Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

A Spiritually Powerful Sect of Judaism: Two Sermons on the Dead Sea Scrolls by Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein

Introduced by Marc Saperstein
Annotated by Jason Kalman

Introduction

Harold I. Saperstein served as rabbi of Temple Emanu-El of Lynbrook, Long Island, from autumn 1933, when he was still a student at the Jewish Institute of Religion, until his retirement in June of 1980. For two and a half years starting in the summer of 1943, he was on leave as a chaplain in the United States Army, European Theater. The two sermons reproduced below were delivered to his congregation in 1955 and 1968.

Temple Emanu-El, composed of some seventy families when he arrived, grew significantly as a result of the massive move to the New York suburbs following the war. At the time the second sermon was delivered, it had close to one thousand families. Many of the original members had grown up in traditional families with rudimentary formal Jewish education and made the break from Orthodoxy as adults by choosing a Reform congregation. Sociologically, with relatively few exceptions, it was middle to upper-middle class.

As in most Reform and Conservative congregations of this period, the major preaching occasion was at a late Friday evening service. It began at 8:30, after dinner, lasted for about an hour and a quarter, and was followed by a leisurely "Oneg Shabbat" that filled the rest of the evening. Average attendance in the 1960s would have been about three hundred. The relatively brief liturgy allowed time for a twenty-minute sermon. These sermons were generally not based on the scriptural reading for the Shabbat; that would be discussed in the Saturday morning sermon, generally in the form of an address to the bar mitzvah. The two sermons printed here are characteristic of those not linked with an occasion in the Jewish calendar, but rather addressing a particular theme, often of some current interest. The topic could be generated by an event in the news; a popular play, movie, or book of Jewish interest; or a cause related to Israel, Soviet Jewry, civil rights, or economic justice.[1] For those who attended these services regularly, the sermons would have served as an ongoing program of adult education.

Saperstein read widely in preparation for his preaching—newspapers, periodicals, and books in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish—but he did not think of himself as an original thinker or even a first-rate intellectual. He took pride

in the role of a popularizing teacher: making ideas and information "come to life" for those who listened to him preach and for those he taught in his classes. In writing and speaking style, he favored clear exposition over high rhetoric. His sermons were delivered in a natural, conversational style, with engaging enthusiasm, conveying excitement about ideas, often expressed with intensity and passion, and leaving a powerful emotional impact on the listeners. While he admired preachers whose sermons were filled with memorable phrases and beautifully crafted sentences, he preferred clarity and directness, his points made in a clear structure that helped the listener follow and remember.

The trigger for the first sermon was a long article called, "The Scrolls from the Dead Sea," published in the 14 May 1955 issue of the *New Yorker* magazine by the literary critic Edmund Wilson, followed by his widely read, somewhat expanded book-length treatment with the same title.[2] In addition, Professor Harry Orlinsky, who taught Bible at the New York school of HUC-JIR and who himself played a role in Israel's acquisition of the scrolls, was interviewed in a more popular article in *American Judaism*, a periodical published by the Reform movement.[3] Much of the information in the narrative section of the first sermon is taken from these works; Orlinsky's article is mentioned in this first sermon, and the *New Yorker* article is mentioned retrospectively in the second sermon.

Saperstein begins his December 1955 sermon with a hook to capture the interest of the listeners, promising "an adventure story of discovery and publication" and "a detective story of interpretation." He was a master at the art of telling stories, especially in his story-sermons for children's services. The story here is told as if by an omniscient narrator, summarizing dozens of pages replete with complex detail in a clear presentation. The second "story"—actually a summary of the then-current scholarly consensus about the significance of the scrolls—is punctuated by a series of rhetorical questions: "How do we know"? "How did they get there?" "What happened to them?" "What do these discoveries have to tell us about religious history?" "What does all this mean?" In the responses, Saperstein frequently introduces information with the phrase, "We know … ," suggesting an identification with the scholars who had actually read the texts rather than with those dependent on secondary reports.

Like the first sermon, the second, delivered more than twelve years later, has two major sections. Referring back to the earlier sermon, Saperstein tells his listeners that he will not repeat the story of the discovery, providing only a quick summary. Instead, the first part is devoted to a more detailed characterization of the actual texts. In the first sermon, they were a conglomerate: the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here they are an array of specific documents, of several different genres, their content briefly outlined.

More important for the listeners is the second part, which—like the second part of the first sermon—explains why twentieth-century Jews should

be interested in the scrolls. Several cogent points are made. By including biblical texts almost a millennium older than the previously oldest-known Hebrew *Tanakh*, the scrolls demonstrate the reliability of that text, which is the basis of all traditional biblical scholarship. They vividly show the diversity of Jewish religious thought two thousand years ago as contrasted with the model of a unified, "mainstream" religious tradition that prevailed until the nineteenth century—a point of obvious relevance to the legitimacy of Reform Judaism. The light they shed on the origins of Christianity shows that it was less radically innovative and more extensively derived from Judaism than many had thought. And they provide evidence for the presence of the Jewish people in Israel, thereby undermining the claim that the modern State of Israel is an alien intruder in the Middle East. These are ideas that may well have remained with the listeners long after the sermon was delivered.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Harold I. Saperstein

16 December 1955[4]

In the last eight years a strange detective story has been written in the realm of scholarship. It is linked up with what are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are actually two stories: one, an adventure story, dealing with the discovery and publication of the scrolls, the other, a detective story of interpretation. There are those who think that Biblical scholarship is dull and dry. This refutes them.

