



Qumran

This travel journal leads us on a journey to a location related to the Bible.

Formations Travel Journal by Jim Pitts

Khirbet (the Arabic word for “ruin”) Qumran is on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. Between 1947 and 1956, a number of ancient manuscripts, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, were found in nearby caves. Located a few miles south of Jericho and 25 miles

east of Jerusalem, a small military fortress was established there in the eighth century BC.

This wilderness area is identified with the City of Salt, one of six cities of Judah listed in Joshua 15:61-62.



Several periods of occupation are evident at Qumran. A large water

Inkwell

Inkwell from the scriptorium of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Kirbet Qumran, before AD 68.

cistern, walls, and pottery fragments date to the eighth and seventh centuries BC. The settlement was destroyed with the fall of the kingdom of Judah. After several centuries of abandonment, Qumran was resettled. Around 130 BC, a new settlement developed. An elaborate water collecting system of aqueducts



The scriptorium

The scriptorium was the place where some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were copied. The discoveries in the scriptorium include evidence of sharpened reeds (used as pens), pottery ink wells, and dried sheepskins (which were used to make scrolls).

and reservoirs, buildings, and pottery kilns were constructed. The complex included a watchtower, a dining room, a writing room, a flourmill, a stable, a laundry, and various workshops.

The residents apparently aimed to be as self-sufficient as possible, although there do not seem to have been any sleeping quarters. Tents or caves may have served occupants for shelter. Near the settlement, separated from it by a wall, there is a large cemetery. An earthquake and fire severely damaged the buildings in 31 BC. The site was deserted for a brief period and then repaired and resettled between 4 BC and AD 6. Thanks to a treasure trove of archeological remains and literary evidence, we have information and insight into life and religious aspirations of the first-century AD residents at Qumran.

In June AD 68, Qumran was destroyed during the Jewish Revolt against Rome. Then it served as a Roman garrison for twenty years. Later, Bar-Kokhba's fighters occupied the ruins during the Second Jewish Revolt in AD 132–135.

Some sixty years ago, the character of this community was more clearly revealed. Bedouin shepherds accidentally discovered a clay jar in a cave near Khirbet Qumran that contained seven parchment scrolls. The scrolls came into the hands of dealers in antiquities, who offered them for sale. What followed is a



Miqveh Bath

Miqveh Bath used for a religious ceremony of purification. Ritually defiled persons would enter a miqveh by one set of steps, immerse themselves in the water, and then exit by a separate set of steps once they has been ritually cleansed.



Dead Sea

complex story of their ownership and restricted availability to the academic community. The Israel Museum in Jerusalem constructed a special building—the Shrine of the Book—in which to exhibit the Dead Sea Scrolls to the public. For the most part, the scrolls date from the



The Shrine of the Book – Jerusalem

The Dead Sea Scrolls and other rare ancient manuscripts are displayed in Jerusalem's Shrine of the Book. The museum's white dome symbolizes the lids of the jars in which some of the scrolls were found.

Scroll jars

As Roman forces approached in AD 68, the Essenes hid their religious scrolls in the caves near Qumran, where they were discovered beginning in 1947.

middle of third century BC to the second half of the first century AD. Written mostly on parchment (a few are on papyrus), they were part of the library of a monastic-type community. In some caves the manuscripts were carefully placed in covered cylindrical jars, but in others they appear to have been dumped in haste. Some manuscripts disintegrated into thousands of fragments that had to be pieced together with the utmost patience and care.

For their safe keeping, the scrolls were hidden in caves near Qumran when the Roman Army advanced on the area before moving on to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70. They tell us much about the Qumran community and greatly enhance our understanding of Judaism and Christianity in the first century. Among the scrolls are copies or fragments of every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther.

The scrolls also include numerous sectarian documents particular to the Qumran community. Certain manuscripts apparently describe the life of the community: the *Manual of Discipline*, the *Damascus Document*, the *Thanksgiving Psalms*, and the *War Scroll*. They tell about the community's origin and history, its rules of life, and expectations for the dawn of a new age. The sect was a Jewish



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The people at Qumran constructed a complex of buildings to include communal facilities, a water system, a library, and a large cemetery.



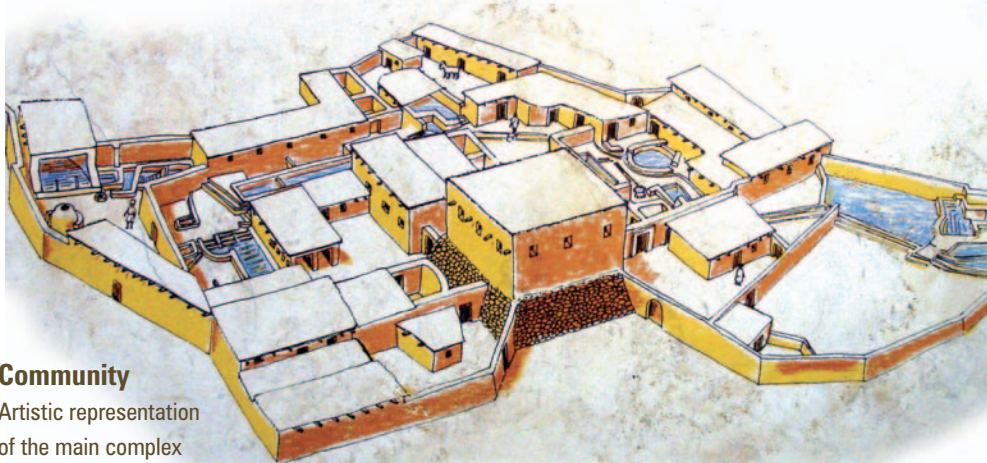
apocalyptic movement preparing for the end of the world. When it came, the wicked would be destroyed, and Israel would be freed from the yoke of the nations. Before this, God would raise up a community of the elect who were destined to be saved. These few would become the nucleus of the future divine order.

Members of this sect, believed to be Essenes, opposed the Hasmonean dynasty of kings and priests. They regarded the sacrificial worship in Jerusalem as having been defiled. Therefore, this new monastic order was a community of protest against the establishment “heretics” in Jerusalem.

Like their near neighbor, John the Baptist, they were a voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mk 1:3). ■

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Cave 4 - as seen from the ruins of the settlement - produced the largest number of scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls are copies or fragments of every book of the Hebrew Scriptures except Esther. The scrolls were hidden in eleven different caves.



Community

Artistic representation of the main complex of the Qumran community.