



Historical Reasons

Small Group Work Sheet

January 16, 2011

Part 1 - Ice Breaker

- What stories in the Bible do you think most people find hardest to believe?
- Have you ever experienced doubts about the Bible? How do you handle them?

Part 2 - Sermon Review

- George Orwell stated, *Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.* What are the ramifications of redefining history?
- What would you say to someone who said archaeology has confirmed the Bible has mistakes?
- Explain the *history to theology* link and why it is essential for the Bible to present flawless history.
- The key thing to remember about the Old Testament is its *accuracy*. What techniques did the Jewish Scribes use to insure copies of Old Testament books were identical to the original?
- Pastor Kurt shared three historical discoveries that confirmed the Bible's version of history was right, and the former consensus of scholars was wrong. Which one was your favorite? What does this tell you about the limits of historical scholarship?
- Why is modern archaeology causing such a fast erosion of biblical confidence? What recent discovery, if the academic world will accept the facts, is returning confidence to the biblical account?
- While the Old Testament was copied accurately, the New Testament was copied *plentifully*. By what kind of margin do New Testament manuscripts outnumber anything else from antiquity? Why does this plentifulness of New Testament manuscripts give us confidence in the New Testament's accuracy?
- What works of secular history confirm biblical accuracy?
- How has this sermon changed your confidence in the Bible?

Part 3 - Digging Deeper... How did the Dead Sea bring the Old Testament to life?

How were the scrolls discovered?

We often wonder how we know that the Bible in our hands came down to us accurately. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the Old Testament has not substantially changed for centuries. Here is a synopsis of perhaps the most important of all archaeological stories.

In March of 1947, a Bedouin shepherd, looking for a lost goat near the Dead Sea, threw a stone to ward off other animals and heard the sound of something breaking when it landed.

He found a companion and together they went into a cave where they saw several large jars containing rolls of leather and papyrus wrapped in cloths. They smuggled them across the border between Israel and Jordan and found an antique dealer in Bethlehem, who bought them for a small fee. The merchant told a Syrian scholar in Jerusalem about them, but he was unable to identify their age or significance. The Syrian acquired several of the manuscripts and stored them in the Monastery of St. Mark in Old Jerusalem.

Realizing these manuscripts might be of considerable value, the Syrian scholar sought the advice of L'Echolle Biblique, a French institution in Jerusalem devoted to biblical and archaeological study. A Dutch professor, from L'Echolle Biblique, visited the monastery and examined one of the texts. He recognized it to be an ancient copy of Isaiah. When he returned to his French colleagues, they assured him that no such manuscript of antiquity could possibly exist, so the matter was dropped.

Eventually, two librarians from Hebrew University in Jerusalem visited the monastery and recognized the manuscripts needed further evaluation. By the time professor E.L. Sukenik, of the Hebrew University, returned from America to Jerusalem in November 1947, he realized that he may have discovered one of the greatest historical finds of all time.

By now, the caves by the Dead Sea were being scoured for other scrolls. In all, they yielded fourteen significant finds.

Where did the scrolls come from?

In 140 B.C., a group of people called the Essenes left the city of Jerusalem to survive in the barren, dry caves of the Judean hills. Qumran, as the site was called, was established to preserve the purity of the priesthood and to cling to the law of Moses and the prophets. In A.D. 60, Rome became weary of the Jewish rebellions and decided to crush them throughout the land, including this community. This Essene community hid their scrolls in the caves as they fled the wrath of Rome. There the scrolls remained for two-thousand years.

What is their significance?

Until these scrolls were found, the oldest Old Testament manuscripts dated back to A.D. 800. These scrolls are between 800 and a thousand years older than those manuscripts. Portions of every Old Testament book were found, except for the book of Esther. This gives us an opportunity to glimpse at how the Old Testament changed over a thousand year period of time.

Dr. Gleason Archer summarizes the findings this way. From the two copies of Isaiah found in the caves they *"proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling."* Now what is even more amazing is scholars believe the text we have in our hands, is even more accurate than the Dead Sea Scrolls! How can that be? That is a story for another time but if you have extra time as a group, discuss what could possibly make that true.