

## **A Note to Parents:**

As I did research on this subject, the different sources I used sometimes gave the details of this great discovery a little differently from each other. So here I have tried to write and give details in a way so that this text and audio would agree with all (or most!) of my sources. (A bibliography is included at the end of this PDF.) Also, I didn't want to include too many details, as that might make this confusing to younger children. The main point, though, is that God's Word is the same today as it was thousands of years ago; it doesn't change.

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## **A Shepherd Boy Finds the Dead Sea Scrolls** **by** **Joelee Chamberlain**

The year was 1947, and World War II had ended only 2 years before. I was almost 15 years old and was just graduating from junior high school. But at the same time that I was thinking about getting ready to go to high school (which was very important to me), clear around on the other side of the world there was a young shepherd boy who was thinking about something that was very important to him -- but he wasn't thinking about school. He was thinking about something very different. Something that really worried him.

Now, you may well be wondering what this has to do with God and the Bible. After all, before I've always talked with you about God and the Bible, haven't I? So does all of this have anything at all to do with either God or with the Bible? -- Yes, it does!!

Now this is a true story; it really happened, and it happened during my lifetime. And though I don't know as much about this story as I know about the Bible, I read up on it just to be able to tell this to you, because it's very interesting and I think you'll enjoy it very much. But how will this have anything to do with God or with the Bible? Ooohh, you just wait and see! So now we're going to go back to this worried young shepherd boy.

This young shepherd was a Be-dou-in boy. (The Bedouins are Arabs who travel around the desert, living in tents.) And this Bedouin boy's name was Mohammed Adh-Dhib. (Many Arab boys are named Mohammed after a leader of theirs who lived many years ago.)

Now, the Bedouins have lots of herds of sheep and goats. And Mohammed's job was to take care of the goats for the group of Bedouins he lived with. But what was worrying him that day? Why, one of the young goats had run away and he couldn't find it! Oh dear! He knew he would be in trouble if he lost that goat! So he began looking for it.

Now the land where this young shepherd took care of the goats was a desert. On one side of where he was there was a great big lake called the Dead Sea, and on the other side were cliffs with caves in them. Of course, he knew that the goat wouldn't be down by the Dead Sea drinking water, because the water of the Dead Sea is so salty that no one can drink it. In fact, it's so salty that fish can't even live in it! That's why it's called the Dead Sea.

By the way, did you know that the Bible talks about the Dead Sea? Yes, it does. But in the Bible this Dead Sea is called the Salt Sea, because it is so salty. Yes, the Bible talks about this great big lake. In fact, the Bible tells us that way back 4000 years ago in Abraham's time that enemies came around the Salt Sea and captured many people, including Abraham's nephew Lot. (But Abraham rescued his nephew.) Also, later perhaps David actually hid in some of these caves in the cliffs by the Dead Sea when he was hiding from King Saul! But let's get back to Mohammed and his lost goat.

Well, the goat wouldn't be down by the very salty Dead Sea, would it? So Mohammed thought it might be up somewhere on the cliffs. After all, goats can easily climb up cliffs, can't they? As I said, these cliffs had caves in them, and he figured that the goat may have gone into one of those many caves. But it would take Mohammed a long time to climb up and look into all of those caves, wouldn't it? Hmmm. What to do? But he had an idea. He thought, "I know what I'll do. If the goat is in a cave, I'll try to scare it out. I'll do this by throwing rocks into the caves." He figured that if a rock came flying into the cave that the goat might get scared and run out of the cave. I think that was a pretty good idea, don't you?

So Mohammed began throwing rocks into the different caves. As he threw them, the rocks would fly into the caves and go, "thud!" as they hit the ground or the side of the cave. But no goat came out. He threw rocks into several caves. Then he saw another cave. It was higher up, and the opening was small. But he picked up another rock and threw it into this cave. (He sounds like a good thrower, doesn't he?!) But this time instead of hearing "thud", Mohammed heard, "crunch". Huh?? "Crunch"?? What would be in a cave that would sound like that?! In fact, it sounded as if something had broken!

Well, this made him very curious, so he climbed and pulled himself up to where the cave was. He didn't go inside of the cave, though; he just looked into it. And what do you think he saw inside of this small cave? Why, he saw some tall clay jars standing along the

walls of the cave -- and one of the jars had broken when his rock had hit it! The pieces of the jar were scattered around the floor of the cave!

