

The Ancient People of Qumran: An Introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls

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The most fascinating thing about the Dead Sea Scrolls is the ancient people who used them. Certainly a study of the ideas found within the documents is interesting, but contemplation of the fact that those ideas actually constituted the belief system of real, live, flesh-and-blood human beings who lived some two thousand years ago on the edge of a lifeless sea is truly arresting. It is understandable that Latter-day Saints would be especially drawn to a group in the Middle East who claimed to be the true Israel and went off by themselves to establish a religiously based covenant community in desert country right next to a vast salt lake fed by a freshwater stream named the Jordan. Who those ancient people were, how they lived, where they came from, what they thought, why they thought it, what happened to them, and how we know about them are among the most profitable questions we can explore.

New Documents from the Earth

The ruins of the Dead Sea Scrolls community lie on a marl terrace between limestone cliffs where a dry stream bed (called a *wadi* in Arabic) cuts a deep gorge through the ground to the Dead Sea. The Arab Bedouin call the site Khirbet Qumran or the “ruin” of Qumran (*khirbeh* in Arabic means “ruin” and Qumran is the proper name of the wadi). It is likely that the Dead Sea Scrolls community was built on an older biblical site, which several scholars equate with one of the Judean desert fortress towns called *ir ha-melah*, “City of the Salt [Sea]” listed in Joshua 15:61–2.¹

It should hardly be surprising to Latter-day Saints that previously unknown ancient texts, long buried in the ground, were discovered at Qumran in the middle part of the twentieth century. Joseph Smith’s experience gave us a pattern of how new things might come forth from the ground, preserved from a previous age (see Joseph Smith—History 1:51–2). Restoration scripture not only speaks of God sending forth truth (the Book of Mormon) out of the earth (see Moses 7:62), but it has primed us to expect additional ancient records—both biblical and nonbiblical—“springing from the ground,” to quote Psalms 85:11.

Indeed, new texts were literally taken from the earth again in 1947 near the shores of the Dead Sea, but not without some foreshadowing. Less than 250 years after Christ, the great biblical scholar Origen (AD 185–254) mentioned the discovery of Hebrew and Greek biblical manuscripts stored in jars in the vicinity of Jericho. The church historian Eusebius (ca. AD 260–340) also noted that a Greek version of the Psalms, as well as other manuscripts, had been found in a jar at Jericho during the reign of the Roman emperor Antonius son of Severus (AD 198–217).²

About five hundred years later, the Nestorian Patriarch of Seleucia, Timotheus I, wrote a letter to Sergius, Metropolitan of Elam, in which he described the discovery of a large cache of Hebrew manuscripts in a cave near Jericho. The story of this find as described in the letter bears a striking resemblance to the account of the discoveries of 1947: when a Bedouin hunter’s dog failed to emerge from a cave, the owner went in after it and found a cache of documents, both biblical and nonbiblical.³

No one knows for sure whether that cave was directly related to the Qumran community, but it seems more than possible when one considers other Jewish and Islamic sources. The medieval Jewish Karaite writer Kirkisani, in a history of Jewish sects written around AD 937, speaks of a sect called *al-Maghariya*, “the cave people,” already extinct at that time. They were so called because their books were deposited in caves. According to a Muslim writer named Shahrastani, these cave people flourished around the middle of the first century AD.⁴

No manuscript discoveries near the Dead Sea are recorded between the years 800 and 1947. However, in the spring of the latter, according to one version of the story, three Bedouin shepherds from the Ta’amireh tribe were tending their flocks at the wadi Qumran. One of them, Jum’a Muhammad Khalil, threw a rock into one of the numerous caves in the region, ostensibly to chase out a wandering goat, and shattered something in the darkness (later found to be a clay jar).

The noise frightened the shepherds away, but a couple of days later one of the shepherds, Muhammad ed-Dhib (“Muhammad the Wolf”), returned to the cave by himself and found ten jars, each about two feet in height. All but two of the jars proved to be empty. However, one yielded three parchment scrolls; two wrapped in linen and one unwrapped. These were later identified as a copy of the biblical book of Isaiah; a copy of the *Rule of the Community*, sometimes called the *Manual of Discipline* (a text outlining the rules by which the Dead Sea community was to be governed); and a commentary on the biblical book of Habakkuk. Four additional scrolls were later found in the cave: a collection of psalms or hymns known as the *Thanksgiving Hymns* or the *Hymn Scroll* (Hebrew, *Hodayot*); a partially preserved copy of Isaiah; the *War Scroll*—a text describing a final war in the last days between the Sons of Light (the righteous) and the Sons of Darkness (the wicked); and a collection of Genesis narratives called the *Genesis Apocryphon*.

The scrolls were brought to Bethlehem and placed in the custody of an antiquities dealer named Kando, who in turn sold four of them to Athanasius Yeshua Samuel, the Metropolitan, or head, of the Syrian Orthodox Church at St. Mark’s Monastery in Jerusalem. For the equivalent of about one hundred dollars, Metropolitan Samuel received the more complete *Isaiah Scroll*, the *Rule of the Community*, the *Habakkuk Commentary*, and the *Genesis Apocryphon*.

Since no one really understood much about the nature or origins of the scrolls, several scholars were consulted. One of them was Eleazar Sukenik of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. After a secret visit to the antiquities dealer on 29 November 1947 (the very date on which the United Nations passed the resolution to establish the State of Israel), Sukenik purchased the remaining three scrolls from Kando. Professor Sukenik seems to have been the first to recognize the antiquity and value of the scrolls and the first to suggest what has proved to be the most widely accepted view regarding their provenance or origin. Unfortunately, detailed study of the archaeological and historical context of the scrolls, as well as any search for more caves and scrolls, was hampered by the Arab-Israeli conflict, which was at its height.

By this time scholars connected with the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem also recognized the significance of the scrolls, or at least the four that Metropolitan Samuel had shown to them. They felt it was time to announce to the world the amazing find. On 11 April 1948 the American School issued a press release announcing the discovery of the St. Mark’s collection. Two weeks later, Professor Sukenik announced the existence of the scrolls he had purchased. So secretive had been all the dealings surrounding both sets of scrolls from the same cave that the American School had no previous knowledge of the existence of Sukenik’s scrolls.⁵

Looking back on the story of the scrolls up to that point (1948–49), one recognizes that the drama and intrigue were only just beginning! Because of the War of Independence, in 1948 Metropolitan Samuel moved his scrolls to Lebanon for safety's sake. By 1954 he had brought them to the United States in order to find a buyer. It was there that his now-famous, comically understated advertisement appeared in the June 1 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* under the category "Miscellaneous for Sale":

THE FOUR DEAD SEA SCROLLS Biblical Manuscripts dating back to at least 200 BC are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or group. Box F 206, The Wall Street Journal.⁶

The newspaper ad came to the attention of Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin, who, purely by coincidence, was in the United States on a speaking tour. He also happened to be the son of Professor E. L. Sukenik, who had purchased the first three scrolls in 1947. (Given these "coincidences," some may wonder if divine providence was involved.)

Through a series of cloak-and-dagger twists and turns, Yadin clandestinely negotiated for the purchase of the scrolls on behalf of the State of Israel. Yadin believed that any mention of Israel or an Israeli as the interested party would have forced Metropolitan Samuel to cancel the deal. The Kingdom of Jordan had claimed legal title to antiquities found in what was then its territory and probably would have sued any buyer—any buyer, that is, except Israel, because to do so would have implied recognition of the new state. The deal went through, and the agreed-upon purchase price of \$250,000 was met.⁷ The four scrolls from St. Mark's Monastery were put with Professor Sukenik's three. Adjacent to the Israel Museum, a special museum called the Shrine of the Book was constructed in West Jerusalem to house the scrolls, and that is where the original seven scrolls from Cave 1 remain to this day. Much to the credit of the early team of scholars, the contents of all seven manuscripts were translated and published by 1956.⁸ They continue to provide insights into the nature and operation of the extinct community that deposited them where they were found in 1947, as well as valuable information about Second Temple Judaism and the religious environment that gave rise to Christianity.