The first story begins back in November, 1947, when an Arab Bedouin boy named Muhammad the Wolf was tending goats near a cliff on the western shore of the Dead Sea. He was one of a group of Arab smugglers who carried contraband across the border into Palestine. One of his goats, a little more adventurous than the rest, started to climb the cliff and he went up after it. From his higher vantage point he noticed an opening in the wall of the cliff leading into a cave. Idly he picked up a stone and tossed it in. To his amazement, he heard a crash. Something inside had broken. Frightened, he ran away, but he later came back reinforced by a companion, and entered the cave. Inside they found a number of earthen sealed jars. They broke open some and inside them were lump objects wrapped in linen and saturated in a kind of tar. They unwrapped some and found manuscripts. The writing was definitely not Arabic.[5]

Shortly afterward when they came into Bethlehem, where they went to sell their contraband and buy supplies, they showed them to some merchants. One was a Syrian who brought it to the attention of the local Metropolitan of the Syrian Church in Jerusalem.[6] This is a kind of Bishop of the Syrian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Metropolitan, whose name was Samuel, was interested. He was not a great scholar, but he knew that nobody had lived

in that area near the Dead Sea for many centuries, and he said he would be interested in buying them. The Bedouin came, but Samuel—after waiting all morning—had gone out to lunch.[7] Another priest, knowing nothing of the scrolls, being shown dirty manuscripts[8] with what looked like Hebrew writing, sent them to a Jewish school. As luck would have it, the Arab-Jewish situation was very tense, and the Syrian merchant persuaded them that if they went into the new State[9] they would be trapped. So they waited, and eventually four of the scrolls were purchased for about $50 by the Metropolitan.[10]

In the meantime, Professor Sukenik,[11] head of the Department of Archaeology of the Hebrew University, learned that some scrolls had been found near the Dead Sea. The political situation was becoming more and more tense, but he managed to arrange interviews with an intermediary who, after looking at the scrolls, was convinced that they were old and extremely important.[12] An arrangement was made for Sukenik to go to Bethlehem to examine them. The day was November 29: the day the U.N. approved of the partition of Israel. Fighting was going on already and the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem was closed. He consulted with a high officer of the Israel Defense Forces, Yigal Yadin, now Commander-in-Chief of the Israeli Army, who was himself something of an archaeologist and incidentally the son of Professor Sukenik. "As an army officer," he said, "I must tell you that you cannot go; as an archaeologist, I agree that you must go; as your son, I cannot counsel you." The older man went. He managed to get through safely. And eventually he purchased three of the scrolls.[13]

Several weeks later, news representatives in Jerusalem received a call to come to a press conference. It was not a simple thing. As they gathered together in the Jewish Agency building, Arab shells were falling in the vicinity. They didn't know what to expect. To their amazement, instead of an announcement about military or political matters, Professor Sukenik held up some tattered shreds with barely decipherable writing on them and said, "Gentlemen, we have here the oldest Hebrew manuscripts known. Among them is a copy of the Book of Isaiah, nine centuries older than the oldest one in existence. Another is a hitherto unknown book, "The War of the Children of Light Against the Children of Darkness." As he announced the title, a shell burst close at hand. The old man went on talking without blinking an eye.[14]

But the adventure story isn't over yet. In the summer of 1954, General Yigal Yadin, son of Professor Sukenik, who had died in the meanwhile, was in America. He came back to his hotel late one night to find a strange message: "Look in today's *Wall Street Journal*." Not knowing what to expect, he did. Searching through it under the head "Miscellaneous for Sale," he found this ad: "The Four Dead Sea Scrolls—Biblical manuscripts dating back to at least 200 BC. Ideal gift to educational or religious institution."[15] How did they get here? That brings us back to the Metropolitan Samuel.

Having purchased the scrolls, he found himself getting the run-around. All the scholars to whom he went refused to pay any attention. "These scrolls are valueless and relatively modern."[16] Finally he went to the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. They recognized the scrolls, photographed them and published them,[17] and urged him because of the insecure political situation to bring them for safety to America. And so it was that these scrolls were purchased in America by and for the Israeli government. $250,000 was paid for the four, so that today the government of Israel has all seven.[18]

In the meantime, other expeditions went back to the caves and archaeological study of these and surrounding caves brought to light a multitude of scraps of other documents—and a large building near the shores of the Dead Sea.[19]

Now for our other story. What value do these have in understanding religious history? First we must make sure of their dates. We must admit that there has been considerable controversy over this matter. There are some Jewish scholars who maintain that the scrolls are of medieval origin—Professor Zeitlin of Dropsie.[20] Others like Professor Orlinsky, whose views many of you read in the recent article in *American Judaism*, still counsels caution.[21] But by and large we can reach the conclusion that these scrolls come from the period of the century before the beginning of Christianity and the century after.[22]

How do we know? For one thing, there are only scrolls, no parchment or paper, no collection of sheets; that would have been very unusual in medieval times.[23] In archaeological studies, a number of coins were found, none dated later than 68 CE.[24] The jars were definitely of the Roman period.[25] And a carbon 14 test of linen wrappers dated them from the beginning of the Christian era.[26] Now it is conceivable that the wrappers and containers were old and the contents from a later date, but that is very unlikely. The style of writing and contents also indicate an early date.[27] We are not going overboard in agreeing that these are almost 2000 years old.[28]

How did they get there? We know that during the Roman period there were three major groups of Jews: The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. Present day Jewry grew out of the Pharisees. The others disappeared. We know a little about them from Jewish historians like Josephus and Roman historians like Pliny, who came to Palestine with Vespasian for the war against the Jews. We know for example that the Essenes were a monastic group who lived apart in the wilderness. They lived celibate lives, shared all their property, believed in ritual bathing. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls is one which has been called a "Manual of Discipline." It is the rules of this monastic order, agreeing in large part with what Josephus has to tell about them.[29]

