



A portion of the book of Ecclesiastes from the Dead Sea Scrolls

BONES & DIRT—Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) are a cache of approximately 1100 ancient texts written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Among these are over 220 biblical manuscripts dating from the second century BC to the first century AD, representing every book of the Old Testament except Esther. Muhammad Ed-Dhib, a young goat herder from the Ta'amirah Bedouin tribe, discovered the first DSS in 1947 when he was searching for his lost goat among the arid limestone caves at Qumran overlooking the shores of the Dead Sea. Subsequent excavations of eleven nearby caves by Pere Roland de Vaux from 1951 through 1956 yielded a variety of Jewish literature, yet nothing compared to the initial discovery of a complete copy of the book of Isaiah dating to 125 BC. The importance of the finds cannot be overstated. The scrolls are nearly one thousand years earlier than our previously oldest Hebrew manuscripts (the MT), which was used to translate the Old Testament into English. By studying the scrolls and comparing them to other Old Testament manuscripts, scholars discovered that the scribal copying process was conducted with great care and accuracy. For instance, the Isaiah text from the DSS is nearly identical with the later Masoretic Text.

PURIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

- 16 “Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves.
Remove your evil deeds from my sight.
Stop doing evil.
- 17 Learn to do what is good.
Pursue justice.
Correct the oppressor.^a
Defend the rights of the fatherless.
Plead the widow’s cause.
- 18 “Come, let us settle this,”
says the LORD.
“Though your sins are scarlet,
they will be as white as snow;

though they are crimson red,
they will be like wool.

- 19 If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the good things of the land.
- 20 But if you refuse and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword.”
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.
- 21 The faithful town —
what an adulteress^b she has become!
She was once full of justice.
Righteousness once dwelt in her,
but now, murderers!
- 22 Your silver has become dross to be
discarded,
your beer^c is diluted with water.
- 23 Your rulers are rebels,
friends of thieves.
They all love graft
and chase after bribes.
They do not defend the rights
of the fatherless,
and the widow’s case never comes
before them.
- 24 Therefore the Lord God of Armies,
the Mighty One of Israel, declares:
“Ah, I will get even with my foes;
I will take revenge against my enemies.
- 25 I will turn my hand against you
and will burn away
your dross completely;^d
I will remove all your impurities.
- 26 I will restore your judges to what they
were at first,^e
and your advisers to what they were
at the start.^f
Afterward you will be called
the Righteous City,
a Faithful Town.”
- 27 Zion will be redeemed by justice,
those who repent, by righteousness.
- 28 At the same time both rebels and sinners
will be broken,
and those who abandon the LORD
will perish.
- 29 Indeed, they^g will be ashamed
of the sacred trees

^a1:17 Or *Aid the oppressed* ^b1:21 Or *prostitute* ^c1:22 Or *wine* ^d1:25 Lit *dross as with lye* ^e1:26 Lit *judges as at the first* ^f1:26 Lit *advisers as at the beginning*
^g1:29 Some Hb mss; other Hb mss, Tg read *you*