

# **Bible History and Archeology**

## **5. The Dead Sea Scrolls**

How the Bible was written and preserved.

Mohammed Adh Mib was caring for his goats down by the Dead Sea. One of his goats got lost, and he couldn't find it. He suspected that it had gone into one of the caves. So he saw an opening and threw a stone in and heard something break. He was too nervous to go down in there himself, so he went back to his family tent and got another young fellow to come with him and they crawled into the opening of this cave, the Khirbet Qumran Cave. When they got in, they were very disappointed; all they found were small bits of pottery, some broken, some whole. Inside the earthenware jars were musty rolls of parchment and decaying leather. As they examined some of these jars and vessels they could see some strange writing on the parchments. They were actually written in old Hebrew. While they were bitterly disappointed in what they had discovered, it turned out that they had made the greatest discovery of the century; they had discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The whole area was an archaeologist's paradise. The most famous of all they discovered down there in the Dead Sea caves was the complete scroll of Isaiah. These copies went back to the days of Christ probably older. They have found enough manuscripts to keep scholars going for many years.

One of the big questions that archaeologists asked when these jars were discovered was how old are the scrolls? They have used three major methods of inquiry in order to discover the age.

First, from prior knowledge, archaeologists judge that the earthenware vases were similar to those used 2,000 years ago.

Second, linen cloth had been wrapped around the scrolls. At the Nuclear Institute of the University of Chicago, radiocarbon test by using carbon 14 was applied. The dates concluded was between 168 BC and 233 AD.

Finally after thorough investigation and careful study, Hebrew scholars in America and Europe believe that many of these scrolls are at least a thousand years older than any other known Hebrew script of the Old Testament, although some is written in the script of the first or second centuries BC.

It is no wonder that the renowned Dr. William F. Albright of James Hopkins University believed these scrolls they discovered in 1947, to be the greatest archaeological discovery of this century. He says, "These scrolls are original documents of revolutionary importance for Biblical end related studies. They are all from the first and second centuries B.C. with the possible exception of the fragments of the holiness code which may be earlier."

After the discovery of these scrolls they began searching, and found more scrolls in the caves. Today they have found the text or fragments from practically every book of the Old Testament.

The biggest problem the Jews faced in the days of Christ was the Roman occupation. From time to time there were rebellions that broke out here and there in Palestine. In the year 66 AD the

Jewish revolt flared into open war and for the next four years there was continual fighting. Finally Roman General Titus in 70 AD conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and expelled most of the survivors from the country.

It was during this time that the Essenes, a sect of the Jews, hid these scrolls in the caves. Most of them were killed and the memory of the scrolls being hidden in the caves was lost and they laid there until 1947.

One outpost held out longer than any other place, this was the Fortress of Masada, south of the Dead Sea. The Romans built a great ramp of stones to reach the defiant Jews on the top of the fortress. However, when the Romans reached the top, they found no opposition at all, only an eerie silence, like a cemetery. They could hardly believe what they saw; they found freshly slain bodies of the Zealots that they expected to fight, 960 of them altogether. They had committed suicide rather than surrender.

It was then the scrolls were hidden and in this way God miraculously preserved them so that they could be discovered in these last days of skepticism and unbelief. Until they discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls, it was widely claimed that Isaiah was not written by Isaiah at all, but two or three different writers much later. But as they began to examine these scrolls they found no indication at all that it was written at a later date. In fact the more closely they have studied the Dead Sea Scrolls the more scholars have been challenged to change their ideas about the Old Testament and the book of Isaiah.

Opening these scrolls was quite a problem because of their great age. If they tried to open them ordinarily, they would just fall to pieces. So they got a very fine saw and cut the scrolls into small strips, and then laid them side by side; then they were able to read the scrolls. On some the writing had completely disappeared, so they photographed them under infra-red light to bring to view what was invisible to the naked eye. For many years they have been classifying and mounting these scrolls between glass, sealing them up, and spreading them out on long tables for observation.

