

SECRETS OF THE HIDDEN SCROLLS

Ben Finger, Jr.

Reprinted from the *Rosicrucian Digest*, Vol. 34, No.10 (October 1956), pages 368-371

Rosicrucians, like people all over the world, were fascinated by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the revelations about Judaism and by extension, the context of early Christianity which they afforded. This early offering from the *Rosicrucian Digest* is a good summary of the scholarship and opinions of the day, adapted for modern readers.

It was in February or March 1947 that an innocent Bedouin boy (Muhammed adh-Dhib) walked about in the rocky, sterile Qumran region at the northern end of the Dead Sea. He was simply looking for a lost sheep. But when he entered a cave in the cliffs to the west of the famous body of water, he was surprised to find some rolled-up manuscripts within tall clay jars.

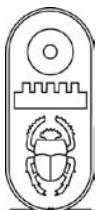
The lad had no idea of their age and value. Neither had some of the authorities who examined them. But now [1956], after nearly a decade of scientific research, the Dead Sea Scrolls have been dated by paleography, and by laboratory analyses of the leather, the carbon ink, and the linen wrappings. We know beyond a doubt that the recovered manuscripts were written during the significant historical period from about 300 CE to 68 or 70 BCE. Most scholars now agree with Dr. William F. Albright, of Johns Hopkins University, that here is the "greatest manuscript discovery of modern times." Edmund Wilson calls the Dead Sea Scrolls "the most precious discoveries of their kind since the texts of the Greek and Latin classics brought to light in the Renaissance."¹

Already we have a new understanding of the last three centuries before Christ and the first century CE—the cross-pollination and variety of pre-Christian Judaism, the development of Jewish theology and of the Hebrew language, the source of the New

Covenant, the ideology of the contemporaries of Christ and the early church. If the Essenes were the Qumran sect that used the Scrolls, as seems probable, we have a clue to the long-hidden Essenian Mysteries. An international group of responsible scholars is grappling with the new problems of religious history, textual criticism, and exegesis. A good friend of mine, who recently visited the Palestine Museum at Jerusalem, was informed by the scholars there that it might take twenty-five or thirty years longer to uncover the full meaning of the abundant manuscript finds.

By this time, practically everyone has become acquainted with the Dead Sea Scrolls through front-page headlines, articles in popular magazines and learned journals, and books adapted to all types of readers. Our understanding of the Bible is being revolutionized, and a thousand interpretations will have to be rewritten. But we must be on guard against hysterical enthusiasm on the one side, and closed-minded partisan bias on the other. Many ultra-orthodox Christians stubbornly refuse to modify their view of the originality of Christ, and no few Jews shudder to be reminded of the fluidity of their religion before official norms were codified after the destruction of the temple. Only with disinterested scholarship can we do justice to a message that promises to yield a new growth of inter-faith understanding.

Here we are chiefly concerned with the deeper philosophical secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls—the quest for divine gnosis, salvation through participation in the One Good, the attainment of mystic union, the ideal of the spiritual community, Providence, the "periods of God." The sect of the Scrolls had Essenian ideas and ways—the same sympathy for the poor, the same love of purity and righteousness. The new Scrolls and fragments



connect with the inter-testamental Apocrypha to show us the gradual evolution of Christianity as the flowering of a great ethical-spiritual movement.

Thousands of scholars, since the time of Karl Barth, have been convinced that Jesus was an Essene. Now we know with certainty that Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, and “the metaphysical John” echoed or at least strikingly paralleled the documents of the Qumran sect. The discovery of the Scrolls has filled a puzzling gap in religious history. Christianity was no sudden comet shining against dark night, but it had a long preparation, and was the masterpiece of a long cumulative growth.

Before we get through with the Dead Sea Scrolls and fragments, be it also noted, the Hebrew Scriptures will be reconstructed from the earliest known sources, and thus will come closer than ever to the original text. Hardly a chapter will remain unchanged. Those thirteen slight changes of Isaiah in the recent Revised Standard Version Bible are just a beginning!

New Light on the Essenes

Jeremiah and Isaiah pioneered the New Covenant, and the Qumran community developed it. There are many parallels between the reborn literature of the Qumran sect and what we have learned of the Essenes from the rabbinic literature, Josephus, Philo, and Pliny.

