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Review of *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Faith*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver

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Sermon on the Mount offer a bunch of hardened academics?

We were asked to sit in the first few rows of a small auditorium without notes or a Bible so that we could just listen. We were told that we might ask questions, engage in a discussion or respond in any way we saw fit after Rhoads delivered the sermon. He spoke, we listened, he sat down, and we sat in complete silence for more than 15 minutes. Finally, someone rose, and we all dispersed in quiet conversation. Let me repeat: A room full of studious, articulate (obsessively?), analytical academics who talk and write about Matthew for a living sat in silence in response to the Sermon on the Mount. This time I listened and understood; I looked and perceived. I have studied every Greek word of the Sermon on the Mount, but this time I heard it as a whole. What, I thought, if Christian communities really lived according to those teachings?

So Rhoads's video will work if it is really heard within a community of followers of Jesus, like the parishes for which it was produced. His book encourages and guides groups in understanding the Gospels by stressing their particular messages. The diversity of the Gospels and of our responses to the heard word may move individuals and parishes beyond the patterns of thought and behavior that keep many from deeply appropriating the biblical tradition. Hearing the Sermon on the Mount demands complete attention to the spoken word and serious reflection on its meaning.—A.J.S.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Faith

ed. by James H. Charlesworth  
and Walter P. Weaver

(Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998) 96 pp., \$12.00 (paperback)

REVIEWED BY SIDNIE WHITE CRAWFORD

"Do the Dead Sea Scrolls hinder or undermine Christian faith?" James Charlesworth asks in the preface of this volume. The four essays that follow all answer with a resounding "No!"

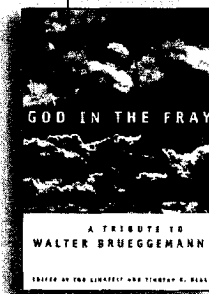
The annual Faith and Scholarship Colloquy at Florida Southern College serves to bring together leading scholars to address the most challenging topics in contemporary biblical studies in a way that speaks to a Christian lay audience. This volume, the fifth in a series, admirably meets that goal. The contributors include four luminaries in Hebrew

Bible and New Testament studies who have been involved in Dead Sea Scroll scholarship for many years: Joseph Fitzmyer, John Collins, David Noel Freedman and James Charlesworth.

Readers looking for fireworks and new, untested theories will be disappointed; the essays provide instead a solid introduction to their topics. At the same time, the essays do not shy away from controversial ideas. Joseph Fitzmyer considers

the proper use of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the study of the Palestinian Jewish matrix of Christianity. He sees the Dead Sea Scrolls as occupying a "privileged" position in the study of early Christianity, since they supply "firsthand information about a form of Palestinian Judaism of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E." He warns, however, of the danger of pushing the importance of the scrolls too far in the study of early Christianity. For example,

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he expresses grave misgivings about the contention of José O'Callaghan and Carsten P. Thiede that fragments of New Testament books have been found in Cave 7.\* He argues that even if a fragment of the Gospel of Mark was discovered in Cave 7 (which he views as "highly questionable"), it would not prove that the

\*See Graham Stanton, "A Gospel Among the Scrolls," *BR*, December 1995.

owners of the scrolls were early Christians or that they even accepted the claims of the Gospel of Mark.

John Collins considers the topic of messianic beliefs in Second Temple Judaism. He shows that the "distinctive point" about messianic expectation in the Dead Sea Scrolls is that the authority of the royal Messiah (the heir to the throne of David) is subordinated to that of the priests. Collins also discusses

4Q285, the so-called pierced messiah text.\*\* He decisively refutes the reading of Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise—"they will put to death the Leader of the Community, the Bran[ch of David]" (line 4)—showing that it misunderstands the passage; the line actually reads "the Prince of the Congregation, the Branch of David, will kill him." Thus the early Christian understanding of Jesus' death as part of his messianic role cannot be traced back to the community at Qumram (where the scrolls were found).

Discussing the use of prophecy in the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christianity, Freedman notes that scroll texts such as Peshar Habakkuk and Peshar Nahum assume that their interpretation of the biblical prophets is "inspired and authoritative." Further, their interpretation "ignores or dismisses the historical setting and context of the prophetic book [that they are commenting on]" and instead applies the prophetic words to contemporary events. Freedman argues that this understanding of prophecy is similar to that of the early Christians, another similarity between the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christianity.

Finally, Charlesworth, whose essay has an almost sermon-like quality, argues that Christians should not be frightened of what the scrolls may say concerning the background of particular Christian doctrines, but should embrace them as enlightening our concepts of the teachings and activities of Jesus of Nazareth and of the foundation of the early church. According to Charlesworth, "I cannot imagine anything in the Qumram library that would hinder Christian faith; of course, I am referring to informed Christian faith, which grows and changes as it is more enlightened."

Since this volume is aimed at a non-scholarly audience and covers mostly introductory material, experts in the field will not find it particularly useful. It may also seem somewhat elementary to *BR* readers who have done extensive reading on the Dead Sea Scrolls. But for those at the beginning of scroll study, this book will prove helpful and interesting.

Sidnie White Crawford is associate professor of Hebrew Bible and chair of classics at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

\*\*See "The 'Pierced Messiah' Text—An Interpretation Evaporates," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 1992; James D. Tabor, "A Pierced or Piercing Messiah? The Verdict Is Still Out," *BAR*, November/December 1992.

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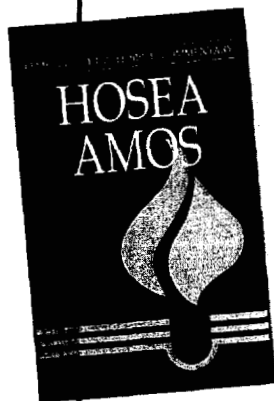
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