One of these scrolls told of a vast fortune that has been buried; the instructions are left in the scrolls where it is located. From the description, there were vast quantities of gold, precious stones, and pearls, a fabulous fortune; but the problem is, all the land marks that the scrolls give as to where the treasure is hidden has long since disappeared. Nobody knows where it is today. No doubt if it could be found it would be the greatest treasure that man's eyes have ever viewed, even as great as Tutankhamen's.

The jars that these scrolls were placed inside are made of baked pottery. They placed these scrolls inside the jars and sealed them with a bitumen (tar or pitch) material. So they were kept from the humidity and the elements and have been remarkably preserved over the years.

All these wonderful discoveries only serve to verify the authority and authenticity of this dear old Book, the Bible. As the Psalmist said in "Thy Word in a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105. "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." Psalm 119:89.

How do the Dead Sea Scrolls compare to the Bible that we have today? They have found that the scrolls discovered by the Dead Sea, compared with the Bible that we have today are almost word for word the same; this Book has come down to us practically unchanged.

People say that the Bible is full of mistakes, because it's been translated over and over again. That really is a statement from someone who does not know the facts, because the Bible was translated from the original languages. In the front of every KJV Bible it says the Holy Bible was translated out of the original tongues; the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. Anyone who claims that the Bible is a translation of a translation of a translation, then they are not stating the facts. The Bible has actually come down to us unchanged since at least the time of Christ.

Back in those days they didn't have printing machines like today; they actually had to copy out the scrolls by hand. They would take a copy of the Bible and write it out. People who did this work were called Scribes. The scribes were so particular that before they wrote a book of the Bible, they would go through and count every word in the book, and literally count every letter in the book.

When they made their copy they would go through and count the words in the copy and the letters in the copy. If they didn't match up perfectly they would go through and find the mistake, or would destroy the copy and start over again.

When they came to the word "God" the scribes would dip their pen in new ink. When they wrote the name "Jehovah" so sacredly did they regard that name that the scribes would not only dip their pen in new ink but they would go and wash themselves first. So you can see that when men were almost fanatical in their regard for the copying of the Bible, a mistake was almost impossible. When you consider that there were thousands of copies made, if a mistake did creep in, it would be very easy to locate it.

To illustrate, if we give several persons a sheet to copy, it may be each one would make a mistake somewhere. Someone might make a spelling mistake, someone else may leave out a line, maybe all of them would make a mistake somewhere. But it would almost be impossible that two would make the same mistake in the same place. The likelihood of that is almost impossible. By comparing all the other copies with the mistake it was easy to work out which was the mistake and which was the true. So even if a mistake did creep in, with all the copies that were made, it became very obvious very soon which was the one that was in error.

It is remarkable that the message of the Bible has not been lost or destroyed; but even more astonishing is the fact that it is not a single book but a library with 66 books, authored by at least 40 different writers. These people were neither similar in occupation nor did they all live at a particular period in history. Instead, their lives are spread over 1950 years. But here is the wonder of it all! When the 39 books of the Old Testament, and the 27 books of the New Testament, with 1189 chapters made up of 31,173 verses, are brought together, there is perfect harmony and no contradictions. If we were to ask several people to write an essay, even on the same subject, at the same time, we would be certain to find differences and contradictions among them. But the Bible is a perfect whole, one book because one Mind

planned it all, and that mind is the mind of God. The Holy Scriptures is God's Word, and this wonderful unity proves that the Bible is true.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have given certainty that indeed what the Hebrew prophets wrote is the Word of God. We can rest our confidence unquestionably in the reliability and authority of what is contained in the Bible, that indeed it is the Word of God.

The tragedy is that while all this evidence has come to light, very few people have heard these facts or understand the Bible. Many have it in their homes; some pay lip service to it; but very few people read it and fewer still actually study it, and of these even fewer actually know the rules by which it is to be studied.

Many people read books about the Bible; they listen to so called educated men talk about the Bible and give their own opinions about what it says, but real knowledge of Bible truth is so rare today. They're not able to really understand the great message that the Book has, most do not even try. The Bible tells us: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Roman 10:17. So if the Word of God is the 'food for our faith' as it were, no wonder Jesus reflected sadly, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8.

