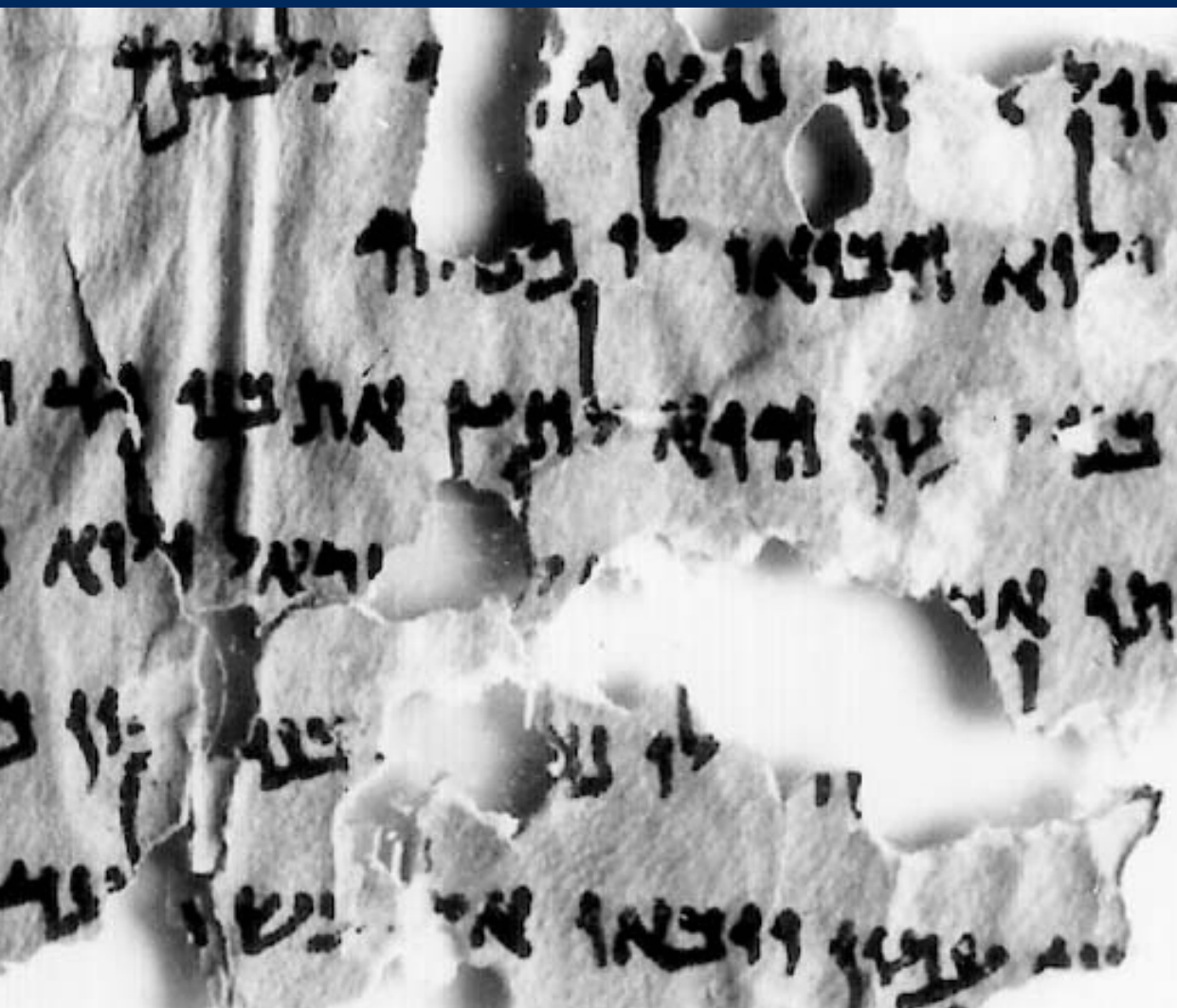


DEAD SEA SCROLLS



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The Significance of the Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls

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Brief Comments on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Their Importance

On 11 April 1948, the Dead Sea Scrolls were announced to the world by Millar Burrows, one of America's leading biblical scholars. Soon afterwards, famed archaeologist William Albright made the extraordinary claim that the scrolls found in the Judean Desert were "the greatest archaeological find of the Twentieth Century." A brief introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls and what follows will provide clear indications why Albright's claim is indeed valid.