This scared him! What were jars doing in that small cave up on the side of the cliff?! This was really weird! He didn't know what was going on, but he didn't wait to find out! No. He got down and ran away from there. He didn't think about the lost goat anymore. He just ran back to his Bedouin camp. (I don't know what happened to the goat that had run away, but I'm sure it was all right. Goats are smart!)

Well, back at the camp Mohammed told a friend what had happened, and they both wondered what this was all about. Then they said to each other, "But maybe there is some treasure in those jars! After all, the jars seem to have been carefully hidden in that cave." And they said, "Who knows what might be in them?!" So, the next day the young shepherd and his friend went back to where the cave was. They were sort of scared, but they were still determined to go inside of that cave and see what was really in there. (I would have been curious, too, wouldn't you?!)

Now remember, the cave was up on the side of a cliff. So the two young Bedouins had to pull themselves up to where it was. Then they climbed up inside of the small cave and were finally in where the jars were. And then they began opening the jars.

But then they were disappointed. The first jars they opened were empty. Aww, that's not exciting, is it? But they went on opening the other jars anyway. -- And then they found that there was something inside of one of the jars! What was it?! But no. It didn't look like anything at all important. In that jar there were just 3 rolls of old-looking cloth with something inside of them. But the 2 boys went ahead and pulled the cloth coverings aside a little so they could see what was inside of them. But inside of each cloth covering was just a piece of rolled up, thin leather. The leather was so thin it was almost like thick paper.

Aww, what a disappointment! There was no treasure. Just some rolled up sort-of-like paper.

Oh, well, they decided to take the rolls back to their tents anyway and look at them.

But -- what those two young Bedouins didn't know was that they had actually found a real treasure after all! In fact, it was a treasure that came to be known as just about the greatest archeological discovery of the 20th century! It was a treasure that later people would pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for! -- But this treasure would actually be worth more than just money! You see, it would help change the way many people all over the world would think, and it would encourage many others! But, as I just said, at the time,

Mohammed and his friend didn't know this.

But what was this great treasure? Okay. Let's go on and find out!

Well, the two Bedouin boys got back to the tents with their 3 rolled up packages. Inside of their tent they began unrolling the thin leather. And it certainly didn't look like a treasure to them! But they did notice that there was some strange writing on the leather, writing that they couldn't read. So then they showed this leather with its strange writing to their family and friends. But they couldn't read it either. What could it all be about? Why were these hidden away in a cave as if they were something precious? And who had hidden them there? They just didn't know.

Well, Mohammed and his friend didn't know what to do with these 3 rolls of very thin leather with their strange writing, so they just rolled them back up, put them in a bag, and simply hung them from a tent pole. What to do with them?

Well, finally they decided to take them to the marketplace. Maybe they could sell them to someone there, at least make a little money off of them. So they went to the marketplace in the town of Bethlehem near where they lived. "Bethlehem"?! Hmmm! Does that name sound familiar to you?! Yes, this is the same Bethlehem where 3000 years ago David had lived! The same David who had killed Goliath and had later become the greatest king of Israel! And it's the same Bethlehem where 2000 years ago Jesus had been born!

So all of this about the young shepherd and the rolls of leather was happening in what we call "Bible lands", wasn't it? And it was happening when I myself was just a teenager. Probably this young shepherd and I were about the same age.

Anyway, Mohammed and his friend got to the marketplace there in Bethlehem, and they went to see a shopkeeper. His name was Khalil Eskander, but he was usually just called Kando. Well, Kando decided to buy the rolls of leather. You see, Kando fixed shoes and sold things in his shop, including some very old things. At first Kando thought he might be able to cut the leather up and fix shoes with it. But he looked again at the writing on the leather. He couldn't read it himself, but he thought, "Hmmm. Maybe this writing might mean something to someone. Why, maybe I can sell it for more money than I paid for it." And then Kando thought, "And maybe there are more rolls, too, and I could sell those as well."

So, Kando took a friend with him, and they went back to the caves near the Dead Sea where the two young Bedouins had found the rolls of leather, and they began looking through more caves around there. After looking in several caves, why, sure enough,

Kando and his friend found some more jars with rolls of leather in them. And these rolls had writing on them, too. But it, too, was writing that they couldn't read. But Kando realized that these weren't just rolls of leather; they were actually scrolls, old books of some sort.

