



The Half Shekel Journal by Ed Rice
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As our bus leaves Beth She'an we could click pictures of the amphitheater with a blood absorbing 'arena' (Latin for sand floor) at the outskirts of the city. Built for the Roman gladiator battles against man and beast these theaters, four found in Israel¹, were used in the 1st and 2nd centuries for cruel persecutions of Christians. The studies of that period afforded no more resource than several pictures clicked through a bus window and a sobering reality added to our Lord's day excursion. Ten days affords but a brief taste of voluptuous pages of precious history. Now off to Qumran.



Although I was very excited to see Qumran there was more to imagine there than there was to see, and the Dead Sea scrolls unearthed there around the year of my birth, have stirred and directed more than imagination in their 56 years of new life. We stood on the rock precipice where the Qumran community was found and Ron, our guide, pointed to a distant peak containing what was called 'Cave 4.' There in 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy cast a rock down into a cave and went to explore the breaking porcelain he heard below. As Ronnie's peculiar accent and intriguing skill unveiled the long untouched jars that the Bedouin's removed, the seven scrolls found inside, and the authentication process riddled with excitement and adventure, we each realized why for 10 years Bedouins were the less shepherds and spelunkers and became full time scroll



hunters. Without question the Israeli government paid the Bedouins \$10,000 per scroll and as the realization of what they had found bloomed, that was a small price.

On this craggy eastern slope overlooking the dead sea, 15 miles from the temple of Jerusalem, God had provided a below sea level, deep basin desert environment that could preserve Hebrew scrolls for 2,000 years! Untouched by human hand and sealed in ceramic jars the Bedouin desert wanderers discovered thousands of scrolls and fragments from 11 caves around Qumran. These scrolls and fragments were archaeological gold and were bought and sold, smuggled and stolen for the 10 years of their discovery from 1947 on. But when the Israel Antiquities Authority inventoried the collection they found intact every book of the Hebrew Bible, (except Esther) all the Apocryphal (pseudipigraphical) books, (books that provide inter-testament history which Jesus, Jews and Baptists never called Holy Scripture, but Catholics, and ergo many Protestants, errantly did.) Disagreements among scholars about the 'who, where, why and hows' of such a collection will continue to ebb and tide, but two things are firmly settled with this find. History, linguistics evidence, paleographic and carbon-14 dating establish the date of the actual scrolls from 200 BC to 68 AD, just 100 years after the prophet Malachi wrote, and just two years prior to the Roman ransacking and destruction

¹ "Very few amphitheatres have been found in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, and most of these are in Israel. Besides Beit She'an, amphitheatres have been discovered in Caesarea, Beit Govrin, and Nablus." Ref "Natural Parks of Israel, Beit She'an, Capital of the Decapolis" ERETZ Ito-Tzvi Inc. © 1996

of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem. But more marvelously than man's dating is God's preservation! Not the preservation of rolled up animal skins in a dry desert, high evaporation environment but the preservation of His words so that not one jot or one tittle would pass away! (Mat 5:18) For there was no letter difference found between the whole of the discovered Hebrew Bible and that found in the Massoretic copies put to print in 1524 (and put in English in 1611).



God had, for over a millennium of hand copying, exactly preserved His words just as He said He would. God's words are 'Preserved': "The words of the LORD *are* pure words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." (Psalm 12:6-7) They are 'Perfect' words: "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple." (Psalm 9:7) They are 'Pure' words: "The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes."

(Psalm 9:8) They are 'Powerful' words: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb 4:12) They are 'Pleasant' words: "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words." (Prov 15:26)

The little I knew about the 1,000 scrolls found around the Qumran ruins stimulated to a new life as our guide so aptly pointed out caves and aspects of the discoveries that only a visit to the Qumran ruins could illustrate. He explained how the Essene community, once thought to occupy Qumran, were found much further south; that Essenes, being passivist, would never have built a fortress and did not use a refectory,² both found in the Qumran ruins. Levitical Jews would not likely use a refectory either. Evidence leans to some "priests of the house of Sodack," or some sect of Jewish zealots, or, perhaps, the Qumran ruins had nothing to do with the guard and defense of the treasury of hidden Hebrew scrolls secured against Roman invasion. Surely visiting Qumran offered little to see but much to learn.

Clearly, the Jewish Bible had been extremely well preserved but not well followed. "We Jews do not live according to the Jewish law, but according to the 'interpretation' of the book of law, the Mishna, or '2nd book,' is the 1st book of interpretation, first made in Tiberieous, with corrections published late in the Talmud, or '3rd book' and 2nd interpretation, which was then later called Shulhond Alhugh, or 3rd interpretation. ... So Judaism, today, is just as



man made as Catholicism." The bus loaded and headed down the east coast of the Dead Sea. One more stop before dark. We need to worship at Engedi.

2 re-fec-to-ry n., A room where meals are served, especially in a college or other institution.