Details on the discovery of the scrolls are readily accessible and known to most scholars,¹ so only the barest comments are necessary. The discovery begins with scrolls found by Bedouin shepherds in one cave in late 1946 or early 1947 in the region of Khirbet Qumran, about one mile inland from the western shore of the Dead Sea and some eight miles south of Jericho. By 1956, a total of eleven caves had been discovered at Qumran.

The caves yielded various artifacts, especially pottery. The most important find was scrolls (i.e. rolled manuscripts) written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the three languages of the Bible. Almost 900 were found in the Qumran caves in about 25,000–50,000 pieces,² with many no bigger than a postage stamp. While a few scrolls are well preserved, almost all are damaged and most are very fragmentary.

In addition to the finds at Khirbet Qumran, several manuscripts were discovered at other locations in the vicinity of the Dead Sea, especially Wadi Murabba'at (1951–52), Nahal Hever (1951–61), and Masada (1963–65). Thus the term "Dead Sea Scrolls" refers not only to scrolls discovered at Qumran (the main site), but also to scrolls from all the sites in the vicinity of the Dead Sea.

Scholars divide the Dead Sea Scrolls into two general categories of writings: Biblical and Non-Biblical. Of the 950 or so scrolls found in the

¹James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2002), 3–19.

²The number varies, depending on how the fragments are counted.

Judean desert, approximately 240 (about 25% of the total) are classified as “Biblical,” which constitute our earliest witnesses to the text of Scripture. Many of the other (approximately) 700 documents are of direct relevance to early Judaism and emerging Christianity. They anticipate or confirm numerous ideas and teachings found in the New Testament and in later Rabbinic writings (the Mishnah and Talmud).³ The earliest scrolls found at Qumran date from about 250 BC or a little earlier; the latest were copied shortly before the destruction of the Qumran site by the Romans in 68 AD.

With respect to the Biblical Scrolls, there are three reasons why Albright’s claim that the scrolls are the greatest archaeological find of the twentieth century holds true:

1. The Scrolls (including Biblical Scrolls) were Found in the Land of Israel Itself.

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, virtually no writings dated to the Second Temple Period had been found in Israel. Even the Nash Papyrus, the oldest Hebrew manuscript fragment known before the discovery of the scrolls (see below), was discovered in Egypt.

2. The Scrolls are Written in the Three Languages of Scripture.

However important ancient languages such as Latin or Syriac may be, or modern languages such as English, French, and German, biblical scholars value manuscripts written in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek above all. Most notable in the present context, the Dead Sea Scrolls include ancient biblical manuscripts in the original Hebrew and Aramaic (portions of Daniel) and ancient remnants of the Septuagint in the original Greek.

3. The Scrolls Include Our Oldest Biblical Manuscripts.

The antiquity of the Biblical Scrolls is of supreme importance for biblical scholars. Virtually all Hebrew copies of the Hebrew Bible used today are based on medieval manuscripts; the oldest Hebrew manuscript fragment known before the discovery of the scrolls was the Nash Papyrus,⁴ which is dated at 150–100 BC. All the scrolls found at Qumran date from the Second Temple Period, from 250 BC or a little earlier to just before the destruction of the Qumran site in 68 AD.

