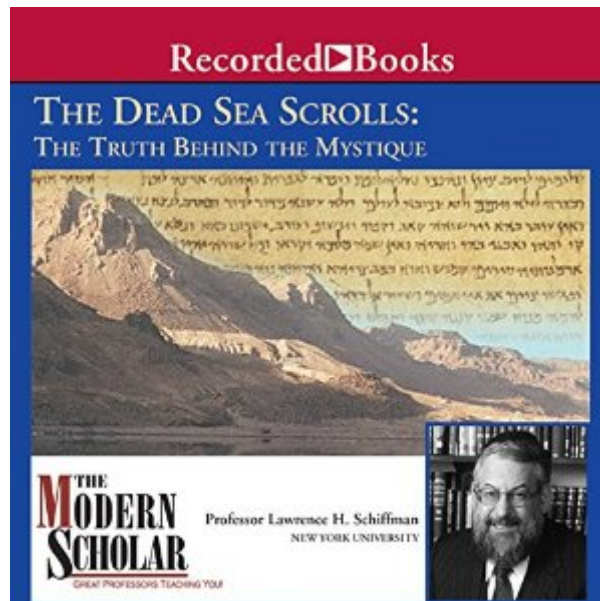


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The Modern Scholar: The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Truth Behind The Mystique



Synopsis

In this course, Professor Lawrence H. Schiffman presents the real Dead Sea Scrolls. In doing so, this widely published authority on Judaic studies imparts a clear understanding of what the Scrolls are, and even more importantly, what they are not. The discovery of the Scrolls is itself a thing of legend. As the story goes, a Bedouin boy discovered the Scrolls in a cave in 1947 while looking for a missing goat. But as Professor Schiffman explains, even this simple story is more complicated than it first appears. Indeed, everything about the Scrolls, from their long, torturous road to full publication to the contentious haggling over dating, meaning, and translation of the Scrolls, has been shrouded in controversy - so much so that even otherwise respected academics have succumbed to the "curse of the Scrolls" by committing serious errors in their Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship. The Dead Sea Scrolls have been the subject of numerous sensationalistic articles in tabloid publications. All manner of people with outrageous theories, including apocalyptic groups and those who believe that the Scrolls contain some hidden message that will lead to man's salvation, have used the Scrolls to further their agenda. In these lectures, Professor Schiffman engages listeners with a fascinating explanation of the content of the Scrolls, the times in which the Scrolls were kept, and the Jewish sectarians who lived in the Dead Sea community. First and foremost, Professor Schiffman clarifies one of the biggest and most widespread misunderstandings about the Scrolls, which is simply this: The Scrolls were not Christian texts nor do they contain any references to Jesus or John the Baptist. The Scrolls, in fact, pre-dated Christianity by many years. By dispersing this myth of the Scrolls as Christian texts, the invaluable insights the Scrolls provide can finally be appreciated.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Lawrence H. Schiffman wrote an excellent book re The Dead Sea Scrolls. RECLAIMING THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS is a clearly written account of the development and interpretation of these Scrolls which were first discovered in 1947. Schiffman argues that not only Christians but also religious Jews can benefit from this book to gain a better understanding of the roots of their religion. Schiffman presents the controversies surrounding the editing and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These controversies were based in part on pettiness, professional jealousy, etc. Yet, Schiffman also informs readers that some of these controversies were based on honest differences of opinion. An interesting feature of this book is the photo plates of some of "the players" involved in this controversy. One of the scholars involved in interpreting and publishing the scrolls was Ben Zion Wacholder whose was one of the professors this reviewer's son while in graduate school at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Schiffman gives a detailed yet clear picture of the scholars involved and explains why there was controversy and what the differences were. Schiffman also explained the cultural milieu in Palestine and Judea during the time that the Scrolls were written (c.400 BC-200 AD). Devout Jews were caught in cultural conflict between Hellenistic Greek influences and later Roman influences especially after 63 BC. Schiffman explains that these differences were serious and led what may be called the Maccabean Wars (c.175 BC-163 BC). Schiffman showed that not only were there conflicts between religious Jews and their Greek and later Roman rulers, but these influences caused internal conflict among religious Jews themselves.

While almost certainly the fault of the marketing arm of the publisher rather than of the author, it is a bit disappointing that the dust jacket promises a Forward by Chaim Potok (in brighter lettering than the author's name) that turns out to be a mere one and a quarter pages, and merely baldly restates the thesis of the book that the Dead Sea Scrolls were not the library of a community foreshadowing Christianity, but the library of a community firmly within the Jewish tradition. As for the substance of the book itself, there is some disappointment there, also. It appears to be a very good draft of a not-quite-edited book. There are often shifts between the documents found at Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls) and those found elsewhere at other times. Although the documents are named when being discussed, the general reader is often left to ponder the sources, the origins, and the relative dates of the documents. At the beginning, there are several tables that illustrate in detail points that could have been made in summary. For example, there is a table setting forth the age of various

Dead Sea Scrolls as calibrated by Carbon-14 dating. The table even includes the number of samples of particular scrolls tested, although the meaning of those numbers is not apparent to a non-expert reader, and not explained by the author--yet there is an entire column of data. (p. 32). On the next page is a graphic showing that the Carbon-14 dating of the scrolls was not that far off from the dating performed by paleographic scholars or explicit dates set forth in the scroll itself. Whether the table distorts the statistics would not be apparent to any non-expert, so the point would just have been better made by authorial assertion.

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