Part VI:  
The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament

39. Were books of the New Testament discovered among the scrolls?

Not a single copy of a New Testament book was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The reason for this is twofold: first, the group that inhabited Qumran was not Christian; second, many or most of the texts belonging to the corpus of the Dead Sea Scrolls were created and copied before the rise of Christianity in the first century AD.

40. Are there any references to Christ or Christianity in the scrolls?

Most of the Qumran writings were written between the third and first centuries BC, long before the advent of Christianity, and thus contain no historical references to Christ or Christianity. An early scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls, G. Lankester Harding, once suggested that Jesus Christ studied with the people of Qumran, but this suggestion is sensationalistic and without basis in fact. Jesus Christ is not identified, explicitly or implicitly, in the nonbiblical scrolls. Nevertheless, the scrolls do provide much information about Judaism and the religious scene of the period, from which Christianity was established.

41. Did the Qumran community accept Jesus Christ when he came?

As a group, the Essenes of Qumran did not accept Jesus as the Messiah during his mortal ministry. Brigham Young University professor David Rolph Seely has pointed out that in AD 68 the Essenes “were still at Qumran awaiting divine intervention on their behalf when their community was destroyed by the Romans.” It is possible that a few members of the Qumran community hearkened to the voice of John the Baptist or Jesus Christ and joined the Christian flock, but there is no evidence to support this idea.

42. Is John the Baptist identified in the scrolls?

No references to John the Baptist exist in the scrolls. Some scholars, however, believe that John may have been affiliated with Qumran as he preached near the Jordan River, but there is not sufficient evidence of this. Also, a few scholars have compared John’s baptisms “in the wilderness” to the immersion rites of those at Qumran, but John’s baptisms were for “the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4) while the ritual of those at Qumran was for other purposes, as set forth in the Community Rule: “They shall not enter the water to partake of the pure Meal of the men of holiness, for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness” (Community Rule 5:13—14; compare 4:20—21). Most significantly, John testified of Jesus Christ, whom the Qumranites did not accept as their Messiah.

43. Are there similarities between the beliefs of Christianity and those of the Qumran group?
Because members of the Qumran community were Jews living before the advent of Christianity, little can be learned from the scrolls about Christianity. However, a few approximate parallels and correspondences between early Christianity and the beliefs of the Qumran community may be drawn from the Dead Sea Scrolls, including:

1. **Immersion in water.** The scrolls mention water rites required of those who enter the community for the first time or reenter it after a period of separation. Like the baptism of the early Christians, this rite was performed by immersion, but unlike baptism, the water rites had nothing to do with Jesus Christ or the remission of sins.

2. **Healing through the laying on of hands.** The New Testament refers to the healing of the sick by the laying on of hands (see Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40; 13:11—13), a practice that corresponds to a passage in the *Genesis Apocryphon*. According to this text, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was suffering from "scourges and afflictions." He called upon his "magicians" and "healers" to heal him, but they failed to do so; he then called upon Abraham, who healed the pharaoh by the laying on of hands. Abraham explains, "So I prayed [for him] ... and I laid my hands on his [head]; and the scourge departed from him and the evil [spirit] was expelled [from him], and he lived" (*Genesis Apocryphon* 20:21—22, 28—29).

3. **Twelve and three.** According to the *Community Rule*, the Qumran community had at its head a group of twelve men, who themselves were directed by three:

   In the Council of the Community there shall be twelve men and three Priests, perfectly versed in all that is revealed of the Law, whose works shall be truth, righteousness, justice, loving-kindness and humility. They shall preserve the faith in the Land with steadfastness and meekness and shall atone for sin by the practice of justice and by suffering the sorrows of affliction. They shall walk with all men according to the standard of truth and the rule of the time.

   When these are in Israel, the Council of the Community shall be established in truth. ... They shall be witnesses to the truth at the Judgement, and shall be the elect of Goodwill who shall atone for the Land and pay to the wicked their reward. (*Community Rule* 8:1—7)

   The number twelve corresponds with the number of the apostles whom Jesus selected; but the twelve men who directed the Council of the Community were not apostles, nor did they possess the powers to cast out unclean spirits, heal the sick, and perform other such acts (see Matthew 10:1—5).

4. **Beatitudes.** The beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:3—11), each of which begin with the word *Blessed*, correspond in some ways to the beatitudes discovered in the scrolls. A Cave 4 fragment called *Beatitudes* reads in part:

   Blessed are those who hold to her (Wisdom’s) precepts and do not hold to the ways of iniquity. Blessed are those who rejoice in her, and do not burst forth in ways of folly. Blessed are those who seek her with pure hands, and do not pursue her with a treacherous heart. Blessed is the man who has attained Wisdom, and walks in the Law of the Most High. (*Beatitudes* 2:1—3)

5. **Light and Darkness.** The apostle John’s writings contain many teachings regarding light and darkness. As recorded in John 12:35—36: “Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light” (see John 1:4—5; 3:19; 8:12; 1 John 1:5—6).

6. Other similarities. Julio Trebolle Barrera discusses several additional parallels between the Qumran texts and the beliefs of Christianity, including the two groups' approach to wealth, their beliefs regarding divorce, the communal meal and Last Supper, the bid for perfection, disciplinary action against those who break rules, the idea of the Creator, overlapping concepts from Paul's epistles and the Qumran texts, and the way that the expression "Son of God" is used.

Notwithstanding the correspondences between the two groups, there are many points of contrast that are noted in the following question.

44. Are there differences between the beliefs of Christianity and those of the Qumran group?

Parallels and correspondences between groups can be misleading if the differences are not also pointed out. The foremost difference between the Qumran community and Christians is the Christian belief in Jesus Christ and his life, ministry, divine nature, and atoning sacrifice. The Qumran community did not share the following Christian beliefs: Jesus is "the mediator of life" (Galatians 3:19—20 Joseph Smith Translation), the "Lord of lords" (Revelation 17:14), "the true and living God" (1 Nephi 17:30), the "lawgiver" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:22; compare 3 Nephi 15:9), "the Lord God Almighty; the Lord Jehovah" (Exodus 6:3 JST), the "Holy One of Israel" (2 Nephi 9:41), and the "Redeemer of Israel" (1 Nephi 21:7).

Although the community at Qumran held a belief in a messianic figure (or more than one such figure), Jesus Christ was not their Messiah. The Book of Mormon is explicit in naming Christ as the Messiah: "For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (2 Nephi 25:19).

Furthermore, the Qumran community did not share with the Christians beliefs in the plan of salvation, aspects of church organization, priesthood offices, the Second Coming, a living prophet, the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands, the gift of tongues and interpretation of tongues, other gifts of revelation and of the Spirit, and numerous other doctrines that were part of the early Christian church and that are now part of the Church of Jesus of Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Notes

47. For a discussion of views regarding John the Baptist and Qumran, see García Martínez and Barrera, *People of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 205—6.

48. See ibid., 214—15.