The Biblical Scrolls and the Content of Scripture

The Hebrew Bible consists of 24 books, in three sections: the Torah (Gen to Deut), the Nebi’im or Prophets (Josh to the Minor Prophets), and the Kethubim or Writings (Pss to Chron). The Protestant Old Testament

³The Non-Biblical Scrolls may be divided into five categories: Rules and Regulations (such as the *Community Rule*); Poetic and Wisdom Texts (such as the *Hodayot*); Reworked or Rewritten Scripture (such as the *Genesis Apocryphon*); Commentaries or Pesharim (such as the *Commentary on Habakkuk*); and Miscellaneous Writings (such as the *Copper Scroll*).

⁴This fragment contains text from Exod 20:2–17 and Deut 5:6–21.

contains exactly the same texts, but numbering 39 books⁵ and in four groups: the Pentateuch (Gen to Deut), the Historical Books (Josh through Esth), Poetry or Wisdom (Job through Song), and the Prophets (Isa through Mal). Roman Catholic Bibles contain additional books known as the Apocrypha, for a total of 46 books and two additions,⁶ and Orthodox Bibles include more books besides.⁷

Despite these differences, Jews and Christians believe that the books comprising the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament are of ancient origin, and that the medieval copies handed down over many centuries existed before the Common Era. However, before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it was very difficult to prove that Numbers, Samuel, Job, or Isaiah, actually existed before the early centuries BC, because virtually no texts survived from the Second Temple Period, which ended in 70 AD.

However, the scrolls found at Qumran and other sites in the Judean Desert include some 240 manuscripts (most very fragmentary) that are classified as “Biblical.” This number has actually increased in recent years, with the emergence of several scrolls from Cave 4 at Qumran that lay in private hands for over 50 years and were known only to a handful of scholars. Some have been purchased by institutions and collectors in the U.S. and Europe:

- In 2006, the Institute for Judaism and Christian Origins in Princeton, New Jersey announced the acquisition of fragments of Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, and Jeremiah, all from Cave 4. These are being edited for publication by James Charlesworth.⁸
- In 2009, Azusa Pacific University acquired five Dead Sea Scroll fragments containing text from Leviticus and Daniel, two from Deuteronomy, and one possibly from Exodus. These were the main feature in a highly successful exhibit, “Treasures of the Bible: The Dead Sea Scrolls and Beyond,” held 21 May–29 August 2010.⁹
- In January 2010, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas announced its acquisition of three fragmentary Dead Sea Scrolls and an ancient pen used at Qumran. This collection contains biblical passages from Exodus, Leviticus, and Daniel; The purchase of three more Scrolls—two containing text from Deuteronomy and one with text from Psalm 22—was announced by the Seminary in October, 2010.

⁵The higher number is due to the fact that several books counted separately in the Old Testament are grouped together in the Hebrew Bible (notably 1–2 Sam, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chron, and the Minor Prophets).

⁶Tob, Jdt, Add Esth, 1–2 Macc, Wis, Sir, Bar with Ep Jer, and Add Dan.

⁷For example, 3 Macc and Pr Man.

⁸<http://www.ijco.org/?categoryId=28681>. Accessed 14 October 2010.

⁹<http://www.apu.edu/deadseascrolls>. Accessed 14 October 2010.

As indicated in the table below, the grand total of all the biblical scrolls from all sites in the Judean Desert is 238, comprising 221 from Qumran and 17 from other sites (5 from Nahal Hever, 5 from Murabba'at, 1 from Sdeir, and 6 from Masada). The numbers for Qumran include the Greek biblical scrolls and the three Aramaic Targums (4Q_{tg}Lev, 4Q_{tg}Job, 11Q_{tg}Job).