The Qumran Complex

Within a short time after the original announcements of the discovery of the scrolls, worldwide scholarly interest in them began to grow. The first archaeological excavation of Cave 1 was carried out between February and March 1949 by G. Lankester Harding, Director of the Department of Antiquities of the Kingdom of Jordan, and Father Roland de Vaux, distinguished biblical scholar, archaeologist, and Director of the Ecole Biblique (a degree-granting French Dominican school in Jerusalem). Artifacts and fragments of seventy-two additional manuscripts were uncovered. These fragments have also been published, bringing to seventy-nine the total number of texts from Cave 1 that have been found and analyzed.⁹

Scholars working on the site initially thought that ruins about a half mile to the south of the cave were part of an old Roman fort that had no connection to the manuscripts. But in the early 1950s, scholarly debate grew more intense, prompting a decision by archaeologists to conduct a full-scale excavation of the area and rethink their conclusions.

Between 1951 and 1956, Khirbet Qumran was excavated and partially restored. Father de Vaux was able to discern that the Qumran complex had been built around 150 BC and was inhabited until AD 68. He believed that a thirty-one-year gap in occupation occurred immediately following the great Near Eastern earthquake of 31 BC.

The community was apparently attacked and destroyed about AD 68 by Roman soldiers who came to Palestine to put down the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–74). Soldiers were garrisoned there well past the fall of Masada in AD 74.

The Qumran complex appears to have been the religious center for a communal society of Jews living in the area. Archaeological evidence indicates that the people actually lived outside the building complex in tents, huts, or, most likely, the more than two hundred caves and underground chambers in the hills west of the complex. The complex was built of stone and included a seventy-five-foot-long refectory, or dining hall, used for meals and assembly. Excavation of an adjoining pantry yielded over one thousand bowls, plates, beakers, and assorted other vessels.¹⁰

The most distinctive feature of the Qumran complex is its gravity-flow aqueduct system, which brought water from the nearby cliffs and was interconnected to a series of cisterns, ritual baths, and a decantation pool. This was an exceptional hydrological engineering feat, and such emphasis on fresh water was more than just a reaction to the desert environment. The members of the community had to purify themselves by bathing in fresh water before entering the “holy temple” (sacred area) of the refectory to partake of the communal meal.¹¹

Also of special interest at Qumran are the remains of a chamber some scholars labeled the Scriptorium, or “writing room.” According to the theory first proposed by de Vaux, here the community scribes copied many of the scrolls that were later found in the nearby caves. He reached his conclusion on the basis of inkwells found there as well as installations he thought were desks. An alternate theory that has gained adherents is championed by a Belgian team of archaeologists, Robert Donceel and his wife, Pauline Donceel-Voûte, hired by the Ecole Biblique to complete the unfinished final excavation report of de Vaux. Based on the conclusions of earlier scholars who disagreed with de Vaux regarding the existence of a Scriptorium, the Donceels interpret the evidence as pointing to the existence of a *coenaculum* or a *triclinium*—another dining room (de Vaux had already found the large refectory) to be used for a small number of guests who took their meals in typical Hellenistic fashion, reclining on couches. Others have even suggested more recently that Qumran was “but a customs post, entrepôt for goods and a resting stop for travelers crossing the Salt Sea.”¹²

De Vaux’s idea that writing desks existed at Qumran has now been abandoned by some scholars because there is no evidence that ancient writers of the period used desks. De Vaux himself was aware of this, but the discovery of inkwells at Locus 30 (the site of de Vaux’s proposed Scriptorium) is problematic in any interpretation that attempts to posit a triclinium there. The former curator of the Shrine of the Book and expert on the Qumran site, Magen Broshi, says that in the final analysis, there is “a high probability the room was a Scriptorium.”¹³ The assertion that Qumran was not a religious settlement that produced the documents found in nearby caves also becomes very tenuous when considered in light of evidence uncovered in 1992. Professor Shemaryahu Talmon of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem explains:

The connection of the caves with the ancient settlement was conclusively proven in the winter of 1992. Exceptionally heavy rainfalls eroded a sand wall on the site and laid bare a completely preserved, albeit empty, earthenware jar of exactly the same make as the intact jar found in Cave 1 which had served as the receptacle of the four scrolls.¹⁴

After excavating the Qumran complex of buildings, archaeologists turned their attention to locating more caves and more scrolls. It was the Ta’amireh Bedouin, however, who proved to be more adept at making new discoveries.

Between 1952 and 1956, ten more caves containing manuscripts were found at Qumran, making eleven caves in all that yielded texts. The Bedouin are credited with having discovered the richest repositories of documents—Caves 1, 2, 4, and 11, while professional archaeologists located Caves 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10—none of which contained impressive numbers of manuscripts.¹⁵ To date, the total number of separate documents recovered from all eleven caves is 818.¹⁶

The Bedouin also discovered some manuscript fragments in caves in the remote Wadi Murabba'at region, about twelve miles south of Qumran, and in the Nahal Hever caves, which lie just past Ein Gedi. These fragments include a variety of papyrus and sheepskin documents dating from the second century AD, as well as coins from the Second Jewish, or Bar Kokhba, Revolt (AD 132–35). There were also biblical manuscripts closely related to the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament (the text type from which our King James Version was translated in the early seventeenth century). The two most important documents found were a fragmentary copy of the Hebrew text of ten of the minor prophets (Joel through Zechariah), and a fragmentary copy of the Greek translation of six of the minor prophets.¹⁷ More significant from a historical point of view was the discovery of original letters from Simeon ben Kosiba (nicknamed Bar Kokhba), the actual leader of the Second Jewish Revolt. These letters lent a dramatic air to the finds.¹⁸

The overall importance of the manuscripts and artifacts found in the region south of Qumran is twofold. First, they show that many refugees fled from Roman troops who occupied the area. Second, they bear witness to the “trilingualism that prevailed at this time in Judea, showing that Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew were all being used by the people who took refuge in these caves from the Romans.”¹⁹

The greatest treasure trove of documents in the entire Dead Sea region came from Qumran Cave 4, a bell-shaped underground dwelling artificially enlarged by community dwellers that was situated closest to the Qumran buildings. Of the fragments of 584 manuscripts recovered from Cave 4 (literally 40,000 separate scraps or pieces²⁰), 127 appear to be biblical texts. Every book of the Old Testament except Esther is represented. In addition, two other categories of documents were found: those that are called apocryphal or pseudepigraphical texts, and those that may be termed “indigenous” documents (sometimes called sectarian documents), which are scripturelike texts used primarily or exclusively at Qumran.

The indigenous documents are of special importance because, when put with the documents from Cave 1, they show the nature of the Qumran covenanters' conceptual universe and the socioreligious structure of their community. These documents (what Professor Shemaryahu Talmon calls the “Foundation Documents”²¹) help define the unique nature and outlook of the Qumran community. On the other hand, the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books found at Qumran are interesting, but are not as helpful for understanding what is different about the people of Qumran because they have been found in other places. They bear such titles as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Tobit*, *Jubilees*, and *1 Enoch*, and were known in normative or Pharisaic Judaism of the first centuries BC and AD, though generally they were not highly regarded. Some early Christians, however, used Greek and Ethiopic versions of these and other apocryphal books and included them in their biblical canon.

