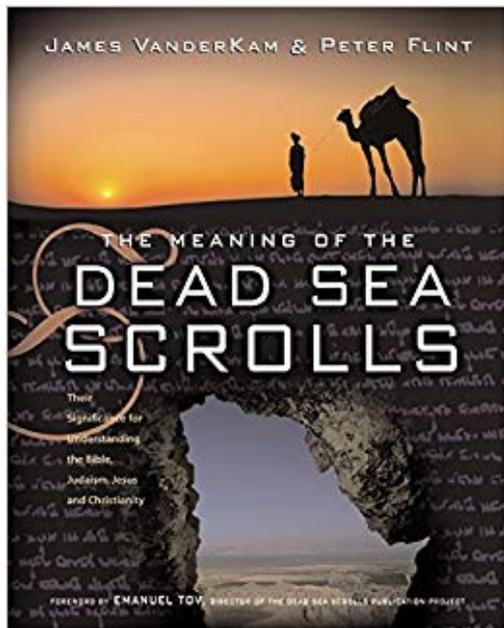


# The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity *by* James VanderKam, Peter Flint



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**Author:** James VanderKam, Peter Flint

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The Dead Sea Scrolls, found in caves near the Dead Sea fifteen miles east of Jerusalem from 1947 to 1956, include the oldest existing biblical manuscripts and the remarkable texts of the purist Jewish community at Qumran. The discovery of the scrolls has added dramatically to our understanding of the varieties of Judaism at the time of Jesus and the rise of Christianity, but has also prompted heated debate about the nature of these religions. As the monumental task of transcribing and translating the Dead Sea Scrolls is finally completed, people around the world are taking stock of the significance of these ancient documents. In this book, two of the world's leading experts on the scrolls reveal the complete and fascinating story in all its detail: the amazing discovery, the intense controversies, and the significant revelations.

Drawing together all the evidence, this timely book explores:

The discovery and dating of the scrolls  
Their relationship to the Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha, and New Testament  
Their messianic and apocalyptic messages  
The identity, nature, and theology of the Qumran community  
The nonbiblical scrolls  
Controversies surrounding the scrolls

This comprehensive, up-to-date guide is the definitive introduction to all aspects of the scrolls, including their teachings, the community that created them, the world of Judaism, the origins of Christianity, our understanding of Jesus and the New Testament. Featuring photos of the original texts, the sites, and the scholars who deciphered them, and including illustrative passages from the scrolls, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* presents the most complete and accurate scholarship

on the Dead Sea Scrolls available today.



## **Reviews of the [The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity](#) by James VanderKam, Peter Flint**

Jeronashe

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 pseudigraphical texts among the scrolls. This section shows some of the multi-task use of the book - in discussing the relationship of the scrolls to the canon of scripture, they go into some detail about what is meant by the use of the term 'canonical', and what constitutes the canon of scripture for the Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox bibles. This makes this an excellent text book for biblical studies classes in addition to a book for the general reader.

The third section surveys the nonbiblical scrolls - phylacteries, commentaries, community documents, and more. In addition to looking at these texts, the authors recreate from them a possible portrait of the community at Qumran, providing of course that one accepts that the scrolls are related to the Qumran site. The authors mention various interpretations at different points, but largely concentrate on the most commonly accepted interpretation, which is that the Qumran group was a part of the Essenes, one of the three primary groups of Judaism identified by Josephus as being present in the late Second Temple period. This section also addresses some of the more interesting characters found within the writing of the scrolls, the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest.

The fourth section takes up the issue of relationships between the scrolls and the New Testament. The authors discount the various claims that New Testament fragments have been found among the scrolls, while not ruling out that such discoveries might in fact occur. However, the primary claims have largely been discounted. The connections between Essene thinking and practice and some early Christians, however, is stronger, but not to the extent that Jesus or John the Baptist can be identified as Essenes (or, as is also sometimes speculated, Zealots). The authors take issue with those whose sensational interpretations (Allegro, Thiering, et al.) rest on shaky extrapolations.

The final primary section gives a good account of the controversial history of the scrolls, looking at the governmental politics, the academic politics, the sensational and sometimes outlandish conspiracy theories about the restrictions placed on the scrolls and the content of 'hidden' scrolls, and the long court battle that resulted from the publication by Herschel Shanks and others of a famous 120-line text, 4QMMT, made far more remarkable for the problems of publication than it perhaps ever would be as a part of the larger body of scrolls.

Authors Vanderkam and Flint provide several appendices, including indexes, quotations and allusions, and a good listing of further readings, including translations of the scrolls in book, microfiche and electronic forms. The book has a very generous collection of photographs, charts, graphs, line-art drawings and maps. There are useful highlight boxes and technical detail boxes to focus upon particular important points. The general layout of the book is very nice, easy to read and visually interesting.

A great book!

RUsich155

Ever since their discovery in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) have been the subject of a prodigious amount scholarly research and popular speculation. In this wonderful tour de force leading DSS scholars James Vanderkam and Peter Flint provide an outstanding overview of these ancient documents and their relevance to Jewish and Christian religious traditions. While the book has much strength, the overview of contextual and technical issues; the DSS relevance to the Old Testament (OT)/Hebrew Bible and New Testament (NT) and the refutation of some leading speculative theories, are particularly valuable.

\* First, with respect to broad contextual issues, the authors provide an excellent overview of the discovery, the various documents and salient technical issues such as translation, reconstruction and dating. The discussion of the different archaeological, palaeographical and carbon- 14 dating techniques is particularly helpful and informative

\* Second, the text provides a comprehensive book-by-book analysis of the scrolls and their relationship to the major OT textual traditions (Masoretic, Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch), which also includes the respective Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. This compilation and synthesis is an invaluable reference - articulate, concise and even-handed..

\* Third, while the DSS have less direct reference to the NT the analysis in this area is also a valuable asset to NT students and scholars. The chapter dedicated to O'Callaghan's claim that NT fragments are included in the Dead Seas may be of particular interest to Christians. While not definitive the authors make a strong case that the specific fragments identified are unlikely to be NT excerpts. The analysis of contextual and stylistic similarities between DSS and NT books also provide helpful historic context.

\* Finally, while not a primary focus of the book, the gentle yet firm refutation of the silly sensationalist theories advocated by Allegro, Thiering, and Eisenman is a worthwhile read for the general reader. Unfortunately, this text is probably not an ideal forum to reach the popular audience that would most benefit from this discussion.

Overall, this is the definitive DSS overview - to date - essential reading for all NT and OT students. A good reading companion to this text is the DSS translation by Wise, Abegg and Cook.

Runeshaper

If you want to hear the different explanations of the early Christians and the ancient sects known as the Essenes this is a must buy. One treasure is the confirming of many books of the Pseudeographical works such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch, and the Apocryphal writings as well, as an index of the findings. If you are a fan of "the Book of the Parables" be prepared to be disappointed, it wasn't found with the other four books, BUT there is a book of the giants that was found. Bought the HARDBACK version for a buck... Wow!!!

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