Book	Qumran	Other	Total
Psalms	37	3	40
Deuteronomy	36	3	39
Genesis	21	4	25
Isaiah	21	1	22
Exodus	19	1	20
Leviticus	17	2	19
Numbers	8	3	11
12 Minor Prophets	8	2	10
Daniel	10	0	10
Jeremiah	7	0	7
Ezekiel	6	0	6
1 & 2 Samuel	4	0	4
Job	6	0	6
Ruth	4	0	4
Song of Songs	4	0	4
Lamentations	4	0	4
Judges	3	0	3
1 & 2 Kings	3	0	3
Joshua	2	0	2
Proverbs	2	0	2
Ecclesiastes	2	0	2
Ezra	1	0	1
1 & 2 Chronicles	1	0	1
Nehemiah	1	0	1
Esther	0	0	0
Total	227	19	246
Adjusted	221	17	238

For the Pentateuch, totals have been adjusted to read eight less, since six scrolls from Qumran¹⁰ preserve parts of two books and so have been counted twice, and the Murabba'at scroll (Mur 1) preserves portions of three books (Gen, Exod, and Numb) and so has been counted three times.

A totally accurate count may not be possible, since the status of some manuscripts is not assured: (a) Some texts classified as "Biblical" may in fact be abbreviated or excerpted compositions.¹¹ (b) *4QReworked Pentateuch* most likely qualifies as an edition of the Pentateuch, in which case the five scrolls involved (4QRP^{a-e}) should be added to the number of Pentateuch scrolls. (c) Two Genesis scrolls (4QGen^{h1} and 4QGen^{h2}) and three Jeremiah scrolls

¹⁰4QGen-Exod^a, 4QpaleoGen-Exod^d, 4QExod^b 4QExod-Lev^f, 1QpaleoLev, 4QLev-Num^a.

¹¹For example, 4QPs^g, 4QPs^h, 5QPs, 4QCant^a, 4QCant^b, and 4QDan^c.

(4QJer^b, 4QJer^d, and 4QJer^e) may be parts of two single manuscripts. (d) It is not clear whether the Deuteronomy and Exodus segments of 4QDeutⁱ are part of the same scroll. (e) The text from Murabba'at listed as Mur 1 (MurGen, MurExod, MurNum) may constitute one, two, or three manuscripts.

The list is presented in descending order of manuscripts. Thus the books represented by the most scrolls are the Psalms (40, with 37 at Qumran), followed by Deuteronomy (37, with 34 at Qumran), Genesis (25, with 21 at Qumran), Isaiah (22, with 21 at Qumran), Exodus (20, with 19 at Qumran), and Leviticus (17, with 17 at Qumran). The only Old Testament biblical book not represented is Esther. (1 Chron is also absent; however, a piece of 2 Chron was found in Cave 4 at Qumran.)

The fragmentary state of most of the biblical scrolls means that the final form of many biblical books cannot be proved; however, they do indicate that text from every book of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament existed before the destruction of the Qumran site by the Romans in 68 AD. This confirms the belief of Jews and Christians that the Scriptures comprising the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament are of ancient origin, and that the ancestors of the medieval copies that were handed down over many centuries existed before the Common Era.

The Scrolls Preserve Earlier or Preferable Readings of the Biblical Text

Several hundred earlier or preferable readings are preserved in one or more biblical scrolls over against the traditional Masoretic Text. Two examples will be discussed:

1. A Missing Verse from Psalm 145

It is frequently observed that a verse seems to be missing from Psalm 145 in the Masoretic Text, since this is an acrostic Psalm, with every verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Although there are 22 letters in this alphabet, Psalm 145 contains only 21 verses: a verse beginning with *nun* should come between verses 13 (the *mem* verse) and 14 (the *samek* verse):

Psalm 145:13–14 (MT)	Psalm 145:13–14 (KJV)
מַלְכוּתְךָ מְלֹכֹת כָּל־עֲלָמִים וְנִמְנָשְׁלֹתֶיךָ בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר	Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

[The verse beginning with *nun* is missing]

סִנְמָה יְתוּה לְכָל־הַנִּפְּלִים וַיִּזְקֶה לְכָל־הַכַּפְּנִיַּים	The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.
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The Traditional Explanation. The traditional solution is to consider the missing *nun* verse as the result of divine inspiration. Thus tractate *Berakhot* of the Babylonian Talmud reads:

Rabbi Johanan says: “Why is there no *nun* in *’ašrē* (= Ps 145)? Because ‘the fall of Israel’s enemies’ begins with it. For it is written: ‘Fallen is the virgin of Israel, she shall no more rise’ (נפלה לא תוסיף קום בתולת ישראל) (Amos 5:2).”