Besides the documents of Cave 4, the most intriguing texts were found in Cave 3 (discovered in 1953) and Cave 11 (discovered in 1956). Cave 3, the first to be discovered by professional archaeologists, contained the famous *Copper Scroll*—a description of buried treasure that was written on a thin metal scroll (the ancients really did write on metal plates!). The *Copper Scroll* is now housed in the Amman Archaeological Museum, and although people have looked carefully no one has found any of the treasure.

Last but not least, Cave 11 yielded the longest of all the scrolls—the *Temple Scroll*. Written on very thin parchment, the text disclosed two different scribal hands and turned out to be about twenty-seven feet long, although not intact (the great *Isaiah Scroll* from Cave 1 is twenty-two feet long and is intact). Dating to about the second century before Christ but presented as the words of God to Moses, the text of the *Temple Scroll* supplies laws dealing with issues important to the Qumran group. Of interest to Latter-day Saints is the scroll’s description of an ideal temple to be established by God himself at the end of days, and that temple’s association with Jacob at Bethel. The *Temple Scroll* states:

And I will consecrate my Temple by my glory, [the Temple] on which I will settle my glory, until the day of the blessing [or, the day of creation] on which I will create my Temple and establish it for myself for all times, according to the Covenant which I have made with Jacob at Bethel.²²

While Latter-day Saints might remember that President Marion G. Romney called the events at Bethel “Jacob’s endowment experience,”²³ we have no indication that the Qumran community regarded this ideal future temple as anything more than an Aaronic priesthood structure, associated with the rites and rituals of the Mosaic Law in a pure and uncorrupted form. The Qumran community believed that the Jerusalem Temple was full of corruption.²⁴

Identity and History of the Qumran People

Following the suggestion of Eleazar Sukenik,²⁵ Frank Moore Cross of Harvard University, one of the original scholars of the scrolls, definitively and succinctly identified the inhabitants of the ancient Dead Sea Scroll community of Qumran as Essenes.²⁶ The Essenes were one of the four Jewish “philosophies,” or sects, described by the first-century historian Josephus as the major competing ideologies contemporary in the Holy Land.

More recently Professor Cross reemphasized the Qumran-Essene connection by reminding us that a scholar who would suggest any non-Essene identification for the Dead Sea Scroll community “places himself in an astonishing position.”²⁷ For, in essence, one must explain away the simplest and most logical interpretations of historical sources in favor of more complicated theories based on supposition and inference. Professor Cross states:

He [the scholar] must seriously suggest that two major parties formed communalistic religious communities in the same district of the Dead Sea and lived together in effect for two centuries, holding similar bizarre views, performing similar or rather identical lustrations, ritual meals, and ceremonies. He must suppose that one, carefully described by classical authors, disappeared without leaving building remains or even potsherds behind; the other, systematically ignored by the classical sources, left extensive ruins, and indeed a great library. I prefer to be reckless and flatly identify the men of Qumran with their perennial house guests, the Essenes.²⁸

Unfortunately, none of the Dead Sea Scrolls comes right out and explicitly states, “We are Essenes!” (though one gets the impression that such a declaration still might not be conclusive enough for some scholars). One of the most significant recent challenges to the Essene theory of Qumran identity was put forward by a scholar whose opinions carry significant weight, Lawrence Schiffman of New York University. He claims that the community members were Sadducees. This is based on similarities between legal issues found in a recently published Qumran text called *Miqsat Ma’aseh ha-Torah* (4QMMT) and certain legal positions that the Mishnah attributes to the Sadducees.

But the basic argument really seems to be one of semantics rather than substance, because Schiffman says that the Sadducees he is championing are not the aristocratic sect described by Josephus and the New Testament, but rather a different group, one that was conservative in its approach to the law and whose name also derives from “Zadok,” just like the more famous group. This is not very helpful or insightful information because we already knew from Qumran texts that the leaders at Qumran called *themselves* the Sons of Zadok, and that their orientation and outlook was priestly.²⁹ In addition, Schiffman overlooks many Qumran texts that express non-Sadducean theological concepts, ideas that better fit within an Essene context.³⁰ Hence, the view expressed so eloquently by Professor Cross continues to be the most widely held position.

History of the Community

No single document found at Qumran, or elsewhere for that matter, constitutes anything like a purposeful history of the sect. However, from classical sources, archaeological evidence, and passages within the scrolls themselves, one can glean enough clues to put together a historical sketch of the community.

Both Josephus and Philo indicate that the total number of Essenes in the Holy Land was about four thousand. But archaeologists and historians estimate the number of persons living at the Dead Sea community at any one time to have been between 150 and 300. This indicates that the Essenes residing at Qumran were a very small part of the larger Essene movement in the ancient Near East.

Of the various ideas scholars have proposed regarding the origin of the Essenes, two basic theories have endured. One theory traces the beginnings of the sect to the exiled Jews living in Babylonia (587–538 BC). According to this scenario many of the Jewish deportees perceived the Babylonian captivity as divine retribution for unrighteousness. In response they bound themselves together as a covenant group devoted to the perfect observance of the law. Some of the group returned to the Holy Land at a time when Maccabean Jewish victories over the Greek Syrians (the Seleucids) seemed to ensure the renewal of an independent Jewish state (sometime between 165 and 143 BC).

Once they arrived back in Palestine, however, they became bitterly disappointed and disillusioned over the extreme Hellenization of Judaism that controlled the state. After an unsuccessful attempt to return their erring brethren to the truth, the covenantors retreated to the isolation of Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea. Rallying behind a leader referred to in their documents as the Teacher of Righteousness, the group adhered to their strict lifestyle, believing that their divinely revealed precepts constituted the only sure refuge against the imminent judgments of a messianic age.

The other and perhaps more commonly accepted theory suggests that the Essenes originated in Palestine during the period of Hellenization. Advocates of this theory refer to certain passages of the *Damascus Document*—a document of commandments and exhortations that has been known since medieval times.³¹ In the *Damascus Document*, the birth of the community is said to have occurred in the “age of wrath,” 390 years after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. At that time God caused a “root” to spring “from Israel and Aaron.” In other words, a group of righteous Jews encountered apostate conditions and formed a company of dissenters. They groped in darkness for twenty years until God sent them the famed Teacher of Righteousness (sometimes translated the “teacher who is right”), and he guided them “in the way of [God’s] heart.”³² Nebuchadnezzar razed Jerusalem and its temple in 587 BC. Subtracting the years mentioned in the *Damascus Document* (390 years after Jerusalem’s destruction, plus the other 20 years that were filled with struggle) places the founding of the community at approximately 177 BC.

But, say the texts, things were not immediately and universally harmonious among the Jewish reformers. Conflicts between the Teacher and others seem to have arisen, and understandably so when one considers the force of the Teacher's claims that God specifically revealed to him all the mysteries of the prophets.³³ Some are said to have turned against him and formed a breakaway group. They persecuted the Teacher and his disciples who withdrew to the "land of Damascus" (Qumran?) where they entered into a new covenant. The leader of the dissenters is branded as the "Scoffer" and the "Man of Lies" (one who led many astray through deceptive speech) in the words of the *Damascus Document* and some of the community's scriptural commentaries.³⁴ This certainly sounds familiar to readers of latter-day revelation—similar occurrences are described in Alma 30 and Moses 4. The *Commentary on Psalm 37* found at Qumran states explicitly that the Teacher of Righteousness was a priest. His primary contemporary opponent is called "the Wicked Priest" (Hebrew, *ha-kohen ha-rasha*) in several Qumran texts. Scholars believe that the epithet is a play on words alluding to the Jerusalem high priest, who was called in Hebrew *ha-kohen ha-ro'sh*³⁵ and was the man who was perceived by the Essenes as the enemy of all righteousness.