Jerusalem was the crossroads of trade, and thus the Essenes became acquainted with Babylonian solar symbolism, Zoroastrian dualism, Brahman forms of worship, Buddhist vegetarianism and self-control, Pythagorean mysticism, the plain living and high thinking of the Cynics, and ideas of Gnosticism and emanations from the Near

and Far East. They held their goods in common, abstained from predatory habits of life, and were strict pacifists until Jerusalem was threatened. Contemplation was their avenue of illumination and union with God. They philosophized regarding choice and destiny, occasionally foresaw the future in extrasensory precognition, served as tutors and healers, and employed the “magic” powers of the mind and the will for the general good. They hoped and prepared for a Messiah to establish the Kingdom of

Heaven on earth, a paradise of purified soul-personalities.

One of the Dead Sea Scrolls holds a passage which only an Essene could have written:

“And none shall be abased below his appointed position or exalted above his

allotted place; for they shall all be in true community and good humility and loyal love and righteous thought, each for his fellow in the holy council, and they shall be Sons of the Eternal Assembly.”

The Scrolls were found in the region where the Essenes are known to have had their headquarters, and archeologists have found meaningful remains of a monastery there. We are almost sure that the Qumran sect was Essene, if only because there would not have been room for another group in that vicinity.

There is further evidence aplenty. Both Josephus and the Manual Scroll speak of the stages of probation, the limitations imposed, the instruction, the “exams” before admittance, the oath of initiation. The common meal of the Qumran sect agrees with that of the Essenes, and so does the order of seating at the meetings.

Other points of correspondence include the decisions by assembled members on

“Here we are chiefly concerned with the deeper philosophical secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls—the quest for divine gnosis, salvation through participation in the One Good, the attainment of mystic union, the ideal of the spiritual community, Providence, the ‘periods of God’ ”

questions of admission and discipline, the study and interpretation of the law in groups, the stress on God's sovereignty and providence, the division into celibate and marrying groups, the "offering of the lips" instead of animal sacrifice, the physical and spiritual purification, the community of goods, the centralization of all monetary transactions, and an obscure relationship with the Samaritans.

There were both lesser and greater Mysteries, and a vow of secrecy was imposed. There was a pronounced interest in eschatology—the consummation of the age—and the divine judgment. Some parts of the Qabalah seem to trace to the Essene secret lore, but only now is the veil beginning to lift.

Documents and Dates

The Dead Sea Scrolls were challenged as to genuineness or antiquity by S. H. Stephen, Solomon Zeitlin, Godfrey Driver, P. R. Weis, Harry M. Orlinsky, and Toviah Wechsler (who has changed his mind). At first it was hard to find a buyer for the Scrolls at any price, and they seemed destined to go to waste.

Then, with commendable insight, Archbishop Samuel of the Syrian Orthodox Convent of St. Mark (in the Old City of Jerusalem) bought the two portions of a Manual of Discipline, the complete sixty-four chapters of Isaiah, the Habakkuk Commentary (quoting two chapters of text), and the then-unopened "Lamech" Scroll (which has since been unrolled and identified as a paraphrase of and commentary on Genesis).

Dr. E. L. Sukenik, Hebrew University archeologist, acquired the latter part of a decidedly different manuscript of Isaiah (showing pre-Masoretic text variations), Thanksgiving Psalms, and War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness.

The above (except for the fragmentary Isaiah) are the extensive compositions of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thousands more fragments have been uncovered, but we need not discuss them beyond noting that the earliest may be as old as the third century BCE.

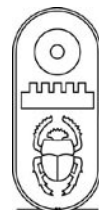
The St. Mark's complete Isaiah Scroll was probably copied a little before 100 BCE. The Manual of Discipline seems to have been written not much later than that date. The manuscript of the Habakkuk Commentary apparently belongs to the last quarter of the first century BCE. The "Lamech," War, Thanksgiving Psalms, and fragmentary Isaiah documents were probably made during the first half of the first century CE.

Israel did well to acquire Archbishop Samuel's precious manuscripts. The complete Isaiah Scroll, which he reluctantly sold, is the oldest known entire manuscript of any book of the Bible, and is therefore important for textual criticism. The Manual of Discipline is undoubtedly the manual of a dissident monastic order, and we have considered compelling evidence which points to the Essenes. The Habakkuk Commentary mysteriously tells of a "Teacher of Righteousness" persecuted by the "Man of the Lie." We have mentioned that the so-called "Lamech" Scroll is not really that long-lost apocryphal book, but has to do with Genesis.

"There were both lesser and greater Mysteries, and a vow of secrecy was imposed. There was a pronounced interest in eschatology—the consummation of the age—and the divine judgment"

The Thanksgiving Psalms have some resemblance to those of the Old Testament. Also, they anticipate Paul's doctrine that God alone is righteous. "A person's way is not established except by the Spirit which God created for that person."