—In the West this verse is thus interpreted: “She is fallen, but she shall no more fall. Rise, O virgin of Israel” (*y.Ber.* 5).

—Rabbi Nahman B. Isaac says: “Even so, David refers to it by inspiration and promises them an uplifting. For it is written: ‘The Lord upholds all that fall’ (ה’ לכל נופלים סומך) (Ps 145:14)” (*b.Ber.* 4b).

In other words, David, “by the holy spirit” (ברוח הקדש), foresaw the prophecy of Amos concerning the exile, and thus excluded the *nun* stanza. This reasoning may be substantiated by the *samek* stanza that follows, which goes on to predict the return.

How the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) Translates this Verse.

However, the Greek Bible (Septuagint) supplies an additional verse following verse 13:

(13) ἡ βασιλεία σοθ βασιλεία πάντων τῶν αἰώνων,
καὶ ἡ δεσποτεία σοθ ἐν πάσῃ γενεᾷ καὶ γενεᾷ.

(13b) πιστὸς κύριος ἐν τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ
καὶ ὄσιος ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ.

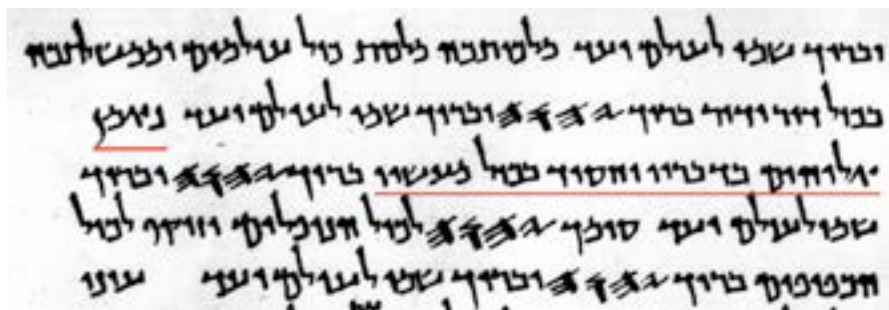
(13) Your kingdom is a kingdom of all the ages,
and your dominion is through all generations.

(13b) The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.

Psalm 145 in the Dead Sea Scrolls. 11QPs^a is the only scroll to preserve Psalm 145, including a recurring refrain. For verse 13 this scroll contains not only the *mem* verse but the missing *nun* verse as well, in lines 2–3 of column 17 (underlined in photograph below):

נאמן אלוהים בדבריו וחסיד בכול מעשיו

God is faithful in his words, and gracious in all his deeds.



In addition to 11QPs^a and the Septuagint, the *nun* verse is also found in one medieval Hebrew manuscript and the Syriac, but with the second word as יהוה (“LORD”).¹² Many scholars regard it as part of the original Psalm; it is thus included as v. 13b in most modern English Bibles, including the New American Bible, the New International Version, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the English Standard Version (where it is bracketed).