This theory of the Essene origins, including consideration of the dates provided in the *Damascus Document*, seems to accord well with what is known of the history of the second century BC. The historical details of the period are outlined in the apocryphal books of First and Second Maccabees. According to those records, the process of Hellenization in the Holy Land began almost imperceptibly in the third century BC. In the first part of the second century BC, however, the forces of Hellenization gained new ground. In 172 BC, Onias III, the legitimate high priest, was murdered in Jerusalem. Onias was a Zadokite, a priest who was descended from Zadok (King David's high priest and the originator of the line of high priests at the Temple of Jerusalem). In place of Onias, the Syrian rulers of the region appointed Meneleus, an intensely Hellenized Jew not of the Zadokite line. To the faithful, Meneleus was a usurper.

Matters went from bad to worse when the Syrian overlord, King Antiochus IV, forced Judeans to Hellenize upon penalty of death. In 168 BC Judea revolted. Under the brilliant military leadership of Judah the Maccabee, the revolt was successful, and an independent Jewish state was once again established. This victory is still celebrated by Jews in the festival of Hanukkah. The Hasmonean line of Jewish rulers began with these events. Judah the Maccabee was first recognized as unofficial monarch (165–160 BC), followed by his brother Jonathan (160–143 BC). As it turned out, however, the latter began to dismiss orthodoxy and increase Hellenization.

Two events marked the culmination of degradation. The first came in 152 BC when Jonathan had himself appointed High Priest. This act was the ultimate provocation for many Jews and gave them a strong reason for abhorring the Hasmoneans. But the second event was far more significant. In 141 BC Simon (143–134 BC), the youngest surviving brother of Judah and Jonathan, accepted both the high priesthood and the official title of king. The high priesthood of the Aaronic order was now made hereditary in the Hasmonean line, and an independent Jewish state emerged in which the civil head and military leader of the state was at the same time high priest. A decree was issued that warned against any opposition to Simon by priest or layman alike, and prohibited private assembly or any other actions deemed contrary to the stipulations of the decree.

It was in this atmosphere that the Essene movement began, according to several scholars. Some Jews, disgusted by what they believed was the pollution of their ancestral religion and the usurpation of the high priesthood by non-Zadokites, rallied behind their Moreh Tzedek, the Teacher of Righteousness.³⁶ While no clues disclose the identity of the Teacher of Righteousness (it most assuredly cannot be Jesus or John the Baptist), Professor Cross argues that we probably can deduce the identity of the Wicked Priest—Simon the Hasmonean. Simon's program of absolute control "seems to give the appropriate occasion for the crystallization of the Essene sect."³⁷ In addition, a

document entitled *List of Testimonia* from Cave 4 at Qumran seems to describe Ptolemy's assassination of his father-in-law, Simon, who was in a drunken stupor in Jericho. Finally, on the basis of evidence from the *Commentary on Habakkuk*, Professor Cross observes:

In this era one cannot complain of a shortage of wicked priests. One final text, however, deserves mention. In a passage of the *Commentary on Habakkuk*, the expositor comments, "This means the priest whose dishonor was greater than his honor. For he . . . walked in the ways of drunkenness in order to quench his thirst. But the cup of God's wrath will swallow him up . . . !" The high priest caroused once too often. In Jericho, at the hands of Ptolemy, the cup of pleasure turned into the cup of wrath and swallowed Simon.³⁸

Evidence from Primary Sources: Descriptions of Location

Evidence from primary sources that supports the identification of the Qumran community as an Essene center is of two types: classical sources that explicitly place Essenes on the western shore of the Dead Sea approximately near the site of Qumran, and descriptions in classical writings of the beliefs and practices of the Essenes that match those of the Qumran community as depicted in their own texts and by their artifacts.

Pliny the Elder

The ancient Roman historian Pliny the Elder compiled a detailed list of places and curiosities throughout the Roman world from Spain to India. When describing the Dead Sea, one of the earth's marvels because it is both the lowest point on land and the saltiest body of water on the planet, he made the following observation:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes [Esseni], which is remarkable beyond all other tribes in the whole world, as it has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus through thousands of ages (incredible to relate) a race in which no one is born lives on for ever; so prolific for their advantage is other men's weariness of life! Lying below the Essenes [literally: these] was formerly the town of Engedi, second only to Jerusalem in the fertility of its land and in its groves of palm-trees but now like Jerusalem a heap of ashes.³⁹

Though a few discrepancies arise when one matches the details of Pliny's description with the actual site of Khirbet Qumran,⁴⁰ resolutions of the difficulties have been presented, and his text remains one of the pillars on which the widely accepted notions of both Essene habitation of Qumran and Essene authorship of the scrolls rest.⁴¹

Dio Chrysostom's Writings

The classical writer Dio Chrysostom (ca. AD 40–112) is also reported to have written that the Essenes were located near the Dead Sea. Chrysostom's biographer, Synesius of Cyrene (ca. AD 400), commented concerning some lost writings on this subject: "Also somewhere he praises the Essenes, who form an entire and prosperous city near the Dead Sea, in the centre of Palestine, not far from Sodom."⁴² The significance of this comment lies in the fact that it provides us with another independent historical source that definitely identifies a Dead Sea community in the middle of Palestine as being Essene.

Descriptions of Distinctive Beliefs and Practices

If we had only the evidence of Pliny and Dio Chrysostom at our disposal, alternate theories regarding the identity of the Qumran community would still seem inferior. In truth, however, we have much more. The second body of evidence helping to identify the Qumranites as Essenes comes from comparisons between classical sources that describe Essene theology and the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves. The ancient writers Josephus (AD 38–100), Pliny (AD 23–79), Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BC–AD 50), and Hippolytus (AD 170–235) complement and agree with the Qumran texts to an impressive degree. One scholar compared descriptions of beliefs and practices from Josephus and from the scrolls and concluded that there are twenty-seven definite parallels between Josephus and the scrolls; twenty-one probable parallels; ten concepts in Josephus that have no known parallels in the scrolls; and six apparent discrepancies between the two sources regarding beliefs or practices of the Essenes versus Qumranites.⁴³ This impressive tally has been increased by other experts who have explained and harmonized many of the difficulties between Josephus and the scrolls.⁴⁴

Following are the most significant parallels documented by both the major classical authors and the scrolls that help identify the ancient people of Qumran as Essenes.

