2.5

Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of over eight hundred manuscripts discovered by archaeologists in several caves around the Dead Sea. The first scrolls were found in 1947, and many more were unearthed in the ensuing years. The manuscripts had been stored in sealed jars, and some care had been taken to preserve them, most likely by the Essenes, who apparently operated a monastic community in the area. The manuscripts date from the New Testament era or slightly before. Among the finds, in addition to a wealth of liturgical materials:

- **manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible** (Old Testament), including parts of every book, except Esther and Nehemiah, and also many books of the Apocrypha; most of these are over a thousand years older than any copies of these books that we possessed previously

- **numerous biblical commentaries** (called *pesharim*) that interpret passages in psalms and prophetic works as predictions of what would happen to the community

- **the *Temple Scroll***, a work that reinterprets and systematizes laws from the Pentateuch in a manner analogous to the much later Jewish Talmud; perhaps this was similar to what the

Pharisees also did orally in their "tradition of the elders" (Matt. 15:2)

- **the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document***, two works that spell out regulations for the sect: procedures for joining, duties of members, qualifications for leadership, disciplinary policies, and so forth

- **the *War Scroll***, an apocalyptic work that provides a blueprint for an imminent end-time conflict, describing how the children of light will triumph over the children of darkness

- **the *Messianic Rule***, a handbook for the future that details life in a postwar righteous community ruled by two messiahs, one a king and the other a priest