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INTRODUCTION

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS: THEIR DISCOVERY AND CHALLENGE TO BIBLICAL STUDIES

James H. Charlesworth

Origins are fundamental. We are each what we have become because of the way we began both genetically and socially. Often our choices are dictated because of our beginnings, even though we may be only tacitly aware (if at all) of that dimension of our lives.

Readily, we comprehend that we will never know where we are and where we seem to be going until we glance back at our past, examining our paths and perceiving our origins. That axiom pertains to all of us both as individuals and also as a society. The main reason the Dead Sea Scrolls seem to fascinate so many is because they throw a rare illuminating light on the origins of our culture and the faith of Jews and Christians today. Indeed, recent examination of the Qumran Scrolls, in the judgment of a growing number of specialists, helps us comprehend in significant ways both the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism and also the origins of Christianity. On the one hand, we recognize that previous reconstructions of pre-70 C.E. Judaism are inaccurate. On the other hand, we are only now able to synthesize the knowledge obtained from Qumran research and the study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, as well as from the vast data obtained from archaeological research, in a more informed attempt to represent the world of the time of Hillel and Jesus.

Origins, unfortunately, are also shrouded by opaqueness. Often they are hidden behind the mists—complex and changing—that cover not only time but also place, which are complex and changing. For example, it is well known that Muhammad Ed-Dib discovered the first cave fifty years ago in 1947. But who is (or was) he? In March of 1997, the *ACOR Newsletter* reported that he had “died two years ago.” Over three months after this obituary, however, I was introduced to an Arab who claimed to be Muhammad Ed-Dib. He explained how he threw a rock into a cave and became frightened when it echoed back after careening off pottery. He was afraid because jinn, desert demons, might be dwelling in the cave. He also

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