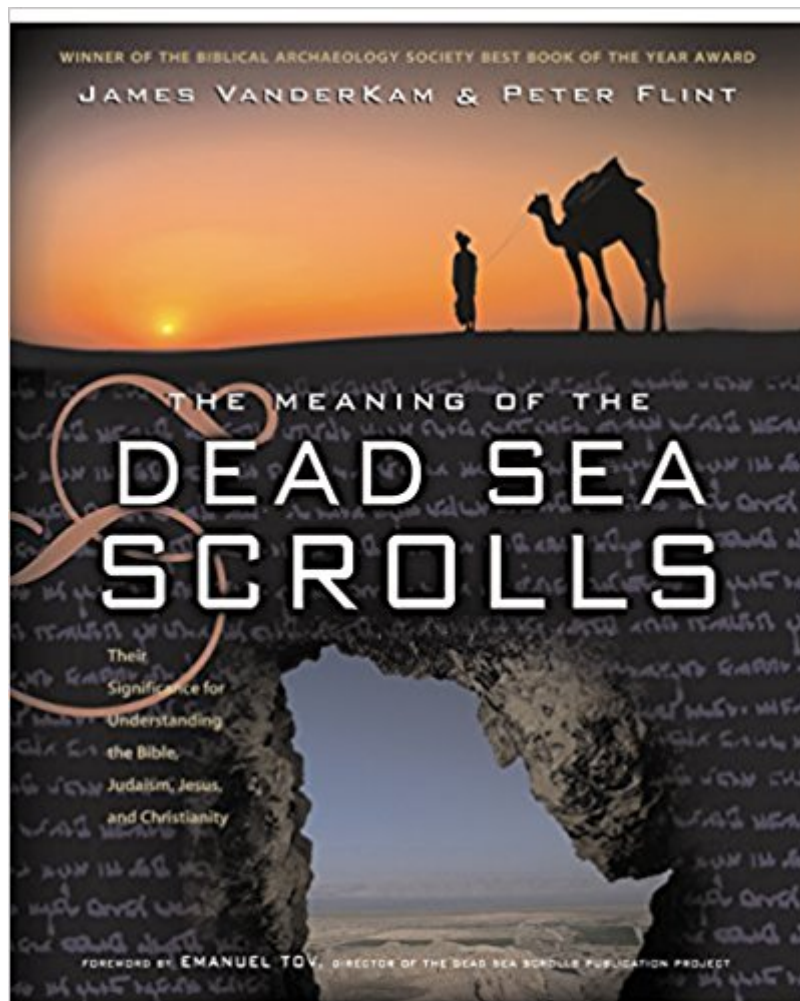


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The Meaning Of The Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding The Bible, Judaism, Jesus, And Christianity



Synopsis

The story of the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls has become a part of Western lore. Who has not heard about the Bedouin shepherd who threw a rock into a cave, heard a crash, went in to explore, and found the scrolls? The story in that form may be accurate, but it turns out to be something of a simplification. As a matter of fact, much remains unknown about the exact circumstances under which those scrolls were discovered. The story of the discovery at first deals with just one cave; the other ten were located at later times.

Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: HarperOne; Reprint edition (October 12, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060684658

ISBN-13: 978-0060684655

Product Dimensions: 7.4 x 1.2 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (26 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #259,757 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 in Â Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Additional Texts > Dead Sea Scrolls #345 in Â Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Sacred Writings #544 in Â Books > History > World > Religious > General

Customer Reviews

This is the first book I've ever read on the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). I got the book after reading a history of paper and thought knowing more about this famous treasure trove of ancient scrolls would make interesting reading. I was not disappointed. The book is nothing if not comprehensive and inclusive. Vanderkam teaches theology at Notre Dame and Flint is co-director of the Dead Sea Scrolls Institute at Trinity Western University in British Columbia. Together, they have produced a comprehensive and easy to read introduction to the subject. They discuss the evidence and the controversies. It is not a didactic tract seeking to make converts, though. If you want an more emotional or intuitive experience of the words written down so long ago, a different text might be appropriate. It starts with the discovery of the scrolls near Khirbet Qumran, tracing the various Bedouins, art dealers and scholars who identified the scrolls and brought them to world wide attention. We are then treated to a history of 'digs' near the discovery caves and a tentative outline

of what we know from the physical evidence. This history includes the rather sad story of scroll deterioration since discovery. With the physical evidence covered, the authors turn to a detailed review of what we think the scrolls actually say. Scholars think that most of the material represents copies of ancient text that served as 'source' for existent copies, the earliest of which was created about 400 AD. Thus, all our traditional texts are relatively recent copies. In contrast, the DSS were created between 150 BC and 68 AD, 500 years earlier. In essence, the DSS provide a way to 'check' on Jewish, Samaritan and Christian traditions for copying their theological references.

In this book VanderKam and Flint present an in-depth survey of the Dead Sea Scrolls with many insights making the book worthy enough of a scholar to read, or in another sense, worthy of the two scholars who wrote it. The book begins with the discovery, dating, and preservation of the DSS. The archaeological work of de Vaux is well spoken of, but V and F point out his dating may need some adjustment. The site may not have been occupied until the 1st century BCE. There may have been no 30 year gap between Periods I and II. And Yaakov Mosherer (more of his work on coins ought to be read) points out that coins from years four and five of the Revolt are rarer, so there is no need to posit that Qumran was destroyed before 73 BCE. In their survey of the DSS and Scripture, V and F mention that Psalm 145 is an acrostic poem with a verse missing. For those who do not know, an acrostic poem is one in which the successive verses begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In the Masoretic Text and English versions based upon it, Psalm 145 skips the "nun" verse which would occur right after verse 13 in English versions. One of the DSS texts contains the missing verse. The verse from 11QPsA may be translated "God is faithful in his words and gracious in all his deeds." One will want to grab her/his favorite version of the DSS texts as he makes his way through the sections on the non-biblical texts. There is no text of the Book of Esther among the DSS. However there is a *proto-Esther* to be found. The fragments known as 4Q550 clearly show similarities with the Book of Esther though the same story is not told. For all of the scrolls found among the DSS, one might get the impression that the library was comprehensive. Actually it was not.

James Vanderkam and Peter Flint are names well-known to those who follow the scrolls. Each has contributed their own work in book and article form to the body of literature about the Dead Sea Scrolls. This volume, 'The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity' is one of the most comprehensive, in-depth and well-organised introductions and overviews of the scrolls done to date. Published just a few years

ago, it takes into consideration all but the very latest of scroll research and publication. As Emmanuel Tov, another name well known to scroll aficionados, states in the foreword, the publication of information about the scrolls has proceeded so rapidly during the past decade that it has become necessary for a new volume such as this to provide an adequate introduction to the scrolls. In the first part, Vanderkam and Flint give an overview of the discovery and identification of the scrolls. This includes discussion of the acquisitions and explorations, the dating processes, and the archaeological digs around the site at Qumran. The authors also discuss the use of technology in the processes around the Dead Sea Scrolls; processes such as Carbon-14 dating were in their infancy during the time the scrolls were first discovered - both technology and scroll knowledge have come a long way in the past 55 years. The second section looks at the relationship of the scrolls to scripture. The chapters here look almost exclusively at the Hebrew Bible; questions regarding the New Testament are reserved for a later section. The scrolls contained at least some portions of every text of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament save (perhaps) Esther; there are also apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts among the scrolls.

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