2. A Missing Section from 1 Samuel 10

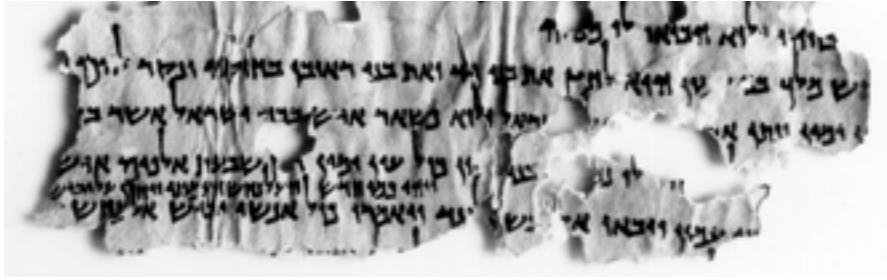
First Samuel 11 relates that—following Saul’s less than successful appointment as Israel’s King—Nahash the Ammonite besieged Jabesh-gilead. In verse 2 Nahash offers to make a treaty with the inhabitants of the city on condition that he gouge out their right eyes. This seems cruel and unusual punishment indeed because such treatment was reserved for those who had rebelled or committed insurrection. In the Masoretic Text there is no evidence that the inhabitants of the town had acted in this way:

Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose hearts God had touched. But some worthless fellows said, “How can this man save us?” They despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace (1 Sam 10:26–27).

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.” But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you, namely that I gouge out everyone’s right eye, and thus put disgrace upon all Israel” (1 Sam 11:1–2).

However, a much fuller picture emerges when we turn to this passage in 4QSam^a, which was copied about 50 BC. The relevant portion is from column 10:

¹²Cf. the Apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; and Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and The Book of Psalms*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1997),



Here the Samuel scroll contains a longer text and provides two important pieces of information. First, it was Nahash's practice to gouge out people's right eyes. Second, we are told that 7,000 men who had fled from the Ammonites had actually sought refuge in Jabesh-gilead. These additional details provide a logical explanation for the otherwise strange and cruel behavior of Nahash in chapter 11.

So far, the longer passage from the Samuel scroll has been adopted by one set of translators (additional material from 4QSam^a printed here in italicized type):

Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose hearts God had touched. But some worthless fellows said, "How can this man save us?" They despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace.

Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead.

About a month later,

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you." But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, namely that I gouge out everyone's right eye, and thus put disgrace upon all Israel" (1 Sam 10:26–11:2, NRSV).

The Biblical Scrolls Preserve Lost Readings with Messianic Implications

On occasion, one or more biblical scrolls preserve a reading that differs from the traditional Masoretic Text and has messianic or other implications that would interest Christian exegetes and scholars. Two examples will be presented:

1. The Original Reading of Psalm 22:16

Psalm 22 begins as follows: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning” (NASB). This familiar piece has proved significant in both Jewish and Christian exegesis, and is quoted several times by Jesus in the Gospels in relation to his sufferings and death. A difficult reading is found in verse 16 (Hebrew v. 17) of the Masoretic text:

יִבֶשׁ כְּחֶרֶשׁ כַּחַי וְלִשְׁוֹנֵי מִדְּבַק מֶלֶקֶזְחֵי וְלְעִפְרָמוֹת תְּשַׁפְּתֵנִי
כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרָעִים הִקִּיפוּנִי כְּאֵרֵי יְדֵי וְרַגְלֵי

Thus כְּאֵרֵי (“like a lion”) is translated from the traditional Masoretic Text of this Psalm:

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and you have brought me into the dust of death.

For dogs have surrounded me: the assembly of the wicked have encompassed me: like a lion are my hands and my feet.

The Septuagint—supported by the later Syriac—translates as ὠρυξάν χειρας μου καὶ πόδος (“They have pierced my hands and feet”). Some scholars suggest that the Septuagint reading represents a modification of the Hebrew “like a lion” (כְּאֵרֵי), in order to make better sense of the verse. Another suggestion is that early Christian editors changed the Greek text in order to find evidence for Jesus’ crucifixion in the Hebrew Bible.