The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness possibly pertains to an eschatological war, such as we find predicted in Ezekiel and The Revelation of John. The



light symbolizes the real spiritual world, and the darkness delusion. Holy angels support the army of the Sons of Light. But since the Essenes did not remain consistent pacifists, their militant spirit may not have stopped with metaphysical theology. Possibly the War Scroll was written to celebrate the Maccabean attainment of religious freedom.

General Interpretation

By and large, the Dead Sea Scrolls breathe a love of peace, order, self-control, humility, and insight. They do not rest content in blind belief and mechanical obedience. They glorify inner spiritual response, and an effort to *live the life* of understanding. Divine gnosis is the realization of meaning. Not quantity of factual information but quality of wisdom has the prime importance, for humans are spiritual beings. The highest awareness yields depth of life, and motivates a dynamic desire to do one's duty.

The community of the Dead Sea Scrolls grasped these exalted truths, and gave them the noblest utterance in the two documents that we shall interpret in this article—the Manual of Discipline and the Habakkuk Commentary.

Manual of Discipline

Not only is the Manual a compilation of the rules of a community, but it contributes a most inspiring psalm to humanity's wisdom literature. We quote this in part, after the superb translation by Millar Burrows:

“With nothing but the will of God shall a man be concerned ... I will sing with knowledge,

And all my music shall be for the glory of God ... Source of knowledge and Fountain of holiness ...

“For from the source of His knowledge He has opened up my sight...

My eye has gazed on sound wisdom,
Which has been hidden from the man of knowledge ...

Blessed art Thou, my God,
Who openest to knowledge the heart of Thy servant...

Thou hast taught all knowledge.
For without Thee conduct will not be blameless,

And apart from Thy will nothing will be done.”²

The one Supreme Ruler transcends our deepest awareness: “There is no other beside Thee to oppose Thy counsel, to understand all Thy holy purpose, to gaze into the depth of Thy Mysteries, or to comprehend all Thy marvels.” But humans are capable of intuitive openings that admit a wisdom beyond our own.

God is Truth, and the Spirit of Truth gives “understanding, and insight, and mighty wisdom, . . . and a spirit of knowledge in every thought of action.” In the enlightened fulfillment of our temporal duties, we transcend the confines of time. We inherit eternity.

Persons who would enter into the New Covenant of Truth must “bring all their knowledge and strength and wealth into the community of God, to purify their knowledge in the truths of God's ordinances.” Error is the lot of that soul which has “abhorred the discipline of knowledge.” The trial of conflict between the brighter and the darker angels within a human soul tests fidelity and perseverance. But all sin shall disappear in the appointed period, and the upright shall fully enter into “the knowledge of the Most High and the wisdom of the Sons of Heaven.”

The student of religion will note that this document is more theosophical than Rabbinic Judaism. It bespeaks profound spiritual dedication.

Habakkuk Commentary

It is appropriate to conclude with a glance at the highlight of the Habakkuk Commentary. It seems that there was a wicked priest ruling in Israel, identified only as the “Man of the Lie.” With his treacherous

followers, he plundered the poor and engaged in illegal activity for the sake of gain. It was his purpose to make the people “pregnant with works of falsehood, that their toil may be in vain.”

An unnamed heroic “Teacher of Righteousness” passed judgment on the wickedness of the evil priest. This inspired interpreter of prophecy had been granted a new and ampler revelation. He was a friend of the poor and simple, a laborer for social justice. When he came into conflict with the wicked priest, those who should have helped him kept silent. Many of his followers deserted him. His was the usual fate of bold reformers. The villainous man chastised the great champion of righteousness.

There is no agreement among scholars as to the identity of the hero, nor of the villain. The pre-Christian Teacher of Righteousness may have been Jeshu ben Panthera. After André Dupont-Sommer read the

Commentary, he exclaimed that Jesus appeared to be “an astonishing reincarnation of the Teacher of Righteousness.” Both delivered similar ethical teachings, delivered a new revelation perfecting the old, pronounced judgment on Jerusalem, were opposed by hostile priests, and bore martyrdom for the ideal.

It seems probable that the greatest Wayshower of all drew inspiration from the Habakkuk Commentary, having read it in the scriptorium of the Essene monastery where he passed his silent years.

“There is no other beside Thee to oppose Thy counsel, to understand all Thy holy purpose, to gaze into the depth of Thy Mysteries, or to comprehend all Thy marvels”

Endnotes:

¹ Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

² Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1955).

