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**What archaeological discovery has had the all-time greatest Biblical impact?**

"Probably the [Dead Sea](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/deadsea.html) Scrolls have had the greatest Biblical impact. They have provided Old Testament manuscripts approximately 1,000 years older than our previous oldest manuscript. The Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated that the Old Testament was accurately transmitted during this interval. In addition, they provide a wealth of information on the times leading up to, and during, the life of [Christ](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/christ.html).  
*—Dr. Bryant Wood, archaeologist,* [*Associates for Biblical Research*](http://www.biblearchaeology.org/)

**Discovery of the Scrolls**

Men of Qumran and the Messiah

Juma was beginning to get nervous. Some of his [goats](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/goat.html) were climbing too high up the cliffs. He decided to climb the face of the cliff himself to bring them back. Little did Juma realize as he began his climb on that January day in 1947 that those straying goats would eventually involve him in “the greatest archaeological discovery in the twentieth century.” Such thoughts were far from his mind when he saw two small openings to one of the thousands of [caves](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/cave.html) that dot those barren cliffs overlooking the northwestern shore of the [Dead Sea](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/deadsea.html).

He threw a rock into one of the openings. The unexpected cracking sound surprised him; what else could be in those remote caves but treasure? He called to his cousins, Khalil and Muhammed, who climbed up and heard the exciting tale. But it was getting late, and the goats had to be gathered. Tomorrow they would return—perhaps their days of following goats would come to an end once the treasure was uncovered!



Cave 4 at Qumran where approximately 15,000 fragments from some 574 manuscripts were found.

The youngest of the three, Muhammed, rose the next day before his two fellow “treasure-seekers” and made his way to the cave. The cave floor was covered with debris, including broken [pottery](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/pottery.html). Along the wall stood a number of narrow jars, some with their bowl-shaped covers still in place. Frantically, Muhammed began to explore the inside of each jar, but no treasure of [gold](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/gold.html) was to be found… only a few bundles wrapped in cloth and greenish with age. Returning to his cousins, he related the sad news—no treasure.

No treasure indeed! The scrolls those Bedouin boys removed from that dark cave that day and the days following would come to be recognized as the greatest manuscript treasure ever found—the first seven manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls!

Such was the discovery of a group of manuscripts which were a thousand years older than the then-oldest-known [Hebrew](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/hebrewlanguage.html) texts of the [Bible](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bible.html) (manuscripts, many of which were written more than 100 years before the [birth](http://www.christiananswers.net/christmas/home.html) of [Jesus](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jesus.html)). These manuscripts would excite the [archaeological world](http://www.christiananswers.net/archaeology/home.html) and provide a team of translators with a gigantic task that even to this day has not been completed.

The story of how those scrolls traveled from the hands of young Bedouin goat herders to be under the scrutinous eyes of international scholars is stranger than fiction. Although all the details of the next few years will probably never be known for sure, this much is clear. After hanging from a pole in a Bedouin tent for a period of time, the seven original scrolls were sold to two separate Arab antiquities dealers in [Bethlehem](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bethlehem.html). From there, four were sold (for a small amount) to Athanasius Samuel, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan at St. Mark's Monastery in the Old City of [Jerusalem](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jerusalem.html). Scholars at the American School of Oriental Research, who examined them, were the first to realize their antiquity. John Trever photographed them in detail, and the great archaeologist William F. Albright soon announced that the scrolls were from the period between 200 BC and AD 200. The initial announcements were then made that the oldest manuscripts ever discovered had been found in the [Judean](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/judea.html) [desert](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/desert.html)!



Clay jar of the type the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in. From Qumran, now in the Citadel Museum, Jordan.

Three of the other original scrolls found by the Bedouin boys were sold to E. L. Sukenik, archaeologist at Hebrew University and father of Yigal Yadin (a general in the Israeli army who later became a famous archaeologist and excavator of Masada and [Hazor](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/hazor.html)). It should be noted that the drama of these events was heightened because these were the last days of the British Mandate period in [Palestine](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/palestine.html), and tensions between the [Arab](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/arab.html) and Jewish population were great. This made examination of the scrolls by scholars extremely dangerous.

All of the scrolls finally came together at Hebrew University under another strange set of circumstances. After touring the U.S. with his four scrolls and not being able to find an interested buyer, Metropolitan Samuel placed an ad in the *Wall Street Journal*. By coincidence (or divine providence?) Yigal Yadin happened to be lecturing in New York and saw the advertisement. Through intermediaries, he was able to purchase these priceless scrolls for around $250,000. In February of 1955, the Prime Minister of Israel announced that the State of Israel had purchased the scrolls, and all seven (including the three purchased earlier by Professor Sukenik) were to be housed in a special museum at Hebrew University named the Shrine of the Book, where they can be seen today.