You see, a very long time ago people didn't have the kind of books that we have now. No. Instead, when they wanted to make a book, they would write on several or even many pieces of some kind of usually paper-like material. Each separate piece might be about the size of a regular piece of paper that we use now, about the size you use for schoolwork. Then after they had finished writing on these pieces, they would sew all of the pieces together into one long piece. After that they would simply roll the one long piece up into a roll and keep it that way. This rolled up thing was called a sc-roll. If they wanted to read a scroll, they would unwind it to the place they wanted to read. Then when they were finished reading, they'd roll it back up again. They might even wrap cloth around the scroll to keep it clean, like the cloth around the 3 scrolls that the young shepherd Mohammed and his friend had found.

In fact, did you know that back when the Bible was first written that the Bible was not all just in one big book like we have it now? No. The Bible was a collection of a whole bunch of scrolls. There would be a scroll with just the book of Genesis, another scroll with just the Psalms, yet another scroll with just the book of Daniel, and so on like that.

But now let's go back to Kando as he was finding more of these scroll/books in jars in the caves by the Dead Sea.

Well, Kando took the scrolls back home with him. And at that point Kando made what was to become a very important decision. He decided to take the scrolls to Jerusalem and show them to a Christian leader there. (Yes, again this is the same Jerusalem that we read about in the Bible! The Bible city of Jerusalem is still there today and is thousands of years old. So in our story today that took place when I was a teenager, we hear about the Dead Sea, Bethlehem, Jerusalem! Those are all places that we read about in the Bible, aren't they?! And those places are all still there today!) But back to our true story.

Anyway, Kando took the scrolls to Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem Kando showed 4 of the scrolls to an important Christian preacher named Mar Samuel. Mr. Samuel was very interested in the scrolls, but he couldn't read them, either. But Mr. Samuel figured they might be important, so he bought the 4 scrolls from Kando.

But, remember, Kando had more scrolls, so he went to another man in Jerusalem and sold him 3 more of the scrolls. Kando was happy to be making so much money!

Well, the next day this second man in Jerusalem telephoned a very educated man named Eliezar Su-KE-nik. So the day after that the second man and Mr. Sukenik got together, and he showed Mr. Sukenik the scrolls. And when Mr. Sukenik saw the scrolls and the writing on them, he got very excited! You see, Mr. Sukenik was a Jew, and he could speak and read Hebrew, which is the language of the Jews who live in Israel today. And right away he saw that the writing on the scrolls was in Hebrew -- and he could read it!! And he knew that the writing was very old! Yes, these scrolls were really very, very old, what we call ancient. And Mr. Sukenik realized that he was reading an ancient copy of a scroll of Isaiah, a book that we have in our Bibles today!! Just imagine how excited he must have been! Why, it makes me excited just thinking about it!

Well, to make a long story short (as the saying goes!) other people heard about these scrolls. And scholars, very learned men, were also very excited about this discovery of these ancient scrolls. So, more people began searching the caves above the Dead Sea. And many more ancient scrolls (though mostly just parts of scrolls) were found there in jars inside of caves in the cliffs beside the Dead Sea. These scrolls were soon called "the Dead Sea Scrolls", because they were found near the Dead Sea.

These scrolls that were found there in the caves near the Dead Sea were mostly written on very thin pieces of leather called parchment, but some of them were written on a kind of paper made from a plant called pa-PY-rus, and one scroll was even written on very thin copper! And over a period of about 10 years, altogether about 930 scrolls were found in 11 different caves! Wow!!

Well, scholars soon realized that these scrolls were written about 2,000 years ago! They were really excited about them! And over the last about 70 years since the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, many very learned men have studied these ancient scrolls and have been able to translate them. So what did these ancient scrolls say?

Well, many of the scrolls simply told about things in the lives of the people who had lived then. So from those scrolls the scholars were able to learn a lot about the life of the people who had collected and written the scrolls about 2000 years ago. That would be interesting, wouldn't it? But that isn't the most important thing about the Dead Sea Scrolls. Well, then, what is the most important thing about these ancient scrolls? All right, I'm going to tell you that now.

