

Five *More* Reasons to Get Excited about the Dead Sea Scrolls

- 1) Modern discoveries shed light on their importance. The oldest and most authoritative New Testament manuscripts found to date, the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* codices (what's a codex, plural: codices? A scriptural manuscript in book form, as opposed to scrolls), were discovered in the nineteenth century, long after the most popular version of the English Bible, the 1611 King James Version, was written. These codices throw into question or, in some cases, frankly negate issues that were assumed by many to be religious certainties. Given this new knowledge, biblical textual criticism is experiencing a resurgence of interest. Many new facts have been exposed, some of which are of such importance as to be considered religiously revolutionary. The Dead Sea Scrolls, like a critical piece of an unfinished jigsaw puzzle, helps to fill in our understanding of the Christian Bible.
- 2) Modern biblical scholarship demands re-evaluation of the Old and New Testaments. Scholars such as Bart D. Ehrman and Bruce Metzger have exposed numerous errors and inconsistencies in both the Old and New Testaments. Some of these errors are significant enough to challenge orthodox Jewish and Trinitarian Christian beliefs. In the context of this scriptural and canonical uncertainty, every bit of evidence helps. Again, the Dead Sea Scrolls help in this regard.
- 3) The Dead Sea Scrolls excite the imagination. They speak of a Teacher of Righteousness, believed by some scholars to refer to either Jesus or James. They also speak of the Teacher of Righteousness' antagonist, variously identified as the "Wicked Priest," the "Man of Scoffing," "The Man of the Lie," "The Spouter of the Lie," and "The Priest who Rebelled." Some scholars believe these euphemisms refer to Paul, whom the scrolls describe as having been excommunicated from the early Christian church. Now . . . wait a minute. If Paul was an enemy of Jesus or James, and was excommunicated from the early Christian church, what does that say about Trinitarian Christian canon, which is primarily based on the teachings of Paul?
- 4) The Dead Sea Scrolls are fun! I mean, come on, those keepers of the scrolls? They were *wild* men! Talk about guys who really knew how to party, beginning of the first millennium-style. Their sectarian scrolls describe their pure food and drink, daily ritual baths, and nighttimes spent studying scripture and praying. If one of the "Sons of Light" so much as gestured with his left hand, he was punished, and anyone who even whispered against Mosaic law was exiled forever. Giving up all worldly wealth, living a monastic life in the desert, this was a bunch of wool-robed, wild and crazy guys! But seriously, even if you don't respect their convictions, you've simply got to respect their sincerity. The keepers of the scrolls (believed by most scholars to have been Essene Jews) lived a tough life devoted to piety and worship. So once again, what did they know about the scrolls that we don't know?
- 5) And finally, what is the main reason we should get excited about the Dead Sea Scrolls? The same reason the world's great religious and political powers are excited about them! Nowhere in the Bible do we find the gospel of Jesus. In fact, modern Christian scholarship acknowledges that all four of the New Testament gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were written anonymously. The religious world would love to find the true gospel of Jesus . . . well . . . maybe. Perhaps I should say, the religious world would love to find the true gospel of Jesus, but only if it says what they want it to say. If the true gospel of Jesus were ever found, consider the consequences. A gospel that unequivocally proves Jesus' prophethood would destroy Judaism and negate Israel's political purpose of creating a Jewish state. If Jesus teaches the monotheism of Unitarian Christianity rather than the Trinitarian mysteries derived from Paul's teachings, it would tear down the canon of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as that of all other Trinitarian

denominations. At the same time, it would challenge the faith (and political support) of all so-called Christian nations. We're talking major upheaval of the world's religions and religion-based superpowers. Consequently, if the gospel of Jesus were ever found, these world powers would fight to possess it or kill to suppress it, depending on what it contains. Now *that* is definitely worth getting excited about.