The large building which has been unearthed had a central kitchen, a large central dining room, a room for scribes with inkpots still standing there and dried up ink inside them. Nearby were caves, where the people lived. Pliny mentions that not far from the Dead Sea was a colony of Essenes. Apparently here we have the very colony he was talking about.[30]

What happened to them? We know that in the year 68, Vespasian came down to Jericho, which is less than ten miles from the site of this ancient Essenic monastery.[31] The Essenes, from [what] we have learned about them, were very meticulous in ritual observance. Apparently suspecting they would be attacked, they placed their library into earthen pots, sealed them in, and hid them in inaccessible caves.[32] The colony was then apparently destroyed. After a lapse of some years, other caves show evidence of occupancy again. This habitation ended, according to coins and other clues, about the year 135, when the Bar Cochba rebellion reached its tragic end.[33]

Now what do these discoveries have to tell us about religious history, first for Jews and then for Christians? Regarding Jews—as Professor Borroughs [*sic*] of Yale Divinity School has said—there was more variety and flexibility in Judaism than we have ever before supposed.[34] It helps us to realize that there was in ancient times in Judaism room and freedom for minority groups.

More important, it helps us to know more about our own religious literature. Remember that for centuries our Bible was copied by hand. You know the possibilities of scribal errors creeping in. The oldest Hebrew copy of the entire Bible until now was the so-called St. Petersburg codex. By that time, the Massoretic text had been fixed and no more changes could come in. The question is, Is this the original form? Have additions or omissions or changes been made, voluntarily or involuntarily, during the centuries when they were first written until they were cased into a fixed form? The texts of the Book of Isaiah and other discoveries throw some light. They happen to be rather bad copies. In a number of cases they differ from our accepted version. In some of these places they give us a better version than we have, making clear what was confused sometimes by just the change of a letter. In other cases these copies give inferior readings: misspellings, etc., which show that the scribes were not particularly good. But in general—to the amazement of many scholars—they support the Massoretic text of our Bible. In every essential sense, our Bible is the same as it was back 1000 years earlier than any copy we have previously seen.[35]

What about Christians? The study of the Essenes has thrown new light on the beginnings of Christianity. We see a great deal in common in the customs and institutions of the Essene sect and in the practices of the early Christian Church. For instance, the Essenes shared all things in common, and so did the early Christian Church, which was economically a pure communistic society. The Essenes had the custom of meals in common, and whenever ten or more came together, the priest at first partook of the wine and the bread.[36] Here we have what seems like the origin of the communion or mass, which we had always thought came from the Passover Seder. But the Seder is a family observance, and the communion was a congregational observance, and originally—as with the Essenes—for men alone.

The Essenes believed in ritual bathing and baptism. John was very likely influenced by them. Baptism became an essential part of early Christianity.

The Essenes spoke of a Teacher of Righteousness, who lived during the first century before the Common Era, who was oppressed by a wicked priest, who taught many of the things that Jesus taught, and after whom the career of Jesus seems to have been patterned. It leads to this in the words of a Christian scholar: **the monastery near the Dead Sea, more than Bethlehem or Nazareth, was the cradle of Christianity**.[37]

What does all this mean? It brings out the fact that Jesus was not a unique phenomenon, but part of the history of his time. The teachings of Christianity represent the result of several centuries of a Jewish group working in their own tradition. Previously we as Jews had insisted that Jesus was a Jew, and that Christianity came later, largely from foreign sources. Now we realize that while some foreign influences came into Christianity in later years, from the outside, just as Jesus emerged from the Jewish people, so much of Christianity grew out of Judaism. Not mainstream Judaism, but this small but spiritually powerful sect of Judaism.[38]

This is our story. An Arab goatherd, a stone, and a cave. And new light shed on an ancient story. There are those who would close their eyes and minds to such new knowledge for fear it would shake the foundations of their faith. We believe in light—this is our festival of light. As we conquer the darkness, our faith emerges in clearer perspective. As the mysteries disappear, its essential truth remains, more beautiful and powerful than ever.

A New Look at the Dead Sea Scrolls

Harold I. Saperstein

5 January 1968[39]

The Museum in Jerusalem is one of the most impressive museum complexes in the world. It is located on a commanding site on the outskirts of the New City not far from the campus of the Hebrew University and from the new Knesset building. As you approach the Museum you see a sign which says, "To the Shrine of the Book." It leads to a strangely shaped structure. On one side is a wall of black basalt, on the other is a white-colored dome. The Shrine of the Book is the edifice in which are kept the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. The structure itself is symbolic. The white and black colors are intended to represent the struggle between light and darkness, a theme which is expressed in many of the scrolls. The dome is in the shape of the covers of the ancient jars in which the scrolls were found. The Shrine itself is subterranean, symbolizing the caves in which the scrolls were discovered.[40]

The story of how the scrolls were discovered and acquired by the Israel government is fascinating in itself, combining story book coincidence and cloak-and-dagger mystery. I have spoken about it some years ago and will not take the time to repeat it here. Let me merely say that they were discovered by Bedouins in caves near the Dead Sea not very far from Masada. Near them

was an ancient ruin called Khirbet Qumran, later excavated, and apparently the site of an ancient monastic community whose members had escaped into the desert and lived there during the time of the Roman conquest, ending in the destruction of the Temple. It was assumed that these scrolls had been part of the library of the monastic community and had been hidden in the caves prior to the destruction of the Qumran community by the Romans.

The publicity given to the Dead Sea Scrolls after they had been acquired, including two lengthy articles by Edmund Wilson in the *New Yorker* magazine, precipitated what might be called the Battle of the Scholars.[41] There were two major problems. One was the dating of the scrolls. The other was the identity of the monastic group.