There are two sections to the Bible; what we call the Old Testament is in front of the Bible, and toward the back of the Bible is the New Testament. The Bible outlines for us the very rules of how to study it so that we can understand it for ourselves. We can find thousands who will preach to us the opinion of some church or to preach denominationalism. But if we want to know truth for ourselves, we need not be interested in what churches teach and what denominations declare; we ought to be interested solely in what the Bible says.

Not only does the Bible contain instructions on how to study it, but did you know that God has even supplied a person Teacher for each one who truly desires to know His truth? It's a fact! You can't get any better education than that!

"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; .." 1 Corinthians 2:13.

When it comes to the study of the Bible, it does not depend upon your intellect or education. Those who have not had much education are not at a disadvantage over those who have had a lot of education. Understanding the Bible it does not depend upon intellect or education. It's not a matter of what man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches.

The basis of whether a person is going to be able to understand the Bible is not dependent upon outside influences such as education and intellect. It depends upon whether we'll allow the Holy Spirit to teach us. The verse continues:

"Comparing spiritual things with spiritual." 1 Corinthians 2:13.

We allow the Bible to be its own interpreter as we compare spiritual things with spiritual. The Bible is Its own interpreter; we don't interpret it or guess at its meaning, we allow the Bible to explain itself. Continuing:

"But the natural man (the unconverted man) receives not the things of the Spirit of Gods for they are foolishness unto him." 1 Corinthians 2:14.

You may have seen this with people already; tell a person that you study the Bible every day and some of your friends will say "What, you've gone simple in the head, you've gone around the bend." Don't be surprised when people say such things, that's exactly what the Bible says that some people will say. Those who don't love God, or understand much about God, and don't want to, will think you're foolish! Don't be surprised if some of your friends, relatives or even family say such things. That's to be expected. The same verse continues:

"Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned."

The things of God are discerned. The word "discerned" means that they'll be understood by us with the help of our Teacher, the Holy Spirit, the One that guides us to comprehend. That's why we should have prayer before we study the Bible, to get the Teacher to be there to guide us. So it's not a matter of education, or intellect. It's a matter of allowing the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher. He can teach us more in half an hour than the worldly wise men can teach us in a lifetime.

So if you haven't already done it, let's kneel and offer a simple prayer for God to send us the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus and then we will look at some illustrations on just how simply the Bible is to study and understand.

"And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision." Daniel 8:16.

Now we could speculate as to who Gabriel is. Someone may say "I think Gabriel in so and so." Someone else say "No you are wrong, I am sure Gabriel is such and such." Someone else says "You're both wrong, I'm sure Gabriel in so and so." Then they all start to argue. That is the way some churches are formed. We have the church that claims that Gabriel is this and we have the church that claims that Gabriel is that, or the other; three different churches formed over one argument. That's about the way, unfortunately, churches are formed today. But to understand who Gabriel is for sure, we go to the Bible, look up other verses that mention 'Gabriel', and let the Bible explain itself.

"And In the sixth month the angel Gabriel." Luke 1:26.

The Bible makes it clear that Gabriel is an angel. We don't care if a thousand people say otherwise, we know that Gabriel is an angel because the Bible says so. We haven't guessed, or put our own interpretation on it. We have compared spiritual things with spiritual and allowed the Bible to explain itself; get the idea?

Here's another illustration:

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Again we could speculate on what Christ is going to shout. Why is He going to shout? What effect will that shout have when He comes? But we don't need to guess because the Bible tells us.

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice." John 7:28.

Why then is Christ going to shout? What is that shout going to do? It will awaken the dead. Continuing:

29. "And shall come forth: They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation,"

Everyone is going to come forth from the grave. When Christ comes back He's coming with a shout and that shout is to awaken the dead. What are the exact words that Christ is going to shout as He comes back to awaken the dead? We find it here:

"Thy dead *men* shall live together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust for thy dew is as the dew of herbs and the earth shall cast out the dead." Isaiah 26:19.

There are the very words that Jesus will shout when He returns "Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust." And the Bible says that the earth is going to cast out the dead. Thessalonians says that Christ is going to come with a shout. Jesus says in John that this shout will awaken the dead. Isaiah tells us the very words, "Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust."