Common Ownership of Property

A seminal point on which the scrolls and classical descriptions of the Essenes coincide regards the individual ownership of property. Both the Jewish philosopher Philo and the Jewish historian Josephus speak in admiring tones about common ownership of property among the Essenes. From Josephus's *Jewish War* we read:

Riches they despise, and their community of goods is truly admirable; you will not find one among them distinguished by greater opulence than another. They have a law that new members on admission to the sect shall confiscate their property to the order, with the result that you will nowhere see either abject poverty or inordinate wealth; the individual's possessions join the common stock and all, like brothers, enjoy a single patrimony.⁴⁵

The Qumran text entitled the *Rule of the Community* lays out the legal principles by which property is regulated among members of the covenant community:

Then when he has completed one year within the Community, the Congregation shall deliberate his case with regard to his understanding and observance of the Law. And if it be his destiny, according to the judgement of the Priests and the multitude of the men of their Covenant, to enter the company of the Community, his property and earnings shall be handed over to the Bursar of the Congregation who shall register it to his account and shall not spend it for the Congregation. . . . But when the second year has passed, he shall be examined, and if it be his destiny, according to the judgement of the Congregation, to enter the Community, then he shall be inscribed among his brethren in the order of his rank for the Law, and for justice, and for the pure Meal; his property shall be merged and he shall offer his counsel and judgement to the Community.⁴⁶

Predestination

Another important identifying parallel centers on the theological concept described variously as predestination, predeterminism, or the doctrine of fate. Josephus describes the differences between the major sects of Judaism

regarding this idea:

As for the Pharisees, they say that certain events are the work of Fate, but not all; as to other events, it depends upon ourselves whether they shall take place or not. The sect of the Essenes, however, declares that Fate is mistress of all things, and that nothing befalls men unless it be in accordance with her decree. But the Sadducees do away with Fate.⁴⁷

A parallel belief at Qumran is articulated in a number of texts, including different copies of the *Thanksgiving Scroll*, the *War Rule*, the *Damascus Document*, and the *Rule of the Community*. This quote from the *Rule of the Community* shows the Qumran parallel with Josephus's description of the Essenes. Keep in mind that Josephus wrote for gentile readers, and that members of the Jewish sects would have discussed the notion of God's predetermined plan instead of "Fate":

From the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before ever they existed He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change.⁴⁸

Also instructive are a few lines from a Qumran text called the *Ages of the Creation* (4Q180):⁴⁹ "Interpretation concerning the ages made by God, all the ages for the accomplishment [of all the events, past] and future. Before ever He created them, He determined the works of . . . age by age."⁵⁰

The Afterlife

The few Old Testament references to an afterlife are expanded in nonbiblical texts found at Qumran. The book of *Jubilees* (not original to Qumran but probably regarded as canonical scripture there)⁵¹ gives perhaps the best representation of the Qumran idea of life beyond mortality:

Then the Lord will heal his servants. They will rise and see great peace. He will expel their enemies. The righteous will see (this), offer praise, and be very happy forever and ever. They will see all their punishments and curses on their enemies. Their bones will rest in the earth and their spirits will be very happy. They will know that the Lord is the one who executes judgment but shows kindness to hundreds and thousands and to all who love him.⁵²

This text indicates that a fundamental aspect of the belief in an afterlife at Qumran was centered on an assurance of the immortality of the soul and continued existence with the angels of heaven, but without benefit of a bodily resurrection.

The nature of the afterlife described in texts from Qumran matches closely Josephus's understanding of the basic Essene belief in the immortality of the soul. In fact, Josephus draws important distinctions between the Essenes and the Pharisees, as well as between the Essenes and the Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in a bodily resurrection in addition to believing in the everlasting nature of the soul. The Sadducees denied the idea of the immortality of both body and soul. Of the Essenes Josephus says:

It is a fixed belief of theirs that the body is corruptible and its constituent matter impermanent, but that the soul is immortal and imperishable. Emanating from the finest ether, these souls become entangled, as

it were, in the prison-house of the body to which they are dragged down by a sort of natural spell; but once they are released from the bonds of the flesh, then, as though liberated from a long servitude, they rejoice and are borne aloft. Sharing the belief of the sons of Greece, they maintain that for virtuous souls there is reserved an abode beyond the ocean.⁵³

Analysis of a messianic text from Qumran entitled *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521) indicates that at least one person associated with the community may have also believed in a bodily resurrection. It is not clear from the document who is acting—God or the Messiah—but this description seems to be a direct reference to bodily resurrection: “He will heal the slain, and the dead he will cause to live.”⁵⁴ Since most of the Qumran texts support Josephus’s assertion that bodily resurrection was not taught at Qumran, this reference does not call into question an Essene identification of the Qumran community. It may, however, give some credence to the description of Hippolytus who, writing in the second century AD, long after the physical demise of the Qumran community, said that the Essenes *did* believe in resurrection. It is possible that the perspectives presented by both Josephus and Hippolytus are valid, even though they seem to contradict one another, because their information could have come from different sources. Josephus may have presented the doctrine held by the majority, while Hippolytus’s perspective might have been based on doctrines held by a few individuals.

The Communal Meal

One of the distinctive practices of the community involved a ritual cleansing followed by the partaking of a communal meal. As noted above, archaeological evidence testifies of the importance attached to an abundant supply of fresh water at Qumran. Several passages from the *Rule of the Community* describe the meal and cleansing activity of the regular members of the covenant community:

They shall eat in common and pray in common and deliberate in common. Wherever there are ten men of the Council of the Community there shall not lack a Priest among them. And they shall sit before him according to their rank and shall be asked their counsel in all things in that order. And when the table has been prepared for eating, and the new wine for drinking, the Priest shall be the first to stretch out his hand to bless the first-fruits of the bread and new wine.⁵⁵

They shall not enter the water to partake of the pure Meal of the Saints, for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness: for all who transgress His word are unclean.⁵⁶

After he [anyone] has entered the Council of the Community he shall not touch the pure Meal of the Congregation until one full year is completed, and until he has been examined concerning his spirit and deeds.⁵⁷

Josephus describes similar activities among the Essenes in language that strongly links those activities to the practices of the Qumran covenanters. He says the Essenes work until the fifth hour of the day, then

they again assemble in one place and, after girding their loins with linen clothes, bathe their bodies in cold water. After this purification, they assemble in a private apartment which none of the uninitiated is permitted to enter; pure now themselves, they repair to the refectory, as to some sacred shrine. When they have taken their seats in silence, the baker serves out the loaves to them in order, and the cook sets

before each one plate with a single course. Before meat the priest says grace, and none may partake until after the prayer.⁵⁸

The fact that the *Rule of the Community* and Josephus agree on specific aspects of the communal meal—including practices not found among the members of any other known groups in the ancient world—makes identification of Qumran with the Essenes virtually certain. Both Josephus and the *Rule of the Community* describe premeal ritual bathing, the observance of a specific ranking among participants, and prohibitions against initiates partaking of the pure meal (the Qumran covenanters enforced a strict initiation procedure, requiring a mandatory two-year probationary period before applicants could become full-fledged members of the covenant community). Such evidence for Essene identification of the Qumran settlement is impressive.

Non-Use of Oil

The curious practice among Essenes of avoiding the use of oil is described by Josephus: “Oil they consider defiling, and anyone who accidentally comes in contact with it scours his person; for they make a point of keeping a dry skin and of always being dressed in white.”⁵⁹ The Qumran texts not only speak of the same practice, but actually explain why it was observed. In a text entitled *Miqsat Ma’aseh ha-Torah* (4QMMT) we learn that Qumranites believed that liquids were superconductors of ritual impurity, particularly when oil held in one container came in contact with another vessel. Hence, oil on the skin increased the danger of being contaminated by other objects carrying ritual uncleanness.⁶⁰

Toilet Habits

As one scholar notes, the parallels between classical sources and Qumran texts run the gamut from the lofty and sublime to the lowliest and mundane.⁶¹ This is nowhere better demonstrated than by discussions of ancient toilet practices. Josephus reports that the Essenes did not defecate on the Sabbath:

On other days they dig a trench a foot deep with a mattock—such is the nature of the hatchet which they present to the neophytes—and wrapping their mantle about them, that they may not offend the rays of the deity, sit above it. They then replace the excavated soil in the trench. For this purpose they select the more retired spots. And though this discharge of the excrements is a natural function, they make it a rule to wash themselves after it, as if defiled.⁶²