Several reputable scholars, particularly Dr. Solomon Zeitlin, of Dropsie College, Philadelphia, insisted that they were not ancient at all—that they were written in medieval times and were being passed off as being authentically ancient. However as the evidence came in, the authenticity of the scrolls was quite conclusively established. A Carbon 14 test was made of the linen wrappers in which the scrolls were found. The conclusion was that they went back to the first century before the Common Era—allowing 150 years either way. This was further supported by paleographic evidence: that is, the study of the style of writing, by pottery found in the vicinity and by dated Roman coins also found in the vicinity. All point quite definitely to the fact that these manuscripts were in use some time before the end of the war against Rome in the year 70. In other words they are almost 2000 years old.[42]

As for who the group which had written, used and preserved them were, again there has been considerable debate. Many people believe them to have been Essenes, a Jewish sect described by Josephus and Philo. They do have much in common with the Essenes insofar as we have information about this group—all of it relatively limited. However there are some respects in which the group seems to differ.[43] All we can say definitely is that it was a group similar to the Essenes, who existed in the last years of the Jewish nation. This much is clear however: that in these scrolls we hear the voice of long dead kinsmen, speaking to us across the gap of 2000 years.

Just what do the Scrolls contain? The Jerusalem Museum exhibits 7 of them: three of them purchased originally by Professor Sukenik of the Hebrew University, and 5 purchased by his son Professor Yigal Yadin from the Metropolitan of St. Mark's Monastery in Jordan. Of the latter, two proved to be different parts of the same scroll thus making the total of seven. Of these, two are manuscripts of the Biblical Book of Isaiah: one is fragmentary and in poor condition, the other covers the complete text of that book.

A third is a Habakkuk commentary. In this the Biblical Book of the prophet Habakkuk is interpreted in terms of the contemporary situation. A fourth is called a Genesis Apocryphon. This is a retelling of the stories of Genesis with additional detail. The fragment covers the material from Noah until Abraham

and Sarah. This was the last to be unrolled as it had deteriorated and become congealed into a solid mass. It was first called the Lamech Scroll because the part that was legible mentioned the character of Lamech, and it is known that there was an apocryphal Book of Lamech which has been lost.

The fifth is the Thanksgiving Scroll—containing Psalms of Thanksgiving similar in style to those of the Bible. The sixth is the Manual of Discipline. This is in essence the constitution of the monastic group that lived at Khirbet Qumran. It describes the initiation ceremony, their religious calendar and observances, the structure of their community, the practice of joining in common meals, of giving up individual possessions etc.

The final one is called The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness. This gives a prophecy of the ultimate war of the forces of good against evil. It details the organization, the military equipment, the technical formations, the signals of the military force, etc. [44]

It is reported that an eighth scroll has been taken over by the Israeli government from an antique dealer in Bethlehem in the aftermath of the June War. This however has not yet been published or officially described.[45]

Now what is the importance for the understanding of Judaism of these greatly publicized ancient scrolls? Outside of the fascination of dealing with something which goes back 2000 years, do they throw light on our heritage? I think they do.

First, they add great support to the accuracy of our current Bible texts. You see, the problem was always this. In ancient times there were no printing presses. As a result, every copy of every book had to be copied by hand. Try having a long manuscript passed from one person to another to be copied dozens of times, and see how the end result may differ from the original. The Hebrew scribes had developed careful techniques for avoiding errors. Yet the fact remained that the oldest copy of the entire Bible in existence goes back to the middle 900s. The oldest copy of the Book of Isaiah goes back to 875. Before that we could only compare our texts with translations into Greek and Latin which had been made much earlier—but comparisons on the basis of translations are always very tricky.[46]

Suddenly, in these texts of Isaiah and fragments of other books, we have Hebrew copies of Biblical books a thousand years earlier than any we have had previously. How do they compare? There were some differences in the Book of Isaiah for example: some 13 of them. The surprising thing is that there were so few. Several of them gave us improved readings. Others seem to represent errors of the scribes of the scrolls, and our accepted text is preferable. In general these scrolls give strong support to the accuracy of the accepted text.

Secondly, these discoveries make us realize that we are not "the people of the book" but the people of books. We had come to feel that the only book that has come down from ancient times was the Bible. We suspected that

there were many other books which had somehow got lost—there are hints of some in the Bible itself. But we had never seen any. Now suddenly we have come across a group of these books, each with a character of its own, and we can better appreciate how rich the total literary heritage of our people must have been.

Thirdly, we are reminded of the great variety of Jewish religious thought and practice during the time that the Jews were an independent nation. Judaism was never a monolithic faith. There was a great deal of free religious searching. There were many differing, sometimes conflicting, groups. The break away from tradition by Reform Judaism in our day is not an innovation in Jewish history at all. Only after the destruction of the Temple was an authoritative norm fixed and some of the lesser branches growing out of the trunk of Judaism were lopped off.

Fourth, these books give us a new concept of the vitality of pre-Christian Judaism. Christian tendentious literature seeks to give the impression that at the beginning of the common era Judaism had lost its inspirational faith and had become a dry strict legalism. Here however we have an example of intensive religious loyalties, of spiritual aspirations reflected in the Psalms—all similar in spirit to that of the Bible itself.

Finally these books give us a new perspective on the background of early Christianity. There are some people who have tried to identify the Qumran group as being an early Christian sect. This is far-fetched. It is true, however, that there are a number of similarities between ideas found in this literature and those found in early Christianity. And there is a lot of similarity between the structure of the Qumran community and that of the early Christian church. Where does this lead us? We had long assumed that though Christianity grew out of Judaism, it had drawn many of its ideas from other sources. Now we find that some of what we had thought to be original or at least non-Jewish in Christianity is also derived from Jewish sources or influence—except that they are derived from sectarian groups outside the main stream of Judaism, of whose existence we had not known previously.

