

Five Reasons to Get Excited about the Dead Sea Scrolls

- 1) They're old. *So what?* Yeah, well, I understand. Grandpa's old, but the only one who's excited about *him* is grandma, and even there, the magic wore off twenty years ago. But the key is not the age of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Rather, it's the bloody, tumultuous period in which they were hidden away. It was 68 CE, and Judea was in the middle of its revolt against Roman rule. Emperor Nero, infamous for his persecution of the Christian/Jews in the wake of the great fire of Rome, assigned General Vespasian to sweep the Roman legions across Judea and wipe out Jewish insurgency. Midway through this campaign, Nero was deposed and committed suicide. With the Roman Empire in upheaval and the Jews of Judea waging civil war as well as combating the Roman onslaught, the keepers of the scrolls hid their treasured scriptures in the caves at Qumran (the area of the Dead Sea where they were found).
- 2) They're incomplete. Even the best preserved scrolls have holes in them and are missing sections of text. The library of Dead Sea Scrolls looks like an unfinished jigsaw puzzle. Who knows what essential information is missing? Nonetheless, the texts we have hint at mind-boggling religious concepts.
- 3) There may be undiscovered scrolls still hiding out in the Holy Land. Scholars estimate as many as twenty of the caves at Qumran were lost, together with their contents, due to collapse. Being collapsed, these caves cannot be found unless excavated by accident. Caches of scrolls may exist elsewhere in the Holy Land, as well. However, Israel's stranglehold on this flow of information has resulted in scholars leveling charges of academic and/or religious conspiracy.
- 4) Major interest groups don't want you to know about them. But let's face it: If someone tells you not to look at something, isn't that the first thing you want to do? Well, many interest groups don't want you to look, or at least, not too deeply. Visit the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibits, admire their preservation, appreciate their antiquity, but then move on to the Phoenician glass exhibit. Do anything but delve into the scrolls' history, their meaning. Some scholars who have disclosed secrets contrary to the sanctioned "official version" have claimed the whistleblower punishment of academic persecution. Are free-thinkers like Robert Eisenman and Michael Baigent quacks, as Israel's religious authorities would like us to believe, or clear-minded scholars who sound the call of reason? Eisenman's *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* makes clear his lofty level of scholarship, while Baigent and Leigh's *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* renders plausible the claim of a "conspiracy of consensus." For several decades, scholars decried Israel's delay in releasing the scrolls to the public; the work of these authors, among others, provides powerful evidence to support the theory of an academic scandal. Why were Israel's authorities so slow to release the Dead Sea Scrolls? If you believe the

revisionist scholars, Judaic and Trinitarian Christian authorities have good reason to fear the secrets of the scrolls.

- 5) The keepers of the scrolls were slaughtered after hiding them away in the caves. In essence, they died to preserve the scrolls. Sooo . . . they must have held the scrolls with slightly more reverence than, say, the scriptural equivalent of comic books, right? So what was so precious about the Dead Sea Scrolls – not to us, but to their keepers? Was there a deep, dark secret they were willing to die for? Or were the scrolls just *that* holy? Either way, we should want to know.