From the *War Rule* at Qumran, a text describing regulations for the conduct of a holy war against evil in the last days, we have an exact parallel to Josephus regarding the ritually contaminating properties of bodily discharges as well as the offensiveness of nudity associated with defecation: “No man shall go down with them on the day of battle who is impure because of his ‘founts,’ for the holy angels shall be their hosts. And there shall be a space of about two thousand cubits between all their camps for the place serving as a latrine, so that no indecent nakedness may be seen in the surroundings of their camps.”⁶³

Two other bits of information are instructive. A hatchet of the type described by Josephus has apparently been found in Cave 11. And the *Temple Scroll*, also from Cave 11, offers legislation on proper toilet procedures that links the Essenes of Jerusalem with the Qumran covenanters. The *Temple Scroll*, which describes God’s ideal, pure temple in the holy city of Jerusalem, states. “And you shall make them a place for a hand [latrines] outside the city

to which they shall go out, to the north-west of the city—roofed houses with pits within them, into which the excrement will descend, so that it will not be visible at any distance from the city.”⁶⁴

Jacob Milgrom, an authority on ancient Israelite concepts of purity and holiness, offers this comment:

Because of the Temple Scroll, we have the support of an outside source that, indeed, the Qumran sect was part of the Essene movement. For the law of Qumran was practiced by the Essenes of Jerusalem [toilet regulations]. Moreover, Josephus tells us that one of Jerusalem’s gates was called the Essene Gate. Heretofore it has never been identified. Josephus locates it near a place called *Bethso*. That name too has never been identified. But thanks to the Temple Scroll, both problems have been solved. *Bethso*, it turns out, is not a place name. It is Hebrew *beth so’ah* or “toilet.” Thus the Essene gate [*sic*] was not a real gate but an opening in the city wall at the nearest point to their toilets, a wicket which they could squeeze through one at a time.⁶⁵

The Essene Gate has now been found in what was the northwest section of ancient Jerusalem.

Spitting

The last bit of evidence we shall cite is important precisely because it is such a curious little detail. Both Josephus and the *Rule of the Community* report that spitting was prohibited among the Essenes and at Qumran. The *Rule of the Community* declares that “whosoever has spat in an Assembly of the Congregation shall do penance for thirty days.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Josephus says of the Essenes, “They are careful not to spit into the midst of the company or to the right.”⁶⁷

More detailed parallels could be drawn and intricate arguments constructed. But enough of the salient features of the Qumran community have been outlined to demonstrate the weighty evidence in favor of definitively identifying the Qumran sectaries as Essenes. Let us now briefly round out our picture of life and institutions at Qumran.

Other Practices and Parallels at Qumran

The scrolls indicate that the Qumran sectaries regarded themselves as the true Israel surrounded by spiritual traitors and false brethren in a corrupt world. A major theme of the Dead Sea Scrolls concerns the members of the Qumran community awaiting the advent of certain messiahs from their wilderness habitation, where apostasy and persecution had driven them. A similar idea appears in Revelation 12:1–6, which describes a celestial woman giving birth to a son, who is caught into heaven to be preserved, while she (the true church or congregation of the righteous) flees to the wilderness because of intense apostasy and persecution. She was to come forth in a later time of refreshing (see also Acts 3:19–21).

Qumran texts clearly attest a form of messianic belief, as do other pre-Christian Israelite writings. The Qumran documents indicate that the community lived in expectation of a coming prophet (probably the one promised to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth”) who would precede the Anointed One. And instead of one messiah, Qumran texts disclose the anticipation of two: a priestly Anointed One (the Messiah of Aaron), and a Davidic, political Anointed One (the Messiah of Israel). While the Mosaic law was basically an interim covenant that the community members were obligated to observe with exactitude because it was designed to keep God’s people spiritually safe during the

great age of wrath or wickedness, the advent of the Messiahs would usher in a new era of Mosaic purity, peace, and pardon. *From the Rule of the Community* and the *Damascus Document* we read:

They shall depart from no counsel of the Law to walk in all the stubbornness of their hearts, but they shall be governed by the primitive precepts in which the men of the community were first instructed, until the coming of a prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.⁶⁸

This is the exact statement of the statutes in which [they shall walk until the coming of the Messia]h of Aaron and Israel who will pardon their iniquity.⁶⁹

Believing they were God's true Israel, the community organized their movement to correspond to biblical Israel, dividing members into priests and laity: the priests being described as the "sons of Zadok" (Zadok was high priest in king David's time) and the laity grouped into twelve tribes. In describing true and proper temple worship, the *War Rule* says:

And the twelve chief Priests shall minister at the daily sacrifice before God. . . . Below them . . . shall be the chiefs of the Levites to the number of twelve, one for each tribe. . . . Below them shall be the chiefs of the tribes.⁷⁰

The Qumran covenanters viewed their community or congregation (*yahad* in Hebrew) as a link in the historical chain that snapped when Judah was conquered by the Babylonians. This self-identification as the sole legitimate representative of biblical Israel distinguishes the community from their opponents, who regarded the biblical period as a closed chapter, and their authorities—the rabbis—as leading a new phase in the history of Israel.⁷¹

Thus the *yahad* held in high regard the prophets, prophetic teaching, and divine revelation manifested in the Bible. Almost from the start, the community subjected itself to the guidance of men believed to be gifted with the holy spirit. The first to appear among the people was the Teacher of Righteousness, as earlier noted. Because they were considered divinely inspired, the Teacher's decisions were beyond debate and unconditionally binding on the members of community.⁷²

After the passing of the Teacher of Righteousness, the primary leadership of the Dead Sea community was vested in a governing quorum of three priests who worked in tandem with a quorum of twelve laymen, all possessing the divine spirit:

In the deliberative council of the community there shall be twelve laymen and three priests schooled to perfection in all that has been revealed of the entire Law. Their duty shall be to set the standard for the practice of truth, righteousness and justice, and for the exercise of charity and humility in human relations; . . . So long as these men exist in Israel, the deliberative council of the community will rest securely on a basis of truth.⁷³

One is immediately reminded of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles in first-century Christianity, and its three chief leaders, Peter, James, and John (although the latter do not appear to have functioned as a separate entity outside of the Twelve). Qumran also had an officer called an overseer, who seems to have held a position almost the equivalent to that of bishop in the early Christian church (the Greek word *episcopos*, translated as "bishop," literally

means “overseer.”) Temporal and practical matters were the responsibility of the overseer at Qumran, as they were in the Christian bishop’s role (see 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:7–9; and even Acts 6:1–3).