To me there is a special significance in the timing of the acquisition of these scrolls. As in so many other aspects of contemporary Israeli history, there is a certain mystic element and dramatic appropriateness in the working out of destiny. The original scrolls were obtained by Professor Sukenik on the very day when the Partition Plan had been voted by the United Nations—and a barrier was being erected separating Jewish from Arab areas.[47] The Jewish nation was about to emerge and as though symbolically it was associated with this tie to the heritage of the Jewish past. The second batch of scrolls was obtained by his son Professor Yigal Yadin— who had been Chief of Staff of the Israeli army during the War for Independence. And the final scroll was obtained after the last war, the one in June.

Does it not seem as though there is a mystic pattern through it all? The modern State of Israel is linked to its historic past. The nation which won its right to live by force of arms remains the "People of the Book."

May we never lose sight of the inspiration that comes to us from knowledge of our past. May we never forget that Israel—one of the world's newest nations—is also one of the world's oldest nations. May we never become insensitive to the spiritual imperatives of our very existence. The ancient scrolls that come from the area of the Dead Sea still have the potential of life and light and inspiration for the people of Israel.

Marc Saperstein became the Principal of the Leo Baeck College on 1 July 2006. Previously he held prestigious positions at Harvard Divinity School, Washington University in St. Louis, and The George Washington University in Washington, DC. Author of five books and more than fifty articles on various aspects of Jewish history literature, and thought, he is widely recognized as perhaps the preeminent authority on the history of Jewish preaching. Before leaving the United States, he was Vice President of the American Academy for Jewish Research.

Notes

[1]See the examples in Harold I. Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit: Topical Sermons 1933–1980*, ed. Marc Saperstein (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000).

[2]The article appeared as Edmund Wilson, "A Reporter at Large: The Scrolls from the Dead Sea," *The New Yorker* 31, no. 13 (14 May 1955): 45–121. The book, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (London: W.H. Allen, 1955) appeared soon afterward and was reviewed twice in *The New York Times* in October 1955. See Charles Poore, "Books of the Times," *The New York Times* (13 October 1955): 29; and Frank M. Cross, "From Manuscripts Found in a Cave," *The New York Times* (16 October 1955): BR1, BR 31.

[3]Edith Brodsky, "The 7 Dead Sea Scrolls," *American Judaism* 5, no. 2 (1955): 14–16.

[4]The annotations here serve to indicate, where possible, the original sources of Saperstein's information and to provide reference for the reader to more extensive and more recent discussion of the particular topic.

[5]Wilson, 45, col. 1. For discussion of the identification of these Bedouin discoverers and on the reliability of the story and the efforts of scholars to validate it, see Hershel Shanks, *The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Random House, 1998), 3–23.

[6]Ibid. Athanasius Yeshue Samuel (1907–1995) was the Turkish-born archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem until he left for the United States, settling in New Jersey in 1949. Samuel recounts the tale of his involvement with the scrolls in his autobiography, *Treasure of Qumran: My Story of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

[7]Ibid., 45, col. 2.

[8]Ibid. Wilson describes how the priest called the scrolls, "dirty old rolls."

[9]The "new" State of Israel did not yet exist. The U.N. partition plan for Palestine was only ratified later that year as U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 on 29 November. The British mandate ended on 14 May 1948. Wilson devotes several paragraphs to explaining the division between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem in the period when the scrolls were first for sale and the difficulty that would have existed for the Bedouin to have moved back and forth between the two communities (45, cols. 2–3). Saperstein's statement should better be understood as "Jewish territory," as he was well aware of these facts and discusses them later in the sermon.

[10]According to Wilson, the amount was £50. Ibid., 45, col. 3. From here, Saperstein passes over Wilson's long discussion of the archbishop's role in examining the scrolls and his reputation among scholars while he was in Jerusalem and after his departure for the United States in 1948. Wilson, 46 (col. 3) – 48 (col. 1). He returns to it briefly later in the sermon. Sukenik's account of the events, including diary entries, is published by his son, Yigael Yadin, in the book, *The Message of the Scrolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 16–21.

[11]Eleazar Lipa Sukenik (1889–1953), educated at Dropsie College in Philadelphia (doctorate, 1926). Sukenik taught at the Hebrew University from 1935 until his death in 1953. From 1926 until 1935 he was affiliated with the university as a field archaeologist.

[12]Both Saperstein and Wilson, as well as Sukenik's diary, leave the intermediary unnamed. Sukenik describes him as an old friend, an Armenian dealer of antiquities acting on behalf of an Arab dealer in Bethlehem (Yadin, 16). Accounts by other contemporary participants provide the name "Mr. Ohan" for the Armenian. See, for example, George Kiraz, ed., *Anton Kiraz's Archive on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 244–245. He has since been identified as an Armenian Christian named Nasri Ohan. See James VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 6.

[13]Yadin is quoted in Wilson, 48, col. 3.

[14]For the quotation and the description of the press conference see Wilson, 49, cols. 1–3. The press conference was covered by the American press. See, for example, Julius Louis Meltzer, "10 Ancient Scrolls Found in Palestine," *The New York Times* (25 April 1948): 6.

[15]Wilson, 129 (col. 1) – 130 (col. 2). The information about Yadin's hotel stay is not in the Wilson article. Its source is unidentified. For Yadin's account see *The Message of the Scrolls*, 39–52.

[16]Although not a direct quote from Wilson, it accurately captures the attitude of many of the metropolitan's contacts. Wilson notes that Tovia Wechsler, an Israeli Hebrew scholar, was:

unable to believe that [the scrolls] were as old as the Metropolitan hoped. Mr. Wechsler pointed at the table on which the manuscripts had been laid … and declared [to the metropolitan], "If that table were a box, and you filled it with pound notes, you couldn't even manage the value of the scrolls if they are two thousand years old, as you say." (Wilson, 47, col. 1.)

