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# The Whole Scroll Story: Review of *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* by James VanderKam and Peter Flint

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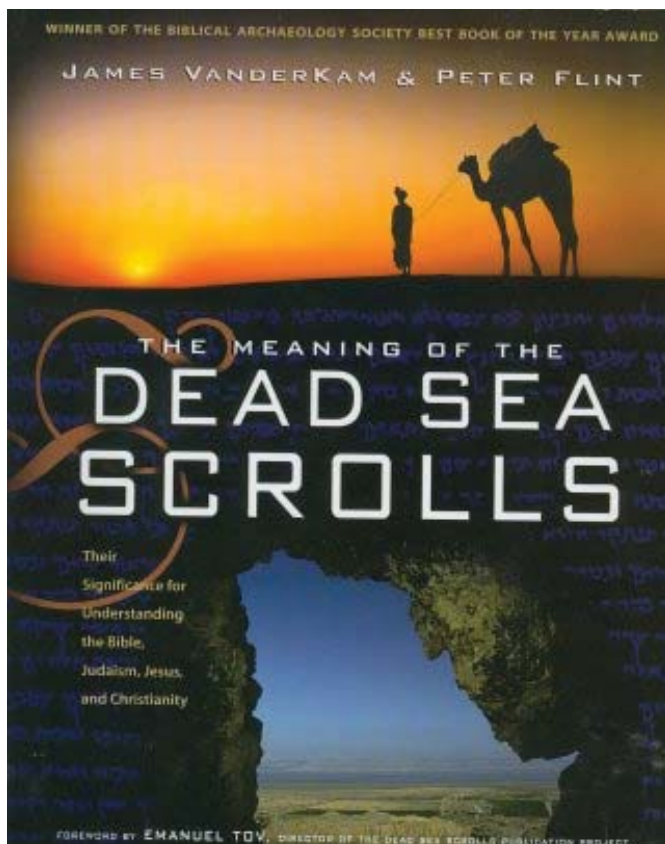
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## *The Whole Scroll Story*

### **The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls**

*By James C. VanderKam and Peter Flint*

(San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002) 480 pp., \$34.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Sidnie White Crawford

James VanderKam and Peter Flint set out to write, in their own words, “a new, comprehensive, and up-to-date introduction” to the Dead Sea Scrolls. They have accomplished that goal admirably, especially when it comes to comprehensiveness. The volume touches on every area of scroll scholarship, and presents a synthetic account of the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls, their importance as a collection of ancient primary texts, and their impact on our understanding of Second Temple Judaism and the roots of Christianity.

VanderKam and Flint begin their survey with a history of the discovery of the scrolls; a detailed discussion of the methods used to date the scrolls (particularly paleography); the results of various archaeological investigations of the Judean desert site Khirbet Qumran, near where the scrolls were discovered; and the advance in understanding the scrolls through the application of advanced technologies such as accelerator mass spectrometry and DNA analysis. They then offer a lengthy analysis of the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible both before and after the discovery of the scrolls, and the formation of the canon of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, as well as new information learned from the scrolls about the books of our present Apocrypha and the so-called Pseudepigrapha. They describe the community at Qumran, its theology, history and identity, through an analysis of the scroll collection discovered in the eleven caves in the vicinity of the site. And they also elaborate on the controversies surrounding the scrolls and the scholars responsible for their publication that generated so much public interest in the 1980s and 90s.

A major section of the book examines the connection between the scrolls and the New Testament. The authors ask: 1. Were New Testament scrolls found at Qumran? (answer: no). 2. What light do the scrolls shed on Jesus and the Gospels? 3. What's the relationship between the scrolls and New Testament books? And, 4. What's the relation between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Revelation?

The book aims for clarity as well as comprehensiveness. It contains many helpful charts, and particular topics are boxed off for easy reference. For example, in the subsection on the canon of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, a box gives a derivation and definition of the English word "canon," while the contents of the canons of four major religious traditions (Jewish, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox) are laid out in a very helpful table.

*The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* embraces what is usually the "consensus" view in Qumran scholarship. The authors believe that the Qumran scrolls are a deliberate collection, stored in the caves by the inhabitants of the nearby site of Khirbet Qumran. Those inhabitants were members of a Second Temple Jewish group, the Essenes. The site was founded as a communal establishment around 100 B.C.E. and was inhabited almost continuously until its destruction by a Roman legion in 68 C.E. The authors' discussion is nuanced, however, and takes into consideration differing views. For example, in the chapter discussing the identity of the inhabitants of Qumran, the authors give the evidence for the Essene identification, which they consider strong enough to overcome objections of detail. They reject as lacking support any identification with either the Pharisees or the early Christians, but acknowledge some relation to the Sadducees, which some scholars have proposed on account of similarities in a few points of legal interpretation found in certain Qumran documents with known Sadducaic positions.

Given the still-fluid nature of scholarship on the scrolls, most readers will find some statement to disagree with in this compendious volume. For example, this reviewer disagrees with the in-

clusion of the Reworked Pentateuch and the Temple Scroll in the category of texts that were certainly considered scripture at Qumran; she would feel more comfortable placing them in the "uncertain" (but possible) category. But this is a minor point that illustrates just how many unsettled questions remain in Dead Sea Scroll scholarship. We can look forward to revised and updated editions of this introduction in the future.

I must warn professors and beginning students to use this volume with caution. It contains more information than can be absorbed by an average undergraduate in a single semester. However, it is certainly the best English introduction available today, and should be on the shelf of anyone with a serious interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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