However, the important point here is that the influence of the holy spirit was emphasized among both Christians and Qumran covenanters. By contrast, as Professor Talmon points out, rabbinic Judaism, which developed alongside these other two branches of Judaism, progressively moved away from prophets and “the spirit,” and developed a rationalist stance. According to rabbinic tradition, after the demise of the last biblical prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—“the holy spirit departed from Israel,” and from then on Israel was enjoined to incline their ear and “listen to the instructions of the [rabbinic] Sages.”⁷⁴

Given the biblically based environment at Qumran, and the historically connected consciousness among the people, it is not surprising that the covenanters applied the term *Renewed Covenant* to the totality of laws and principles to which they strictly adhered. Basing his analysis on the *Damascus Document* (abbreviated CD), Professor Talmon summarizes the views of the Qumran covenanters:

They view[ed] their community as the youngest link in a chain of sequential reaffirmations of the covenant, to which the Bible gives witness (CD II, 14–III, 20). God had originally established his covenant with Adam. He renewed it after each critical juncture in the history of the world, and of Israel; after the flood, with Noah, the ‘second Adam’; then with the patriarchs; again with all Israel at Sinai; with the priestly house of Aaron; and ensuingly with the royal house of David, after the monarchical system had taken root in Israel. In the present generation . . . “he raised for himself” from among all evildoers “men called by name, that a remnant be left in the land, and that the earth be filled with their offspring” (CD II, 11–12). The thread of Israel’s historical past, which snapped when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, is retied with the foundation of the *yahad*’s ‘renewed covenant.’⁷⁵

Though grounded in the Bible, it is not exactly certain how the Qumran Essenes viewed marriage because their texts do not speak of it. Excavations of the large main cemetery, fifty meters east of the community ruins, plus excavations of two secondary cemeteries carried out by de Vaux in the 1950s present an inconclusive picture. The majority of the skeletons were male, but women and children have been identified. The problem comes in trying to reconcile the physical evidence with Pliny and Josephus. The former described the Essene community on the west side of the Dead Sea as having renounced all sexual desire. Josephus’s description of Essene practices begins by agreeing with Pliny that the Essenes shunned pleasure, passion, and marriage, but concludes with a long section that states that there was another order of Essenes which believed that complete rejection of marriage denied the chief function of life—the propagation of the race. They held, says Josephus, that if all people were to live celibate existences the whole race would quickly die out.⁷⁶

If Josephus is correct that pockets of married Essenes did exist among the celibate, it becomes impossible to know without further excavation of the cemeteries just which group of Essenes lived at Qumran. Several proposals have been proffered. Perhaps the most reasonable scenario postulates that the Qumranites were an isolated male society—a celibate subset of Essenes (either temporarily or permanently celibate we cannot tell)—who gave a proper burial to visiting relatives or travelers in the arid region who died suddenly. Of course, it is also possible to propose that both types of Essenes lived at Qumran by postulating that the community was not celibate at every stage of its history.⁷⁷

One thing we *are* certain of is that the temple, ritual washings and cleanliness, the proper observance of feasts, festivals, and ordinances were at the absolute center of life at Qumran. The sectaries believed that the Jerusalem

Temple's priesthood was thoroughly corrupt, and as a result, so was the calendar they perpetuated in the Holy City. Thus the covenanters refused to celebrate even such holy days as the Feast of Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement at the Jerusalem Temple, preferring instead to commemorate them in their own community without burnt offerings. Nevertheless, as the *Temple Scroll* indicates, the idea of a pure and undefiled temple in their midst remained their great ideal. One scholar has written that "the Essenes' basic ideal for living was to live as if they were priests dwelling in the temple itself. By this means, they sought to make their community a virtual temple, whether or not they were priests or Levites."⁷⁸ The Qumran covenanters often wore white linen garments to symbolize the level of templelike purity they sought to attain.⁷⁹

One of the most fascinating and important aspects of life at Qumran was centered on a calendrical system different from the one used in the Jerusalem Temple from sometime in the second century BC until the great destruction in AD 70. For the sake of simplification, let us say that the system used by the Qumran covenanters combined solar, lunar, and ecclesiastical calendars. They observed a unique festival cycle in which they did not celebrate Jewish holidays and religious feasts on the same days such memorial services were celebrated by the rest of Judaism.

In addition, through divine revelation (as they believed), the Qumranites instituted and observed festivals not extant among other Israelites. The additional festivals included the Festival of New Wine, the Festival of New Oil, and the Wood Festival. The unique calendar of the Qumran community shows the distinctive and separatist outlook of that branch of Judaism.

Some of what we have noted concerning the beliefs and practices of the Essenes at Qumran may seem to describe either a pre-Christian era "gospel" community, or even a long-lost group of ancient Latter-day Saints with their familiar-sounding emphasis on consecration, temple-worthy behavior, a strict probationary period before full membership was granted, priesthood organization, an expanded corpus of scripture, the apostate condition of the world, the term *Saints* being applied to covenant members, new ordinances and religious festivals, and light-darkness dualism. But such is not the case.

While the Qumran sectaries were a unified community that keenly recognized the apostate condition of Judaism and inaugurated reforms refocusing their own lives on the seminal tenets of true religion under the Mosaic dispensation, they also embraced notions contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Qumran community believed that the lame, halt, blind, deaf, and idiots remained in the care of the angels, and thus they did not admit them to their group. They did not believe that anyone had the right to worship in the name of the Lord unless a *minyan* (quorum) of ten individuals were gathered in the company of a priest. Contrast this with Jesus' statement that whenever two or more were gathered together in the name of the Lord, there his spirit would be also (compare Matthew 18:19–20).

Among the other differences between Qumran beliefs and the gospel of Christ that might be presented, a final one is worth noting here. As several scholars have pointed out, Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, flatly contradicts the idea that we should love our neighbors and hate our enemies:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matthew 5:43–44)

However, hating one's spiritual enemies is precisely what the *Rule of the Community* advocates in two separate sections: "Love all that He [God] has chosen and hate all that He has rejected"; also, "These are the rules of conduct for the Master in those times with respect to his loving and hating. Everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy for the men of perdition!"⁸⁰ Thus it seems clear that some points of Jesus' doctrine were an intentional rebuttal of Essene teaching.

The Documents of the Community

Unlike their rabbinic contemporaries, the people of Qumran did not immediately (if ever) develop the notion of a closed canon. They obviously invested some of their own writings—the indigenous or sectarian texts—with the same (perhaps even greater?) authority and holiness as held by the Bible. These foundation documents of the Qumran covenanters reveal an attachment to and profound belief in the continuity of biblical Israel, prophesy, and covenantal renewal. Based on a list compiled by Professor Talmon,⁸¹ these foundation documents (the majority of which come from Cave 1) may be summarized as follows:

The *Damascus Document* (CD), sometimes called the *Zadokite Rule*, includes a compressed survey of the history of the *yahad*, along with a selection of legal materials, written in a style somewhat reminiscent of the biblical book of Deuteronomy. The historical account and the statutes appear to pertain to the entire "Community of the Renewed Covenant," that is, to the members who live with their families in "camps" in various locations in Palestine, as well as to the relatively small commune of members (all male?) who resided at Qumran, perhaps for only a season.

The *Rule of the Community* (1QS), or *Manual of Discipline* as it is often called, lists the precepts, structure, and public procedures of the community, and prescribes the conduct of its members.

The *Messianic Rule* (1QSa) offers a description of an envisioned messianic banquet based on the kind of common meals engaged in by the covenanters at Qumran. It also describes a future general assembly for the members of the community, at which time all precepts of the covenant will be publicly read before the entire community—priests, Levites and lay-Israelites, men and women alike, and also children who are mature enough to understand the proceedings (1QSa I 1–5). Professor Talmon asserts that this gathering is, in fact, a replica of Nehemiah's "great convocation" (see Nehemiah 8).⁸²

The *War Rule* (1QM) presents legal and descriptive details of the cataclysmic war in which the Sons of Light (the Qumran covenanters) will finally overcome all Sons of Darkness (the wicked). In the ensuing era of universal peace, the covenanters will reestablish the temple in the New Jerusalem, the capital of their messianic kingdom, which is "a glorified reflection of Israel's historical commonwealth."⁸³

The *Temple Scroll* (11QTemple) describes a future purified temple to be established as the ritual center for Israel. This document somewhat resembles the books of the Law, but it is God, not Moses, who directly addresses the people in the *Temple Scroll*.