[17]Concerning the activities of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) and the photographing of the scrolls see the account by photographer John Trevor, *The Untold Story of Qumran* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965). The ASOR publication of the scrolls appeared as Millar Burrows, John C. Trever, and William H. Brownlee, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery Vol. 1: The Isaiah Manuscript and the Habakkuk Commentary; Vol. 2, fasc. 2: Plates and Transcription of the Manual of Discipline* (New Haven, CT: ASOR, 1950–1951).

[18]Wilson, 129 (col. 1) – 130 (col. 2) and Brodsky, 15, col. 1.

[19]Wilson., 54 (col. 2) – 55 (col. 1); 74 (col. 2) – 82 (col. 2). The discovery of the first cave began a race between the Bedouin and the professional archaeologists to find additional material. Cave 2 was discovered in February 1952 by the Bedouin. That same year caves 3 and 5 were found by archaeologists; caves 4 and 6 were discovered by the Bedouin. Caves 7, 8, 9, and 10 were found in 1954 by the archaeologists. But, in 1956, cave 11, a source of very significant and relatively intact material, was discovered by the Bedouin. See Weston W. Fields, "Discovery and Purchase" in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls,* Vol. 1, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. Vanderkam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 208–212.

[20]Solomon Zeitlin (1892–1976) was professor of rabbinics at Dropsie College in Philadelphia and longtime editor of the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (*JQR*). Between 1949 and 1964, Zeitlin wrote some two dozen academic articles questioning the scrolls' age and authenticity. Zeitlin is discussed only briefly in Wilson, 119, col. 1. Although a teacher of Orlinsky, he does not appear in the interview in the Brodsky article. It seems most likely that Saperstein knew Zeitlin's views concerning the scrolls from several articles in *The New York Times.* See, for example, his letter to the editor of 6 November 1955, just a month before this sermon was given:

> I have on numerous occasions in articles in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* contested the view that these scrolls date from a pre-Christian period. My reasons for so holding are that the scrolls contain terms and phrases, as well as punctuation, which originated among the Jews in the medieval period, and that there are references to Jewish laws which we know definitely were enacted long after the rise of Christianity (*The New York Times* [6 November 1955]: BR60).

[21]Brodsky, 15–16. Harry M. Orlinsky (1908–1992) was, after all, a student of Zeitlin. While he did not suggest in the article that the scrolls were medieval, Orlinsky argued that the evidence for a clear dating of the material to the Second Commonwealth period of Jewish history was not well grounded. For one, Orlinsky challenged the evidence for dating the material based on carbon 14 testing, since the work carried out had been on fabric found with the scrolls and not the scrolls themselves. He indicated that the jars in which the scrolls were found dated to the Roman period (first century CE) and not the Hellenistic period (second century BCE). Additionally, the script of the scrolls had now contemporary inscriptions on parchment with which to be compared, making paleography a poor tool for solving the dating dilemma. Finally, the identification of the community that produced the scrolls with the Essenes was troublesome, as the description of them from ancient witnesses, such as Josephus and others, disagreed with some of the materials in the scrolls. Brodsky, 15. For further discussion of Orlinsky's positions see the article by Kalman in this volume.

[22]The scrolls do not all date from the same time. General consensus now places the copying process between the second century BCE and the year 68 CE, when the community at the settlement of Qumran near where the caves were discovered was destroyed. For a brief overview of the methods for dating the scrolls, see VanderKam and Flint, 20–33. The authors provide a bibliography of more extensive material on this topic.

[23]The source of this conclusion is not clear. By "no parchment," Saperstein must have intended "individual sheets of parchment," as almost all the Dead Sea material is ink on parchment. Additionally, the statement here refers to the first scrolls discovered rather than the thousands of individual fragments found later in the additional caves.

[24]This statement is Saperstein's attempt to simplify a far more complex issue. No coins were found in the caves with the scrolls, as Wilson makes clear (77). At the site of Qumran, however, more than 1,200 coins were found, dating from 136 BCE to 37 BCE and from 4 BCE to 68 CE; additionally, thirteen coins from 132 CE to 135 CE were found, along with a very small handful of coins dating from the period "gaps." See Wilson, 77–78. Saperstein's conclusion is based on his reading that the destruction of the site in 68 CE and the limited number of later coins suggests a primary settlement of those who produced the scrolls in the period before 68 CE. For more recent discussion of the coinage, see Yaakov Meshorer, "Numismatics," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Vol. 2*, 619–620. For the importance of the coins in dating the settlement at Qumran see Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), especially 49–68, 188–193.

[25]Brodsky, 15.

[26]According to Wilson, the testing gave a date range of between 168 BCE and 233 CE (Wilson, 82, col. 3). According to Orlinsky in the Brodsky article, the test showed that the linen was dated to 33 CE, plus or minus two hundred years! (15). Saperstein has accepted the dating while, for certainty's sake, he has chosen to overlook the problems with the testing. In fact, his subsequent statement, "Now it is conceivable that the wrappers and containers were old and the contents from a later date, but that is very unlikely," takes up Orlinsky's critique that the wrappers were tested and not the scrolls, but ultimately he dismisses it. For recent discussion of the carbon 14 dating for the actual scrolls see George Doudna, "Dating the Scrolls on the Basis of Radiocarbon Analysis," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, 2 Vols., ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 1:430–471.