Needless to say, the initial announcement about the scrolls prompted feverish searches in the area of the original discoveries. An official archaeological expedition was begun in 1949 which eventually resulted in the discovery of ten additional [caves](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/cave.html) in the surrounding area also containing scrolls. The archaeologists then directed their attention to a small ruin nearby called "Khirbet (ruins of) Qumran," which had been thought of as the remains of an old [Roman](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/rome.html) fortress. After six seasons of intensive excavation, the scholars were sure beyond any reasonable doubt that the scrolls found their origin in this community which flourished between 125 BC and AD 68. The scrolls had been stored in haste in the caves as the community fled the encroaching Roman army, which was in [Judea](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/judea.html) to put down the Jewish Revolt of AD 66-70.

The ruins of Qumran, which can be visited today, revealed that a substantial group of Jewish ascetics inhabited this community. Storehouses, aqueducts, ritual [baths](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/baths.html) and an assembly hall were all uncovered. One of the most interesting rooms uncovered was a scriptorium, identified by two ink wells discovered there along with some benches for [scribes](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/scribes.html). It was in this room that many, if not all, of the discovered manuscripts were copied.

**Description of the Scrolls**

As soon as the announcement of the scrolls' discovery was made, the scholarly debates about their origin and significance began. The debates increased when the amazing contents of the scrolls were successively revealed.

The seven original scrolls, from what came to be called “Cave One,” comprised the following:

1. a well-preserved copy of the entire [prophecy](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophecy.html) of [Isaiah](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/isaiah.html)—the oldest copy of an Old Testament book ever to be discovered
2. another fragmentary scroll of [Isaiah](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/isaiahthebookof.html)
3. a commentary on the first two chapters of [Habakkuk](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/habakkukpropheciesof.html)—the commentator explained the book allegorically interms of the Qumran brotherhood
4. the “Manual of Discipline” or “Community Rule”—the most important source of information about the religious sect at Qumran—it described the requirements for those aspiring to join the brotherhood
5. the “Thanksgiving Hymns,” a collection of devotional “psalms” of thanksgiving and praise to God
6. an Aramaic paraphrase of the [Book of Genesis](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/genesis.html)
7. the “Rule of War” which dealt with the battle between the “Sons of Light” (the men of Qumran) and the “Sons of Darkness” (the Romans?) yet to take place in the “last days,” which days the men of Qumran believed were about to arrive.

Those seven original scrolls were just the beginning. Over six hundred scrolls and thousands of fragments have been discovered in the 11 caves of the Qumran area. Fragments of every Biblical book except [Esther](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/estherbookof.html) have been found, as well as many other non-Biblical texts.

One of the most fascinating of the finds was a [copper](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/copper.html) scroll which had to becut in strips to be opened and which contained a list of 60 treasures located in various parts of Judea (none of which have been found)! Another scroll, which Israeli archaeologists recovered in 1967 underneath the floor of a [Bethlehem](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bethlehem.html) antiquities dealer, describes in detail the community's view of an elaborate [Temple](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/temple.html) ritual. This has been appropriately called the “Temple Scroll.”

The contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that their authors were a group of [priests](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/priest.html) and laymen pursuing a communal life of strict dedication to God. Their leader was called the “Righteous Teacher.” They viewed themselves as the only true elect of Israel—they alone were faithful to [the Law](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/law.html).

They opposed the “Wicked Priest”—the [Jewish](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jew.html) [High Priest](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/highpriest.html) in [Jerusalem](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jerusalem.html) who represented the establishment, and who had persecuted them in some way. This wicked priest was probably one of the Maccabean rulers who had illegitimately assumed the high priesthood between 150-140 BC. Most scholars have identified the Qumran brotherhood with the [Essenes](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/essenes.html), a Jewish sect of [Jesus'](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jesus.html) day described by Josephus and Philo.

Whoever the men of Qumran were, their writings provide us with a marvelous background picture of one aspect of the religious world into which Jesus came. Some have sought to draw parallels between figures in the scrolls and [John the Baptist](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/johnthebaptist.html) or [Jesus](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jesus.html), but an objective examination of such parallels reveals that the differences are greater than the similarities. Any contact of Jesus with Qumran is entirely speculative and most improbable. The suggestion that John the Baptist may have spent some time with the Qumran community is possible, since the [Gospels](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/gospels.html) tell us that he spent considerable time in the [wilderness](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/wilderness.html) near the area where the Qumran community is located ([Mt. 3:1-3](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/mat3.html#1); [Mk. 1:4](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/mark1.html#4); Lk. [1:80](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/luke1.html#80); [3:2-3](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/luke3.html#2)). [John](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/john1.html)'s message, however, differed markedly from that of the Qumran brotherhood. The only real common point was that they both taught that the "[kingdom of God](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/kingdomofgod.html)" was coming.

One of the most important contributions of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the numerous Biblical manuscripts which have been discovered. Until those discoveries at Qumran, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures were copies from the 9th and 10th centuries AD by a group of Jewish scribes called the Massoretes. Now we have manuscripts around a thousand years older than those. The amazing truth is that these manuscripts are almost identical! Here is a strong example of the tender care which the Jewish [scribes](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/scribes.html) down through the centuries took in an effort to accurately copy the sacred [Scriptures](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/scripture.html). We can have confidence that our Old Testament Scriptures faithfully represent the words given to [Moses](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moses.html), [David](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/david.html) and the [prophets](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html).

