versions of Isaiah. Several readings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon are supported by the Isaiah scroll. The following representative examples of these parallels have been adapted from Tvedtnes’s work.

1. In many cases passages in the Isaiah scroll and in the Book of Mormon contain the conjunction and, which is lacking in the corresponding KJV text. Compare the following:

   “and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not” (KJV, Isaiah 3:9)

   “and they declare their sin as Sodom, and they hide it not” (Isaiah scroll, Isaiah 3:9)

   “and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it” (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 13:9=Isaiah 3:9)

2. Second Nephi 24:32 lacks the word one, which appears in Isaiah 14:32. The Book of Mormon version thus makes messengers the subject of the verb answer. The Hebrew Bible uses a singular verb, but the Isaiah scroll uses the plural, in agreement with the Book of Mormon:

   “What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation?” (KJV, Isaiah 14:32)

   “What shall then answer the messengers of the nations?” (Isaiah scroll, Isaiah 14:32)

   “What shall then answer the messengers of the nations?” (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 24:32=Isaiah 14:32)

3. In the KJV, Isaiah 48:11 reads, “for how should my name be polluted?” while 1 Nephi 20:11 reads, “for I will not suffer my name to be polluted.” The Isaiah scroll supports the Book of Mormon by having the verb in the first person, as follows:

   “for how should my name be polluted?” (KJV, Isaiah 48:11)

   “for I will not suffer my name to be polluted” (Isaiah scroll, Isaiah 14:32)

   “for I will not suffer my name to be polluted” (Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 20:11=Isaiah 48:11)

4. In the KJV, Isaiah 50:2 reads, “their fish stinketh, because there is no water,” and the Isaiah scroll reads, “their fish dry up because there is no water.” Second Nephi 7:2 essentially preserves the verb stinketh from the KJV and the phrasal verb dry up from the Isaiah scroll: “their fish to stink because the waters are dried up.”
5. Often a singular noun in the KJV is represented by a plural noun in the Book of Mormon. One example of this appears in Isaiah 9:9, where the KJV reads “inhabitant” and 2 Nephi 19:9 reads “inhabitants.” The Isaiah scroll supports the reading of the Book of Mormon with its reading of “inhabitants”:

“and the inhabitant of Samaria” (KJV, Isaiah 9:9)

“and the inhabitants of Samaria” (Isaiah scroll, Isaiah 9:9)

“and the inhabitants of Samaria” (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 19:9=Isaiah 9:9)

These examples of variant readings in which the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon agree with the Isaiah scroll but not with the KJV could be multiplied.

36. Did the people of Qumran have books in their scriptures not found in our present Old Testament?

It is not known exactly which books the people of Qumran considered to be scripture, although it is almost certain that they accepted all the books of the Old Testament to be such. It is quite possible that they accepted other books into their canon of scripture, such as the Temple Scroll and the book of Jubilees.

37. How have the biblical scrolls and fragments influenced the English translation of the Bible?

Many contemporary translation committees of the Bible pay special attention to the Dead Sea Scrolls biblical texts and incorporate many new readings into their translations. A look at the book of 1 Samuel will show the importance that translation committees place on the scrolls. The 1986 edition of the New International Version (NIV) accepts 15 readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls texts of 1 Samuel that do not agree with the Hebrew Bible. For example, the NIV prefers the reading “with a three-year-old bull,” found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, over the traditional reading of the Hebrew Bible, “with three bulls” (compare 1 Samuel 1:24 KJV). The translation committee of the New American Bible (1970) was even more accommodating, preferring 230 Dead Sea Scrolls readings from 1 Samuel over the Hebrew Bible. The following list features six prominent English translations of the book of 1 Samuel. The number next to them indicates how many times respective translation committees chose the Dead Sea Scrolls biblical text of 1 Samuel over the traditional Hebrew Bible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Number of Choices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New International Version</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today’s English Version</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
<td>about 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
<td>about 110</td>
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<tr>
<td>New English Bible</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New American Bible</td>
<td>230</td>
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</tbody>
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Yet many other translation committees, in preparing their new translations or revisions of previous translations, have disregarded the variant readings of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For instance, the New King James Version of 1982 prefers on evariant reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls book of 1 Samuel; in fact, it relies on the Dead Sea Scrolls on only six occasions in the entire Old Testament (in Deuteronomy 32:43; 1 Samuel 1:24; Isaiah 10:16; 22:8; 38:14; 49:5). Generally, though, recent translation committees have examined and subsequently integrated many variant readings of the Dead Sea Scrolls into their translations. According to Harold Scanlin, a translation adviser
for the United Bible Societies, “Every major Bible translation published since 1950 has claimed to have taken into account the textual evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls.” 41 Many of these English translations have gone through subsequent revisions to incorporate the variant readings gained from recent scholarship. For instance, the Revised Standard Version (1952) is now the New Revised Standard Version (1990), the New English Bible (1970) has become the Revised English Bible (1989), the Jerusalem Bible (1966) is now the New Jerusalem Bible (1985), and the New American Bible (1970) is going through a major revision at the present time. It is anticipated that the translation committees will accept more variant readings from the biblical scrolls and fragments in the coming years.

