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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php



“The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light”

CONTENTS

	PAGE
MUCH SERVING	1
CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS	4
THE JOYS OF BIBLE STUDY	11
NOTES ON HEBREWS	17
WORD STUDIES IN THE FIRST PSALM ...	22
THE SECOND ADVENT	27
WORDS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE SECOND ADVENT	35
EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS	37
THE RECENT FINDS IN PALESTINE	43
THE BIBLE'S ORIGINS	46

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

Since the truce in Palestine it has been possible for an official archaeological inspection to be made of the cave where the manuscripts were found. Not much was left, as there had been previous unofficial inspections. But there was some ancient pottery which confirmed the dates assigned to the scrolls; there were also fragments belonging to the scrolls themselves, which had been torn off when they were removed from the jars. Other fragments were found indicating that there had been other scrolls in the cave. These fragments included portions of Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges and the Book of Jubilees, and some of them were written in a script more archaic than the Isaiah scrolls, approximating to that used for the Lachish Letters of the 6th century B.C. Among some other fragments from the cave, which were acquired by the Syrian Convent early this year, are three portions of the Book of Daniel from two separate scrolls. In view of current opinions about the date of this book, it will be interesting to know what the experts think about the date of these fragments.

Accounts of the discoveries, with some facsimiles, have been published by the American scholars in various numbers of *The Biblical Archaeologist* since Sept. 1948, and of the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* since Oct. 1948. As for the Jerusalem scholars, Prof. Sukenik has given the first instalment of his findings in a volume entitled *Megilloth Genuzoth* (Jerusalem, 1948). We expect to see complete facsimiles soon; a facsimile of the Isaiah scroll is promised for autumn of this year. We must also hope for reports by experts of another kind on the condition and age of the writing material and ink, for the issues at stake are so far-reaching that the genuineness of these documents must be established as thoroughly as possible. But already sufficient evidence has been offered to confirm Prof. Albright's view that this is "the greatest manuscript discovery of modern time."—[We are indebted to *The Harvester*, London, for this excellent summary.—*Ed.*]

THE BIBLE'S ORIGINS

It may not seem so necessary as it was, say thirty years ago, to devote much space in a magazine of this type to the subject of the origins of the Bible. Various books, educative and popular, have been issued during the past decade which have made available a great deal of valuable knowledge for the reading public.

It still remains true, however, that numbers of Christians are not attracted by such reading, and remain in comparative ignorance of this most important branch of Bible study. Some occasional reference is called for, therefore, and every earnest student of the Word is urged to become acquainted with at least the chief elements of the origins of the BOOK we study and love. It is all to the good that much publicity has been given to the subject by the recent discoveries of some very ancient O.T. (and other) MSS made by some shepherds in a cave at Ain Fashka, near the Dead Sea. But to appreciate the real value and import of such a find it is necessary to know something of the sources from which the present Biblical text is derived.

It may not come as a surprise to anyone today that the "original manuscripts" of the Bible have long passed out of knowledge, and that we are dependent almost entirely upon documents later in date by varying periods. The great hope is that fresh discoveries will continue to lessen the gap between the originals and the earliest we have at present. But this disadvantage is (in the providence of God) largely overcome by the fact that the number and variety of extant copies of the earliest MSS is very large, larger in fact than for any other single classic of antiquity. It has been stated that when the revisers began their work on the English Revised Version a hundred years ago they had access to no fewer than 2,000 MSS of the O.T. and 3,000 of the N.T. This does not mean every MSS contained the whole of either Testament but each contained some portion of very definite value for purposes of investigation and comparison. Since then the numbers of such MSS have increased, and there are now probably well over 4,000 for the N.T. alone.

Manuscripts are of two kinds, known as Uncials and Cursives. The Uncials are written in large disconnected letters (*majuscules*); the Cursives in a running hand, i.e. in letters joined together by strokes (*minuscules*). Generally speaking, the former are the earlier, although, as some Uncials are as late as the tenth century, while some cursives are as early as the ninth, the two overlap in date to some extent.

The earliest MSS were written on *papyrus*, made from the papyrus plant which grows on the banks of the Nile. Though so fragile and easily ruined by any but the most careful handling, it preserved remarkably because of the exceptionally dry climate of the Nile valley. Egypt has been, therefore, a very fruitful

field for those in search of these ancient writings, and there are a number of good books descriptive of such researches. This applies not only to Bible MSS but to other various kinds of writings, including personal correspondence, from which a great deal of light has been received on the Greek of the N.T.

In the 4th century the use of *vellum* instead of papyrus for important MSS came into vogue. This change permitted the easier production and preservation of such writings. This is exemplified in the fact that the Emperor Constantine after his conversion ordered fifty copies of the Scriptures for the churches of his capital, so that all might come to know the Word of God. Two of these have come down to us in the Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

Mention may be made of the three most important MSS, the first of which is

(1) The *Codex Sinaiticus*, discovered by Tischendorf in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai in 1859. It belongs to the 4th century, and may have been one of the copies ordered by Constantine referred to above. It contains the O.T. (Greek) and the whole of the N.T.; also some of the apocryphal books. It was greatly publicised some twelve years ago when it was bought for the British Museum, London, from the Russians for £100,000. It is probably the most valuable MS we have, though not the oldest.

(2) The *Codex Alexandrinus* is in the British Museum also. Ten leaves are missing from the O.T., and several from the New. It dates back to the fifth century, and is supposed to have been written by one "Thekla, the Martyr". It is not so old as the other two MSS mentioned, but most important.

(3) The *Vatican Codex* is regarded as the most ancient, dating from the fourth century, and for the past five hundred years has been preserved in the Vatican Library in Rome. It is written in a most beautiful style and the clearness of its letters is remarkable. It lacks parts of Genesis and thirty-two of the Psalms. The New Testament is complete except for Hebrews from ch. 9:14, the Pastoral epistles and the book of Revelation. Copies of all these (in facsimile) are to be seen in the British Museum and other important Libraries.

(To be concluded in next issue)