

The book of Esther and the Dead Sea Scrolls

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ALTHOUGH MANY Bible manuscripts, whole or in part, have been discovered in caves in the vicinity of the Dead Sea, no trace of a scroll of the book of Esther has yet been found. One Scrolls scholar, Cecil Roth, who takes the view that the Scrolls are the literature of the Zealots, not the Essenes as is usually thought, makes the suggestion that the reason is that a book accepting the control of a foreign power (Persia) over the Jews would be unacceptable to the Zealots.

Eliezer Segal, Professor of Religious Studies at Calgary University, puts forward another view in an article that appeared in the *Calgary Jewish Free Press*, in which he says: "Taken at face value, Esther appears to be a disturbingly secular . . . story, in which God's Name is never invoked, and the salvation of the Jews is achieved through a combination of shrewd scheming, personal courage, and coincidence. For the fatalistic folk at Qumran, who believed that human destiny is miraculously predetermined by the Almighty,

Comparison between the AV text of Esther and two Qumran scrolls

AV	Qumran Scroll
"Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai . . . a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity" (2:5,6)	"A man of Judah, one of the leaders (or notables) of Benjam(in . . .) an exile"
"The fear of the Jews fell upon them" (8:17)	"The fear of the house of the scribe fell upon him"
"On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written . . ." (6:1,2)	"At that same hour the temper of the king was stretched . . . the books of his father should be read to him and among the books was found a scroll (sea)led with seven seals . . . It was found written within . . ."
". . . his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head" (9:25)	"his wickedness will return on his own head"
". . . for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse" (8:8)	"and the king swore to me with an oath that cannot (be changed, or voided)"
"And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins" (2:17)	"and all maidens and all brides that enter under the wedding canopy are not fairer than she. And above all women is she lovely and higher in her beauty than that of them all"
"And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple" (8:15)	Pharaoh gave Abraham a present of "a wide garment (?) and much clothing of fine linen and purple"
<i>The first two examples above are from Segal's article, and refer to the scroll published by Milik; the rest are from Talmon's article, and refer to the Genesis Apocryphon.</i>	

this was not an acceptable message". (It must be clearly stated that this is not the view which true Bible believers take of the book, for they see the Book of Esther as an authentic and inspired component of Holy Writ in which both Esther and Mordecai are providentially guided at the Persian court in preventing the destruction of the Jewish people by the wicked, conspiring Haman, and, in doing so, terminating his position of influence in the Persian realm.)

However, Segal refers in his article to the debates that have taken place intermittently in regard to the Scrolls and the book of Esther, which indicate that the book was in fact known to the Qumran community, even if it was not prized by them as Scripture. He says:

"An apparent turning point in the discussion came in 1992 with the initial publication of a poorly preserved Aramaic text. The text's editor, J. T. Milik, one of the foremost scholars of the Scrolls, was struck by remarkable similarities between certain expressions in this newly discovered work and the language and themes of Esther.

"To cite some of the more salient parallels. The Qumran document relates events that took place in the Persian imperial court. King Darius is mentioned, evidently as the father of the currently reigning monarch. If the reference is to the first king to bear that name, then that would make him the father of Xerxes, who was the Ahasuerus of the Bible.

"In Milik's text, as in Esther, is found an episode involving the reading before the king of a royal chronicle that speaks of the loyalty of one of the protagonists in his service of the king".

Segal comes to the conclusion that "there are enough Esther-like phrases scattered among the Dead Sea Scrolls to establish beyond doubt that the Essenes were familiar with its contents. If this is true, then it only serves to heighten the mystery of its absence from the Qumran library".

Another scholar, Shemarayahu Talmon, in an article, "Was the Book of Esther known at Qumran?",¹ refers to a report by another Scroll scholar in which it is asserted that, in recording the episode of Sarah and Abraham at Pharaoh's court in Egypt, the author of the Genesis Apocryphon scroll "drew upon the fate of Esther and Mordecai at the court of Ahasuerus king of Persia, as transmitted in the biblical book of Esther [implying] that he was familiar with the Biblical text".

Some links between the Scrolls and the book of Esther are shown in the [table](#), and establish that, though no trace of a scroll of the book of Esther has been found by the Dead Sea, there is ample evidence that the book was well known to the people of the Scrolls, and was therefore in existence at the time.

1. Published in the magazine *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 2 (1995).

Sacrifice of any sort, by its very definition, carries with it some type of pain. Relief is, of course, often possible, but only through rejecting or compromising the principles spelled out by the law of Christ. In some cases physical pain may be inflicted by those opposed to our commitment to the Truth. To all of us physical pain comes as a result of our mortality and corruptibility, and illness, extreme and unpleasant, has the potential to cause us to doubt the goodness of God.

Where can we find the strength to endure faithful to the end? In the example of our Master and in the joy that is set before us: "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). God has promised that He will "wipe away all tears . . . there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Rev. 21:4). What joy there will be when these conditions are experienced, with garments of shame discarded and each saint robed in righteousness and girded with gladness!

With such joy before us, with an undiminishing determination that His will be done in our lives, and in heartfelt appreciation of what the Lord Jesus Christ did for his friends, let us look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Let us embrace the same ideals and goals. Let us strive to attune our thoughts to his. In the words of Paul, for whom to live was Christ, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus".

From "The joy that was set before him", by the late Jim Wood, published December 2002