38. Are there passages missing from our Bible that were discovered among the scrolls?

Scribal error has caused words and entire phrases to be omitted from, changed, or added to the books of the Old Testament. For instance, James C. VanderKam notes that one Hebrew version of the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) differs from another Hebrew version in “some six thousand readings; most of these are minor matters such as different spellings of words.” 42 Copies of a few of the books of the Old Testament, such as 1 and 2 Samuel discovered in Cave 4, have scores of words and phrases that apparently have been lost or changed through scribal error. 43 A striking example of an entire verse of scripture that was lost more than two thousand years ago has been discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls texts of Samuel. 44 The new verse presents some forty-nine Hebrew words that were missing in the Hebrew Bible. The missing verse reads as follows:

And Nahash, king of the children of Ammon, oppressed harshly the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, King of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had fled from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead.45

With this verse in place at 1 Samuel 11:1, a better transition occurs from the final verse in chapter 10 to the first verse in chapter 11, and the context for the story of King Nahash falls into place. The verse also assists students of the Bible in understanding the situation described in chapter 11 concerning the advance of Nahash and his troops against Jabesh-gilead and the Israelites. It was the plan of Nahash to make a treaty with the Israelites who were dwelling in Jabesh-gilead, under the condition that he be allowed to “gouge out the right eye of each person in the city,” rendering them helpless in rebelling against him. The story turns out well for the Israelites, however, for they rally around King Saul and the prophet Samuel (see 1 Samuel 11:5—7), and together they slay a number of Ammonites and cause the remainder to flee. Samuel and Saul give credit to the Lord for their victory. There are many other passages that have been discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls biblical texts that perhaps are biblical in nature, such as the psalms called the Prayer for Deliverance and Hymn to the Creator. Newly discovered prose texts were also found, including An Account of David’s Poems, The Prayer of Nabonidus, and A Jeremiah Apocryphon. One newly discovered text is the Apostrophe to Zion, a beautiful psalm that sets forth the wonders of Zion. The first half of this psalm reads:

I will remember you, O Zion, for a blessing; with all my might I love you; your memory is to be blessed for ever. Your hope is great, O Zion; Peace and your awaited salvation will come. Generation after generation shall dwell in you, and generations of the pious shall be your ornament. They who desire the day of your salvation shall rejoice in the greatness of your glory. They shall be suckled on the fullness of your glory, and in your beautiful streets they shall make tinkling sounds. You shall remember the pious deeds of your prophets, and shall glorify yourselves in the deeds of your pious ones. Cleanse violence from your midst;
lying and iniquity, may they be cut off from you. Your sons shall rejoice within you, and your cherished ones shall be joined to you. How much they have hoped in your salvation, and how much your perfect ones have mourned for you? Your hope, O Zion, shall not perish, and your expectation will not be forgotten. (Apostrophe to Zion 12:1—9)

Notes

35. See VanderKam, Dead Sea Scrolls Today, 30.


40. See ibid., 34.

41. Ibid., 27.

42. The two versions are the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Masoretic Text. See VanderKam, Dead Sea Scrolls Today, 125.

43. The material in this section has been adapted from Donald W. Parry, “The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to Biblical Understanding,” in LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 59—60.


45. Translation is by Donald W. Parry. Josephus refers to this incident of King Nahash in Antiquities 6.68—71.