In the Bible are about 1,000 references to the second coming of Christ. If we take those 1,000 references, then we have the whole of God's truth on that subject. We can be sure when we go through these and compare them, that we know what the Bible says on that subject. We need not be concerned about anyone contradicting us when we have gone through to make sure what is in harmony with what the Bible says.

If I drive a stake into the ground, that stake could face in any of dozens of different directions depending on what direction I said it was facing; but if I put dozens of stakes in one line, it can only point in one direction.

So it is with the Bible. If you take one text out of the Bible by itself, you can make it say almost anything you like. But when you take all that the Bible says on that subject and put it together, then you have God's complete truth on that subject, and know what is Biblically true because it's in harmony with all that God says about it.

Here's another Illustration:

"Our God shall come and shall not keep silence." Psalm 50:3.

Does that agree with what we have read so far that when Jesus comes He's not going to keep silent? Sure it does. He's coming with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. He's not going to keep silent. Continuing:

"A fire shall devour before Him and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him."

The Bible says that when Christ comes He's not coming silently and He's not coming secretly. He's going to come with a great noise. Our God shall come and shall not keep silent; nothing silent, nothing secret about Christ's coming.

In fact the Bible says that when He comes He's going to come with all the holy angels. Jesus said:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:" Matthew 25:31.

So how many would that be? Here we find out:

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;" Revelation 5:11.

It says ten thousand times ten thousand, more than the population of the earth. When He comes He comes not only in His own glory but in the glory of all the holy angels with Him. Imagine the glory and grandeur associated with the coming of Jesus! Why the very sun itself will pale into insignificance.

Let's see another illustration.

"For behold the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind to render His anger with fury and His rebuke with flames of fire." Isaiah 66:15.

The Bible says that when Jesus is coming back with His 'chariots.' We can speculate what these chariots are. Someone says "I think those chariots are made of ivory," Someone else says "No I don't believe that at all, the chariots will be made of gold like the golden streets." Another says "You're both wrong!" And we have three churches again, the ivory church, the gold church and the one that's not sure.

People follow whatever their preconceived ideas tell them. They'll stand behind the ivory one if it appeals to them, or the gold seems better so some go with that. The ones that aren't too sure will all follow that church idea. That's the way churches are formed. But that is not the way to study the Bible. We compare spiritual things with spiritual allowing the Bible to be its own interpreter. So what are the chariots of God?

"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Psalm 68:17.

They're the angels; they're not literal chariots. The chariot is a means of transport, when Jesus comes back He's coming with His angels to transport us home to glory. The Bible explains itself. Comparing spiritual things with spiritual and allowing the Bible to be its own interpreter, we are certain that what we believe is true and right.

When you follow this method of Bible study, you are not following some church's interpretation. You don't have to go through a lot of musty old commentaries, or take tedious classes in 'theology' to find out what is truth. It's what God says that counts. You are comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

You may be saying, "It just sounds so simple that I never realized that the Bible was so simple to understand. Tell me honestly. Is the Bible that simple to understand? It's the first time I've really understood the Bible." Friends, the Bible is just that simple to understand on every subject.

Where did this idea of studying the Bible come from? It comes from Someone who is an expert when it comes to Bible study, Jesus Himself. Here's the story: Jesus had just died and all the disciples are downcast, they're discouraged. Two of them are walking home to Emmaus, when Jesus joins them appearing just like a common traveler. They do not recognize Him; nor realize He was raised from the dead.

He asks why they are so sad and listens as they tell Him all about it. Then He begins to give them a Bible study, but He begins in rather a strange way:

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? Luke 24:25, 26.

Now I am not sure I would begin by calling the students 'fools' but I am sure He knew it was the best thing to say.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 24:27.

Most people today have no idea the entire Bible is about Christ! But who did Jesus begin with? Moses. Moses was the writer of the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He began right back in the book of Genesis and went on with all the prophets; Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Zechariah, Malachi, all the prophets and He lifted out of all those books the things concerning His death and resurrection. The disciples listened to what Jesus was saying, and their 'hearts' burned within them, they were so thrilled with what they heard. They were delighted!