[27]Wilson provides rather limited discussion (50 [col. 3] – 51 [col. 2]) of the efforts of paleographers to date the scrolls according to the script. He only briefly mentions the conclusion of Professor William F. Albright, of the Johns Hopkins University, that the script dated the material to c. 100 BCE. By contrast (see n. 18 above), Orlinsky was concerned that paleography could not supply a date because it required contemporary inscriptions with which to compare the script of the scrolls. Since these had not come to light, no comparison could be made, and the dating remained open: "[I]t is impossible for anyone to determine the date of the scrolls within several hundred years" (Brodsky, 15).

[28]Saperstein's insistence as to the early date of the scrolls may have been reinforced by HUC-JIR president and well-respected researcher and popularizer of archaeology, Nelson Glueck. In Glueck's *New York Times* book review in November 1955, he agreed with a dating of the scrolls between 100 BCE and 70 CE. See "New Light on the Dim Past," *The New York Times* (20 November 1955): BR54–BR55. Glueck's influence in these matters in this period should not be underestimated.

[29]Here Saperstein summarizes Wilson, 56 (col. 2) – 70 (col. 3). For an extensive discussion of Jewish sectarianism and the Essene hypothesis see Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1995), 65–157; and Flint and VanderKam, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 239–292.

[30]Here Saperstein summarizes Wilson, 70 (col. 3) – 77 (col. 1). Wilson devotes these pages to his discussion with Roland de Vaux concerning the ruins at Qumran. De Vaux (1903–1971) was director of the French-Dominican École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem and a trustee of the Palestine Archaeological Museum. At the request of G. Lankester Harding, the director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, de Vaux would become the chief excavator at Khirbet Qumran. From 1954 until 1970 he served as the editor-in-chief for the publication of the manuscripts. De Vaux summarized the findings of his excavations in *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: The British Academy and Oxford University Press, 1973). For a more recent assessment of the material finds, see Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls.*

[31]Wilson, 79, col. 1.

[32]This conclusion, while generally accepted, has been challenged by some. See, for example, Norman Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

[33]Wilson, 82, col. 2.

[34]Saperstein intended to identify Millar Burrows, not Burroughs. The quotation can be found in Wilson, 121, col. 2. Millar Burrows (1889–1980) was Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology at the Yale Divinity School from 1934 to 1958. As noted above, he was largely responsible for the ASOR Dead Sea Scrolls publication project and, in addition, was the author of two popular books on the scrolls: *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1955) and *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1958).

[35]The topics of the age and reliability of the received text of the Hebrew Bible was of limited interest to Wilson, who notes, importantly, that "[i]n order to understand the importance of the Dead Sea manuscripts … one has to realize that, except for a fragment or two, our earliest text of the Hebrew Bible—the so-called Masoretic text—is no more ancient than the ninth Christian century" (Wilson, 46, col. 3). The topic is far more prominent in the Brodsky article, which includes an explicit discussion of the "Codex Petropolitanus, [which] is lodged in Leningrad and was produced in the year 916c.e." (Brodsky, 16). Saperstein used the more popular name, the St. Petersburg Codex, to identify this volume. Current scholarship dates the copying of the manuscript to the first decade of the eleventh century. Although this manuscript served as the base text for many later editions of the Hebrew Bible, the Aleppo Codex, copied in 930 CE and preserved incompletely, is an earlier witness to the state of the Hebrew Bible in the Middle Ages. However, it only garnered public attention when it was turned over to the president of the State of Israel, Itzhak ben Zvi, in 1958.

The Brodsky article highlights some of the difficulties that Saperstein lists, but it is the Glueck review of Burrows in *The New York Times* a month prior (see above) that emphasized the importance of the scrolls from this perspective:

> IMAGINE the excitement attendant upon discovering leather scrolls of the Biblical book of Isaiah written in the square or Aramaic alphabet of a type common in Palestinian inscriptions from about the first century B.C. It was from this alphabet that the Hebrew script still used for printing Hebrew texts was developed in later times. This and thousands of fragments of other books of the Old Testament were found, being some nine centuries earlier than the previously, earliest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible. In addition to fairly complete texts of Isaiah and two of the three chapters of Habakkuk, there are fragments of practically all the other books of the Old Testament. They furnish invaluable evidence of the fidelity of the later Masoretic text (Glueck, "New Light," BR54).

For recent discussion on the Hebrew Bible text and the scrolls see, Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

[36]Wilson, 64 (col. 3) – 66 (col. 3).

[37]Quote from Wilson, 118, col. 2. The discussion of John the Baptist is found in Wilson, 112 (col. 2) – 116 (col. 2). In the 1950s, much attention was paid to the relationship among the scrolls, the Qumran community, and early Christianity. Much of the discussion was polemical and was aimed at undermining Christian faith. For more recent, and level-headed, discussion, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) and the essays collected in James R. Davila, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah)* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 46.

[38]Glueck challenges this reading of the relationship of Christianity and the scrolls in his review of Burrows (BR54). However, this argument better served the homiletical aim of the sermon, to highlight Reform Judaism as a modern, spiritually powerful sect of Judaism.

[39]The inspiration for this sermon seems to have been twofold. First, Saperstein and his wife were on sabbatical from his congregation from January to August 1967. The first few months they traveled in Southeast Asia, and from March until June they resided at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion campus in Jerusalem. Although scheduled to leave in early June, they were delayed as a result of the Six Day War. Following their departure they continued their travels in Ethiopia and South Africa. Saperstein recounted his experiences during the war in a sermon he delivered on 8 September 1967, titled, "A Great Miracle Happened There." The sermon, with annotation, is reprinted in Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit*, 259–266. In the period immediately following the war, Nelson Glueck was in Jerusalem and at HUC-JIR. As a result of the fighting there was damage to the Rockefeller Museum, where the thousands of scroll fragments that had been the property of Jordan and that were captured by Israel were housed. As a result the scrolls became a regular part of conversation in the HUC-JIR community in Jerusalem. See Nelson Glueck, *Dateline: Jerusalem—A Diary* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1968). In addition, on 19 August 1967 Edmund Wilson published a second article on the scrolls in the *New Yorker*, "A Reporter at Large," 38–74. In May of that year Wilson had returned to Israel to follow up on his earlier reporting on the scrolls. In his discussions with Yigael Yadin and Hebrew University professor David Flusser, it became clear that growing hostility between Israel and her neighbors echoed for these men the ancient battles they studied in relation to the scrolls. This notion of the continuity of the relationship between Jews and the land of Israel is an underlying theme of the article and is reflected quite clearly in Saperstein's sermon.