The passage is not preserved in any Psalms scroll found at Qumran, but is in the Psalms scroll from Nahal Hever (5/6HevPs), which reads “They have pierced (or, dug) (כְּאֵרֵי) my hands and feet.”¹³ Further confirmation of this as the preferred reading is found in a few Masoretic manuscripts from the Middle Ages, a few editions based on the Masoretic Text,¹⁴ and two Masoretic manuscripts or editions that have a similar verbal form (כְּרֵי). This reading has been adopted by many modern English Bibles, including the New American Bible, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the English Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

2. A Significant Reading in Isaiah 53

The Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is a fascinating passage, both for Judaism (which sees the Servant as Israel), and for Christianity (which identifies the Servant as Jesus Christ). Towards the end of the Fourth

¹³Although the text is fragmentary, the crucial words are preserved: “[For] dogs are [all around me]; a gang of evil[doers] encircles me. They have pierced my hands and my feet.”

¹⁴Cf. the Apparatus of BHS and Flint, *Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls*.

Song, the traditional Masoretic Text, closely followed by the King James Version, reads:

Isaiah 53:10–11 (MT)

Isaiah 53:10–11 (KJV)

<p>וַיְהִי־הָיָה חַפְּץ־דְּכַאֵן הַחֲתָלִי אִם־תְּשִׁים אֲשֶׁם־נַפְּשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה זֶרַע יֶאֱרִיךְ יָמִים וַחֲפֶץ־יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלַח:</p>	<p>Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.</p>
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<p>מֵעַמַּל נַפְּשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׁבַּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ וַיִּצְדִּיק צְדִיק עַבְדֵי לְרַבִּים וְעוֹנְוֹתָם הוּא יִסְבֵּל:</p>	<p>He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.</p>
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How the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) Translates this Verse.

The Greek Bible translates verse 11 in quite a free manner, but includes the additional word φῶς (“light”):

ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ δεῖξαι αὐτῷ φῶς καὶ
πλάσαι τῇ σθνέσει δικαιῶσαι δίκαιον εἰς δοθλεύοντα
πολλοῖς καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτὸς ἀνοίσει

from the pain of his soul, to show him light and fill him with
understanding, to justify a righteous one who is well subject to
many, and he himself shall bear their sins.

Verse 11 appears in three Isaiah scrolls found at Qumran, which significantly impact the meaning of the text. The word “light,” not present in the Masoretic Text, is found 1QIsa^a, 1QIsa^b, and 4QIsa^d, which indicates that the very early Hebrew text used by the Septuagint translator actually contained it. The implications for exegesis are intriguing: in the Masoretic Text the Servant resigns himself to suffering and death, and is satisfied since he is justifying many and will bear their iniquities, but in the Isaiah scrolls he will also see “light,” which implies new life or (in a Christian exegesis) resurrection. Verses 10–11 read as follows in the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a):

Isaiah 53:10–11 (1QIsa^a)

Isaiah 53:10–11 (NIV)

<p>וַיְהִי־הָיָה חַפְּץ־דְּכַאֵן וַיְחַלְּלוּ אִם תְּשִׁים אֲשֶׁם נַפְּשׁוֹ וְרָאָה זֶרַע וַיֵּאֱרִיךְ יָמִים וַחֲפֶץ־יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלַח</p>	<p>Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring</p>
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and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

מעמל נפשוה יראה אור וישבע
 ובדעתו יצדיק צדיק עבדו לרבים
 ועוונותם הואה יסבול

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Many modern English translations have adopted this reading on the basis of the Isaiah scrolls and the Septuagint, including the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New American Bible.

Concluding Comments

Our brief survey and discussion of the biblical scrolls found in the Judean Desert has demonstrated the importance of these ancient texts for biblical studies, for affirming the ancient content of Scriptures, and for preserving earlier or preferable readings of the biblical text. Of special import for Christian scholars and exegetes are cases where the biblical scrolls preserve lost readings that have messianic implications. Two examples of earlier or preferable readings were examined, and two others that have possible messianic implications; several hundred more are preserved in various biblical scrolls. For scholars and students of the Scriptures, the Dead Sea Scrolls are indeed “the greatest archaeological find of the Twentieth Century.”