If you follow this method of Bible study your heart too will rejoice with confidence and surety about what you believe. You'll know what you'll believe. You won't have to run to this church or that church; to this minister or that minister, or read this commentary or that commentary. You will be able to work it out for yourself, because you have compared spiritual things with spiritual and allow the Bible to be its own Interpreter.

There was one man who was searching for truth; he told how he went from church to church, sadly, he finally ended up in a weird kind of spiritualist denomination—because nowhere in his searching had he simply sat down with the Bible and asked the Lord to guide him to truth.

In a home not so long ago, folk had invited a pastor to come in and have a Bible study. He began to open up the Bible like Jesus did, with Moses. But the man said "I hope you're taking all your doctrines and teachings from the New Testament?" The Pastor replied; "Alright," and turned over to this text:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrines for reproofs for correction for instruction in righteousness: "That the man of God may be perfects thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

What Jesus said is like what Paul said; "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The Pastor went on to say, "Remember, that when Paul wrote that statement, the New Testament wasn't written! He was referring to the Old Testament as he said "*All Scripture* is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine."

We need to be very careful of any church or individual who would suggest that some parts of the Bible are not necessary for doctrine. Some people say "We don't need the Old Testament. We're now living in New Testament times." That idea is both deadly and dangerous, because the Bible says 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God'. It is all there to help us to understand the great truths of God. You'll never understand the New Testament unless you have the Old Testament and you'll never really understand the Old Testament unless you've got the New Testament. They fit together like hand in glove.

Mere human speculation is a very poor diet. It will leave you terribly empty inside. The only diet that matters for the soul, is what the Bible says. We need to know the truth, because the Bible says that only those who know and obey the truth will be going into the glory land.

"Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." Isaiah 26:2.

We've seen how to study the Bible, now here's one text of how not to study the Bible.

"Knowing this first. that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." 2 Peter 1:20.

People come along and say, "What's your opinion on so and so?" People get to talking together and they give an opinion on this or that. Another person says "I think it's this and this and so and so." They talk on and on. May I suggest that my opinion on the things of God doesn't matter that much? Any opinion of any human being is not the important thing when it comes to these issues. The important thing to find out is what God says, not what some human beings say.

If I read a text and then put the Bible down and for the rest of the time I theorize and speculate, putting my private interpretation upon the verse? That's just about what happens these days when you go to church, you just hear human speculation.

So many folk, having been to church for many years, don't have much more idea of Bible truth than when they first started. Because they haven't learnt to study the Bible as the Bible says that it ought to be studied. You can arrive at truth as you compare scripture with scripture.

A little girl once said, "If the Bible doesn't mean what it says, why doesn't it say what it means?" Well, I'm happy to tell you that it does say what it means.

if we run into a passage that's difficult, we'll find another passage somewhere else that explains that difficult passage when we compare scripture with scripture. Day by day you can be built up into understanding this grand old Book the Bible.

You may be thinking, "It's all very well for you, you seem to know where these verses are. But I don't have any idea. How can I compare scripture with scripture if I do not know where to start?" Well, don't be discouraged because we all start off that way.

It is true that when it comes to understanding the Word of God you can't expect that after one day you will know everything. It takes time. As you continue to pray and study, after seven or eight subjects you will be absolutely amazed at the amount of Bible knowledge that you have and how many verses you will be able to remember. "How can you remember where all these verses are?" Well you will find that you will be able to do the same thing.

Sometimes when you're reading the Bible you'll come across something that cuts right across your past ideas. You may have been brought up to think a certain thing is right, and you see it isn't what the Bible says at all!

The temptation of some people when they find something that is different to what they've been brought up to believe is to leave off studying. Don't give in to that temptation! Every one of us has to learn many things and all of us have to unlearn some things too. We've all been brought up to believe false ideas, and God has to teach us and un-teach us things too. We have to unlearn them and it's always a difficult process. But if we'll be patient, God will open these things to us in their beauty.

If you read the verse: "For the wages of sin is death," and you stop reading there and close the Book up, you'll be terribly discouraged. We've all sinned, therefore we're all subject to death. But the rest of the verse says, "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." there is hope! God provides a way out and we're going to let the Bible open up these wonderful things! (Romans 6:23)