[40]The Shrine of the Book was inaugurated on 20 April 1965. Although Saperstein had visited Israel many times before, including leading the first National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) tour in 1953, the quality of the description here suggests a recent visit to the museum, likely during the 1967 sabbatical. On the history of the Shrine of the Book see Adolfo D. Roitman, "Shrine of the Book," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, *Vol.* 2, 874–875. Certainly Glueck would have encouraged a visit had the couple not done so before. In 1965, following the opening,

Time Magazine reported, "And from Hebrew Union College's President Nelson Glueck came the shrine's greatest compliment: 'A book is a shrine in itself, but it is doubly so when housed in a shrine like this. Time becomes timeless here.'" ("Endless Cave in Jerusalem," *Time Magazine* [30 April 1965], accessed online 22 January 2009 at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,898691,00.html).

The description of the Shrine of the Book was not explicitly shaped by recourse to Wilson. In his 1967 article he describes the new Israel Museum but not the Shrine of the Book (Wilson, 1967, 49, col. 3). When the article was published as part of an updated book, Edmund Wilson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: 1947–1969* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), an extensive description of the Shrine of the Book was appended to the discussion of the Israel Museum (240–243).

[41]Saperstein appears to have returned to the first Wilson article in preparing this sermon. The concept of a "Battle of the Scholars" appears in quote from William F. Albright, describing the fights over dating in the period following the discovery of the first scrolls. Commenting in 1951 he offered, "During the past three years … there has been a debate about the chronology of the scrolls which has at times attained the status of a veritable *guerre des savants.*" Wilson (1955), 102, col. 3.

[42]This paragraph summarizes his statements about the dating in the first sermon. By the very early 1960s, although he did not change his opinion, Zeitlin by and large refrained from writing about the scrolls in the public and academic press.

[43]Certain similarities in theology, rites, and practices are similarly described in the Qumran manuscripts and in Josephus and Philo's depictions of the Essenes. These include, for example, a commitment to divine foreknowledge and a certain type of fatalism. Additionally, the rites of membership in the group and a commitment to shared community property are quite similar. Both groups also had strong commitment to stringent Sabbath observance and ritual purity. The differences include Philo's description of the Essenes as avoiding commercial activities, city-dwelling, swearing oaths, and marriage. The scrolls provide allowances for all of these.

For discussion see, Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). In recent months, Professor Rachel Elior of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has argued that the Essenes were a fictional group created by Josephus to defend against antisemitic charges made by the Romans. Josephus "wanted to explain to the Romans that the Jews weren't all losers and traitors, that there were many exceptional Jews of religious devotion and heroism. You might say it was the first rebuttal to anti-Semitic literature…. He was probably inspired by the Spartans. For the Romans, the Spartans were the highest ideal of human behavior, and Josephus wanted to portray Jews who were like the Spartans in their ideals and high virtue." (Tim McGirk, "Scholar Claims Dead Sea Scrolls 'Authors' Never Existed," *Time*, 16 March 2009, accessed online on 31 March 2009 at http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1885421,00.html.

[44]It is impossible to identify the source of Saperstein's descriptions of the scrolls. This may have been material he learned while at the Shrine of the Book. Wilson's 1955 article makes reference to some of the scrolls (e.g, The Habbakuk Commentary, 93, col. 1.), but in 1955 he did not know the name "Genesis Apocryphon"—the scroll at that time was still known as the Lamech Scroll—and he did not discuss it in the 1967 article. For general overview of the content of these scrolls see James VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), especially the section titled, "The Seven Original Scrolls," 3–7.

[45]Since the discovery of the scrolls there had been rumors of an eighth intact scroll circulating among scholars and collectors. On 23 June Glueck visited with Kando, the antiquities dealer who had helped arrange the original sale of scrolls to Athanasius Samuel. During the visit Glueck was informed that some of Kando's merchandise—the rumored scroll, Glueck supposed—was confiscated by Israeli authorities (*Dateline: Jerusalem*, 29–30). In the last part of the diary, on 22 August 1967, Glueck noted, "One of my favorite diversions since coming here this June has been to pursue the story of the missing Dead Sea Scroll" (*Dateline: Jerusalem*, 116). Whether Glueck had begun pursuing the question while the Sapersteins were still in Jerusalem is unclear.

However, on 23 October 1968 *The New York Times* made public Israel's acquisition of an eighth scroll ("Israel Discloses Discovery of Dead Sea Scroll," [23 October 1967]: 3). This was followed several weeks later by a challenge to Israel for inappropriately confiscating the scroll (Terence Smith, "Scroll's Acquisition by Israel Criticized," *The New York Times* [11 November 1967]: 1). It would have been difficult for Saperstein to have missed these stories. The scroll, eventually called the Temple Scroll, was published by Yigael Yadin. For his description of its acquisition see Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll* (New York: Random House, 1985), 39–55.

[46]Wilson, 1955, 46, col. 3.

[47]Wilson, (1955), 48 (col. 1) – 49 (col. 3).