Early Objects of Christianity

#4 First known pieces of the Old Testament.

By Shad David Sluiter
Available at www.GospelHall.org
The first of many...

1. First known church building.
5. First known picture of Jesus.
6. First known hymn.
7. First known archaeological evidence of crucifixion.
Dead Sea Scrolls

The oldest copies of Old Testament scriptures.
A shepherd in 1948…

…was wandering among caves in the hills above the Dead Sea. He threw a rock into the opening and heard the sound of breaking pottery. Upon further investigation, he found the first of several caves that had been keeping secrets for nearly 2000 years!

Cave #5, where 90% of the scrolls were found.
(1) some 40% of them are copies of texts from the Hebrew Bible,

(2) approximately another 30% of them are texts from the Second Temple Period and which ultimately were not canonized in the Hebrew Bible.

(3) the remaining roughly 30% of them are sectarian manuscripts of previously unknown documents that shed light on the rules and beliefs of a particular group or groups within greater Judaism.
Qumran and the Essenes

The community of Qumran existed near the Dead Sea between 125 BC and AD 68. The scrolls were hidden in the caves as political chaos tore the country apart in AD 66-70.

The Essenes wrote about themselves as well. They believed they were the only true followers of the law, followed strict rules, criticized the political priests in Jerusalem, expected the world to end and the soon arrival of the True Messiah. Actually, they expected three people – a King, a Priest and a Prophet.
Some of the fragments are completely blackened with age, but modern imaging techniques allow them to be clearly read.
Back 1,000 years

The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls pushed back the date of the oldest known Hebrew manuscripts by about 1,000 years. The previous record for ancient Hebrew manuscripts were the Cairo Codex of the Prophets (895 AD) and the Aleppo Codex (925 AD), copies made by Jewish scribes called the Massoretes. How did these copies compare to each other?
How to copy a scroll

- Even today, Torah scrolls are copied by hand.
- The precision of the Jewish scribes shows how a text remains virtually identical after 1,000 years of copying.
How to copy a scroll

Rule #1 – Count the words.
At the end of each book was written the number of words contained in the book. If this checksum was wrong, the scroll was thrown away.
Rule #2 – Find the middle word.
At the end of the book is also printed the word or the phrase that would have numerically been found in the exact middle of the book. If the copy did not have the right word or phrase in its middle, it was thrown away.
How to copy a scroll

Rule #3 – Count key words.

A scroll would contain a list of key words that appear in the book and how many times they were supposed to occur. If a miscount was discovered, the scroll was destroyed.
How to copy a scroll

Rule #4 – Get a second opinion.

A different scribe was required to count the words as well as locate the word or phrase in the middle of the book. If errors were found, the second scribe would throw away the book.
Features of the Biblical Texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls

- Fragments of every Biblical book except Esther were discovered. Most fragments are just a few inches in size. This does not necessarily mean that Esther was excluded, it just was not found among the fragments.
- A complete scroll of Isaiah was found.
- Comparing the Masoretic text with the Dead Sea Scrolls shows that these manuscripts are almost identical although created 1,000 years apart.
Waiting for Messiah

One Qumran fragment reconstructed from twelve small pieces shows that they ...

- expected the birth of a Wonderful Child (a reference to Isaiah 9:6-7)
- This child will bear special marks on His body and will be have great wisdom and intelligence discerning the thoughts of all living creatures.
- His coming will begin a new age.

Imagination can only tell us what would have happened if anyone brought news of Jesus to Qumran.

(25) And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

(26) Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

(27) And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.