The *Pesher Habakkuk* (1QpHab) or *Habakkuk Commentary*, as well as portions of other *pesharim* (commentaries), provide information on some aspects of the covenanters' history by interpreting certain nonhistorical texts of the Hebrew Bible as referring to historical events and historical people. In other words, the authors of these *pesharim* interpret the scriptural texts as foreshadowings of the historical experiences of their community. The Kittim, for example, in the commentaries on Habakkuk and Nahum are represented as instruments of God, appointed to punish the ungodly priests in Jerusalem. It is believed that the Kittim were the Romans.

Miqsat Ma'aseh ha-Torah (4QMMT) is a pieced-together collection of the fragments of copies of a document from Cave 4 that provides supplementary information on the outlook and function of the community.

These foundation documents are addressed specifically to the people of the Qumran community. The legal prescriptions contained in them are not considered debatable: “Based on inspiration, they are binding . . . [and] are ‘handed down’ like biblical ordinances.”⁸⁴ Thus the scrolls used by the people of Qumran have provided valuable information about a complex time period to which Latter-day Saints (and all Christians for that matter) trace their own spiritual roots. Is there any value for Latter-day Saints in studying the Dead Sea Scrolls? As we compare and contrast some of our own ideas and practices with those at Qumran, perhaps we can better appreciate the ancient people of that covenant community, and better understand the significant rifts in Christian-era Judaism. We can also appreciate the interconnectedness of ideas and texts across dispensations. The Dead Sea Scrolls have also given to the world the oldest biblical manuscripts and they help us to understand the history of our modern version of the Bible. And while caution needs to be urged in making more of the parallels between the Qumran sect and Mormonism than is appropriate, we can certainly see how some of the theological ideas found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are perfectly at home in an authentic ancient cultural milieu.

Summary and Conclusions

We end where we began. Truly the most fascinating thing about the scrolls is the people who used them. Without the realization that the scrolls were the product of real people in a definite point in time, reflecting their fears, hopes, convictions, expectations, aims, and desires, the scrolls would be much less meaningful. By looking closely at the ancient people of Qumran—what they thought and how they behaved—we are given an extraordinary window of insight into the religious climate that spawned normative, or Pharisaic, Judaism, as well as another covenant group of dissenters—the early Christian contemporaries of the Qumran community. The people of Qumran stood at a historical juncture, a three-way crossroads in a period that witnessed the eventual survival of only two ideologies, Pharisaic, or rabbinic, Judaism and Christianity.

Notes

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1. See Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 55—6.
2. See Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 6:16. See also Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (New York: Weathervane Books, 1969), 11—2.
3. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 1—2, quotes the pertinent portion of the letter.
4. See Pfeiffer, *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible*, 13.
5. The story of the find and its initial announcement can be found in most introductions to the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the most accurate without being pedantic is perhaps VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 3—8.
6. As cited in VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, pl. 2.
7. See Hershel Shanks, “Barview,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11/5 (1985): 4.
8. See Cross, *Ancient Library of Qumran*, 36—7.

9. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 57.
0. See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 395.
1. See *ibid.*
2. Alan D. Crown and Lena Cansdale, "Qumran: Was It an Essene Settlement?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20/5 (1994): 25—35, 73—4, 76—8. As early as 1959, Henry Del Medico argued that the structure in question was a triclinium rather than a Scriptorium. This interpretation was also favored by the great biblical scholar G. R. Driver.
3. Personal conversation with Dr. Broshi at the International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls, 15—17 July 1996, held at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
4. Shemaryahu Talmon, *The "Dead Sea Scrolls" or "The Community of the Renewed Covenant"* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 6.
5. See VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 12.
6. See Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions*, 13.
7. See *ibid.*, 26
8. See Pfeiffer, *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible*, 18.
9. Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions*, 26.
0. See Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land*, 397.
1. Talmon, "Dead Sea Scrolls," 3.
2. As cited in Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 113.
3. Marion G. Romney, "Temples—The Gates to Heaven," *Ensign* (March 1971): 16.
4. See David B. Galbraith, D. Kelly Ogden, and Andrew C. Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 150.
5. See VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 71.
6. See Cross, *Ancient Library of Qumran*, 54.
7. Frank Moore Cross, "The Historical Context of the Scrolls," in *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Hershel Shanks (New York: Random House, 1992), 25.
8. Cross, "Historical Context," 25.
9. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) I and V. This and subsequent translations, unless otherwise noted, are from Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1995).
0. See the critique in VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 93—4.
1. For an introduction to the *Damascus Document*, sometimes called the *Zadokite Document*, see Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 48—51.
2. *Damascus Document* (CD) I.
3. See VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 100—1.
4. See *Damascus Document* (CD) I; *Commentary on Psalm 37:7*, in *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, trans. Theodor H. Gaster, 3rd ed., (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1976), 326.
5. See VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 102.
6. See the summary in Hershel Shanks, "Essene Origins—Palestine or Babylonia," in *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Shanks, 80.
7. Cross, "Historical Context," 31.
8. *Ibid.*, 31—2.
9. Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. 2, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (1969), 5.73.

0. These include Pliny's inference that the settlement was still in existence around the time he wrote in AD 77 because he used the present tense in his description. This present-tense language seems to contradict the generally accepted picture provided by archaeological data that suggest that the settlement was destroyed by the Romans in AD 68 or The author's reference to Engedi as a city second only to Jerusalem in palm trees and fertility has also been criticized (it should probably read "Jericho") as indicative of the overall problematic nature of Pliny's description.
1. See VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 72.
2. As cited in *ibid.*, 74.
3. See *ibid.*, 87.
4. See *ibid.*, 88—91.
5. Josephus, *Jewish War*, trans. H. Thackeray and R. Marcus, Loeb Classical Library (1988), 2.122.
6. Rule of the Community (1QS) VI.
7. Josephus, *Antiquities*, trans. H. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (1976), 171—3.
8. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) III.
9. Scroll terminology is not complicated, just abbreviated. The number 4 designates the cave in which the document was found (Cave 4 in this case), the Q stands for Qumran, and the last number indicates this text is fragment number 180.
0. *Ages of the Creation* (4Q180).
1. See the discussion in VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 153.
2. *Jubilees* 23:30—1, in *The Book of Jubilees*, trans. James VanderKam (Lovanii: E. Peeters, 1989), 511:149.
3. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.154—5.
4. As cited in VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, The preliminary publication of this text is found in Emile Puech, *Revue de Qumran* 15 (1991—92): 479—522.
5. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) VI.
6. *Ibid.*, V.
7. *Ibid.*, VI.
8. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.129—31.
9. *Ibid.*, 2.123.
0. See the discussion in VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 81.
1. See *ibid.*, 86.
2. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.147—9.
3. *War Rule* (1QM) VII.
4. As cited in Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 178.
5. As cited in S. Kent Brown, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," *BYU Studies* 23/1 (1983): 55.
6. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) VII.
7. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.147.
8. As cited in Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions*, 53 (see pp. 53—6).
9. *Damascus Document* (CD) XIV. The use of brackets in the text indicates restored portions by the translator.
0. *War Rule* (1QM) II.
1. See Talmon, "*Dead Sea Scrolls*," 15.
2. See *ibid.*, 16.
3. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) VIII, in *Dead Sea Scriptures*; see also Vermes's translation.
4. These quotations are from the Mishnah, *Sotah* 48b, Sanhedrin 11a, and from Seder Olam Rabbah 6, as cited in Talmon, "*Dead Sea Scrolls*," 16.

5. Talmon, "Dead Sea Scrolls," 17—8.
6. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.160—1.
7. See VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 14—5, 90—1.
8. Brown, "Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," 57—8.
9. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.126—32.
0. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) I and IX.
1. See Talmon, "Dead Sea Scrolls," 3—4.
2. See *ibid.*, 3.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 24.