

Canon of Scripture

Lesson 4

I. The Significance of Qumran

- a. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls is perhaps the **most** important archaeological discovery of the twentieth century because it answers whether or not the Old Testament text, as we know it today, is identical to the Bible that was written by the ancients or whether there were changes.
- b. We must keep in mind that until the beginning of the nineteenth century we possessed **no** ancient versions of the Bible. We must also keep in mind that both Jewish and Christian scholars contended that changes had been made to the Old Testament.
- c. Jewish scholars charged that in order to corroborate the revelation of Jesus as the **son** of God that Christians had made changes and Christians charged that Jews had made changes in order to eradicate any evidence relating to Jesus.
- d. In **1844**, while this argument over the authenticity of the Bible was still going on, the German scholar Constantin von Tischendorf discovered the Codex Sinaiticus in the library of the Monastery of Santa Katherina in Sinai.
- e. The codex is a collection of sheets written in Greek from the fourth century AD containing many of the books of the Bible. Studies of the codex have established that **no** significant changes were made to the Old Testament from the time of the fourth century until the present.
- f. Then in 1947 two Bedouin shepherds accidentally came across a clay jar in a cave near **Qumran** that contained seven parchment scrolls. The scrolls came into the hands of dealers in antiquities who offered them to scholars.
- g. Subsequent finds confirm that this is the greatest manuscript find of the twentieth century and demonstrate the rich literary activity of Second Temple Period. It also provides insight into centuries pivotal to both Judaism and Christianity between **300 BC-68 AD**.
- h. The Qumran **"library"** contains some books or works in a large number of copies, yet others are represented as fragments comprised of mere scraps of parchment.
- i. Qumran has provided us with the oldest (125–100 BC) text of **Isaiah**, written over a century before the time of Yeshua of Nazareth.
- j. Called the *Great Isaiah Scroll*, it is also the most complete (all **66** Chapters). When compared to the Masoretic text of the modern Hebrew Bible, only minor spelling differences are found. This demonstrates conclusively the reliability of the scribal process.
- k. There were tens of thousands of scroll fragments found at Qumran. The number of different compositions is almost one thousand, and they are written in **three** different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
- l. According to many scholars, the chief **categories** represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls are:
 1. **Biblical**: Includes about one hundred copies of books of the Hebrew Bible. All of the books of the Bible are represented in the Dead Sea Scroll collection except Esther.
 2. **Apocryphal**: Those works which are omitted from Protestant canon of the Bible and included in others (Catholic & Eastern Orthodox).
 3. **Sectarian**: Those scrolls related to a pietistic commune and include ordinances, biblical commentaries, apocalyptic visions, and liturgical works.
- m. Some scholars believe that Esther was **excluded** from Qumran because the Qumran community utterly disapproved of Judas Maccabaeus and the Hasmonaean family. The Book of Esther expresses a close connection with the sentiments of the Maccabees.
- n. Among their books are several commentaries on books of the Hebrew Bible, explaining them according to the community's distinctive **Essene** principles of interpretation.
- o. Therefore, we know with certainty that the 'canon' of the Qumran community **included** the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Psalms which possibly included a few supplementary psalms.
- p. It also included the book of Daniel, who is called 'Daniel the **prophet**' and Job (an Aramaic paraphrase of Job was found in Cave 11 at Qumran). *Matt 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) KJV*
- q. Fragments of **Tobit**, Jubilees and Enoch, were also found at Qumran. While these have also been classified canonical by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, there is no evidence that these were reckoned canonical by the Qumran community.
- r. We are able to identify which books were considered 'canonical' because they are **quoted** and cited as divine revelation within other community documents.
- s. It is **probable** that by the beginning of the Christian era the Essenes (including the Qumran community) were in close agreement with the Pharisees and the Sadducees about the limits of Hebrew scripture.

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II. The Samaritans

- a. Another source which contributes to our picture of the authenticity of the Old Testament and the **timing** of its canon is the Samaritan population which still resides in Shechem, Israel.
- b. The Samaritan community is descendant from the Israelites of the Exodus Period. The Samaritans are related to the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Levi, and derive their name from the place they inhabit which is **Samaria**.
- c. **Today** the Samaritans, profess themselves to be strict keepers of the ancient Israelite religion and culture. They have their own unique alphabet which happens to be the ancient Hebrew one.
- d. They still pray in the same language and share the ancient accent of their Jewish kinsmen. They also claim to possess the **oldest** copy of the torah and an ancient tradition dating back to the creation of the world.
- e. The divide between the Jews and the Samaritans, according to the Scripture, occurred during the second temple (kingdom) period when the Samaritans had requested to participate in the **construction** of the new temple. *Ezra 4:2-4 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, KJV*
- f. Following that incident, the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans grew and the Samaritans therefore, constructed their own replica of the temple on Mt. **Gerizim**. *John 4:20-21 Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. KJV*
- g. The Samaritan Bible was restricted to the **Pentateuch**. They had their own edition of the book of Joshua and a number of other traditions, but these were not recognized as Holy Scripture.
- h. The Samaritan Bible was basically a popular Palestinian **revision** of the Hebrew Pentateuch, which was subjected to an editorial process to bring it into line with certain aspects of Samaritan tradition which conflicted with Jewish tradition.
- i. The Samaritan Bible has customarily been treated as evidence for the view that the final Samaritan schism took place at a time when the Pentateuch **but not** the Prophets or Writings had been 'canonized'.

III. The Origin of The Septuagint

- a. Almost from the time that Alexander the Great founded Alexandria in Egypt in **331 B.C.**, there was a Jewish element in its Greek-speaking population, and this element continued to increase in the generations that followed.
- b. There were Jewish settlements in **most** of the other Greek-speaking cities established throughout the area of Alexander's conquests, but none was more important than Alexandria.
- c. The Jewish settlement there was facilitated by the fact that, until 198 B.C., Judaea formed part of the kingdom of **Ptolemy**, who succeeded Alexander's empire in Egypt and made Alexandria his capital.
- d. Once **Hellenized**, Jews of Alexandria gave up using the Hebrew language and spoke Greek only. Had the scriptures not been translated into Greek, this would have eliminated their use of the Hebrew Bible and prayer language.
- e. Hellenized Jewish worshippers needed to understand their worship service and because the reading of the Law (comprising the five books of Moses) was essential to synagogue **worship**, it was the first part of the scriptures to appear in a Greek version.
- f. At first, the Law was read in Hebrew, as it was in Palestine, and someone was appointed to give an **oral** translation in Greek. But as time went on, about 150 BC a written Greek version was provided, so that it could be read directly.
- g. This translation into Greek spawned the **legend** of the "seventy" and is recorded in the Letter of Aristeas. It tells how the elders completed the translation of the Pentateuch in seventy-two days and achieved an agreed upon version in that short period
- h. **Philo**, the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, relates how the translators worked in isolation from one another but wrote the same text word for word, 'as though it were dictated to each by an invisible prompter'.
- i. Both he and Josephus confirm that it was only the books of the law that were translated by the elders. It was **Christian** writers who extended their work to the rest of the Old Testament.
- j. While it was at Alexandria that the Hebrew Scriptures were first translated into Greek, the use of the Greek version quickly spread to other Jewish communities throughout the Greek-speaking world, including **Judaea** itself. *Acts 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. KJV*

IV. Application

- a. In what ways does learning about Jewish history affect your understanding of the Bible?
- b. What impact does learning about the process of canonization of the Old Testament have upon you personally?