**Doctrine of the Scrolls**

The men of Qumran fervently believed in a doctrine of “last things.” They had fled to the [desert](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/desert.html) and were readying themselves for the imminent judgment, when their enemies would be vanquished and they, God's elect, would be given final victory in accordance with the predictions of the [prophets](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html). It was in connection with these end-time events that one of the most fascinating teachings of the sect emerges. The [messianic](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/messianicprophecies.html) hope loomed large in the thought of the brotherhood. As a matter of fact, evidence shows that they actually believed in three messiahs—one a [prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html), another a [priest](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/priest.html) and the third a [king](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/king.html) or [prince](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prince.html).

In the document mentioned earlier called the “Manual of Discipline” or the "Rule of the Community," it is laid down that the faithful should continue to live under the rule "until the coming of a prophet and the [anointed](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/anoint.html) ones [messiahs] of [Aaron](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/aaron.html) and Israel" (column 9, line 11). These three figures would appear to usher in the age for which the community was making preparation.

In another document found in Cave Four and referred to as the “Testimonia,” a number of Old Testament passages are brought together which formed the basis for their messianic expectations. The first is the citation from [Deuteronomy 18:18-19](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/deu18.html#18) where God says to [Moses](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moses.html): "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto [thee](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/thee.html)." Next comes a quotation from [Numbers 24:15-17](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num24.html#15), where [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) foresees the rise of a princely conqueror: "a [Scepter](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/scepter.html) shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the [corners](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/corner.html) of [Moab](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moab.html)," etc. The third passage is the [blessing](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bless.html) pronounced by [Moses](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moses.html) upon the tribe of [Levi](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/levi.html) (the [priestly](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/priest.html) tribe) in [Deuteronomy 33:8-11](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/deu33.html#8). The way in which these three quotations are brought together suggests that the writer looked forward to the advent of a great prophet, a great prince and a great priest.

There were three individuals in the Old Testament writings that were referred to as "my [anointed](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/anoint.html) ones"—the prophet, the priest and the king (refer to [Ex. 29:29](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/exo29.html#29); 1 Sam. [16:13](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/1sam16.html#13), [24:6](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/1sam24.html#6); [1 Kg. 19:16](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/1ki19.html#16); [Ps. 105:15](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/psa105.html#15)). Each of these was consecrated to his work by an [anointing](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/anoint.html) with [oil](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/oil.html). The [Hebrew](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/hebrewlanguage.html) word for "[anointed](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/anoint.html)" is *meshiach*, from which we get the word [Messiah](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/messiah.html).

The marvelous truth of the [New Testament](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/newtestament.html) doctrine of the Messiah is that each of these three offices found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth! The people were amazed at His feeding of the multitude and said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" ([Jn. 6:14](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/john6.html#14); also [Jn. 7:40](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/john7.html#40); Acts [3:22](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/acts3.html#22), [7:37](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/acts7.html#37)). Jesus also was a priest, not from the order of Levi but from the order of [Melchizedek](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/melchizedek.html) ([Ps. 110:4](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/psa110.html#4); [Heb. 7](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/heb7.html)), who offered Himself as a [sacrifice](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/sacrifice.html) and appears for us in the presence of His [Father](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/father.html) (Heb. [9:24-26](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/heb9.html#24); [10:11-12](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/heb10.html#11)). Also, Jesus was announced as the One who will receive "the throne of his father, [David](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/david.html). And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" ([Lk. 1:32-33](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/luke1.html" \l "32)). He will be acclaimed "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" ([Rev. 19:16](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/rev19.html#16)).

Thus, we have found an interesting point of contact between Qumran and Christianity—a point of contact which is also a point of cleavage. The Qumran community and the early Christians agreed that in the days of the fulfillment of Old Testament [prophecies](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/messianicprophecies.html) there would arise a great prophet, a great priest and a great king. But these three figures remained distinct in Qumran expectation, whereas the New Testament saw them unified in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

One more manuscript that has come to light in recent years provides a fascinating background to the New Testament messianic hope. It has been reconstructed from twelve small fragments, furnishing less than two columns of writing; but this much can be ascertained from its brief contents. It is a prediction of the [birth](http://www.christiananswers.net/christmas/home.html) of a Wonderful Child, possibly drawing on [Isaiah 9:6-7](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/isa9.html#6): "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... and his [name](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/namesofgod.html) shall be called Wonderful." This child will bear special marks on His body and will be distinguished by [wisdom](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/wisewisdom.html) and intelligence. He will be able to probe the secrets of all living creatures, and He will inaugurate the new age for which the faithful fervently awaited.

Is it not striking that soon after this manuscript was composed, a child wa sborn who fulfilled the hopes of Israel and inaugurated a new age? Although the men of Qumran were mistaken in the details of their messiah, they did expect one whose general characteristics were strikingly illustrated by Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and Messiah. It is not known if some early Christian brought the message of Jesus to this wilderness community. We are left only to speculate on how they would have responded to the Wonderful Child born in [Bethlehem](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bethlehem.html) who was the Prophet, Priest and King of Israel.

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