You see, about 230 of the Dead Sea Scrolls (about 25% or a quarter of them) were parts of the Bible!! Yes, the people who had hidden those scrolls so long ago not only wrote about what they themselves did then, but they had also had or made copies of the Bible for themselves. In fact, some of these copies of parts of the Bible were written 100 to 300 years before Jesus came to earth! That's more than 2000 years ago!

But why had people done this, made copies of the Bible? Well, let's think about that for a minute. To start with, the Bible wasn't all written at the same time, was it? No. Thousands of years ago when God first had men write the Bible, God had different men write different parts of the Bible over a period of several hundred years. In fact, there were over 30 different men who wrote books of the Bible at different times. God had Moses write Genesis, Exodus, and 3 other books of the Bible. About 500 years after Moses, King Solomon wrote some books of the Bible. God had men write down the other history parts of the Bible, too. And the prophets (like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, and the other prophets) each wrote the book of the Bible that is named after them. And, as I said before, these were each in separate scrolls, though later sometimes the smaller books by the prophets were all put together into one scroll.

But there wasn't just one copy made of each scroll of a book of the Bible with that one being the only one. Why not? Why was there more than one copy of them? Well, people wanted copies of these Bible scrolls, so many copies were very carefully made. Also, maybe a copy would start wearing out, so it would be copied again.

And hundreds of years after these scrolls were first written, the men who had lived around the Dead Sea had also very carefully made copies of the Bible scrolls, and for some reason they had hidden these copies in jars in the caves there. (We don't really know why they hid them there.)

Why, even now, there are many copies of the Bible, aren't there? (Of course, most of these aren't scrolls; they are regular books.) I have several copies of the Bible myself. You may have one. Your church has some. Book stores carry many copies of the Bible. In fact, copies of the Bible have been made in many, many different languages, translated, so that people all over the world can read God's word in their own language. In China, in Japan, in India, France, Mexico, Iran, Vietnam, in the many countries of Africa. All over the world, different countries with different languages have copies of God's word, the Bible, that were carefully made in their own language. And that way many, many people all over the world can read for themselves what the Lord God tells us in the Bible.

But here's another thought. The Bible wasn't first written in English! Did you ever stop to think about that?! No, nearly all of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew (the language that most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were later written in), though a little of the Old Testament was written in a language called A-ra-MA-ic. And the New Testament was first written in Greek. Now, can you read Hebrew or Greek? I can't! So I'm glad that someone who could read Hebrew and Greek carefully read the Bible in Hebrew and Greek and then translated it into English. Aren't you?! That way I can read God's word for myself, just as you can read God's word for yourself.

Well, as I said, over the last 70 years many learned men, scholars, have studied the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Hebrew, though a few of them were also written in Aramaic and even a few in Greek. And guess what?! Why, among these Dead Sea Scrolls the scholars have found at least parts from all of the books of the Old Testament except from the book of Esther!! Now, sometimes maybe there are just a few words from a scroll of a book of the Bible. Other times there might be several pages. You see, over the hundreds of years since the scrolls were first put into those jars, many of the scrolls have broken up. I even read that perhaps birds may have taken parts of the scrolls to use in making their nests!

And among the Dead Sea Scrolls were found different numbers of scrolls for all of the various books of the Old Testament (except, again, of Esther), but there was always more than just one scroll found for each book of the Bible. For instance, there were parts of 2 different scrolls found of the book of Joshua, parts of 8 different scrolls found of the book of Daniel, about 20 of the book of Isaiah, 24 of the book of Genesis, and parts of 39 different scrolls found of the book of Psalms!

Now, I said the Dead Sea Scrolls have parts from all of the Old Testament books (except Esther). But it seems that there aren't any copies of the New Testament. Now, why might it be that there are no copies of the New Testament books found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well? Think about that for a minute. What do you think?

Well, there are two reasons for that. Now, the New Testament is all about Jesus when He was here on earth and then what happened after He went back to heaven, isn't it? So, the first reason that there might not be copies of the New Testament among the Dead Sea Scrolls is that scholars now-a-days figure that most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written between 100 and 300 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which, of course, would have been long before the New Testament was even written! Though a few of the Dead Sea Scrolls had been written around the time Jesus was on earth or maybe even a few years later.

But the second reason there might not be copies of the New Testament among the Dead Sea Scrolls, is because even though the people who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls were Jews, they weren't Christians; they weren't believers in Jesus. So they may not have cared about Jesus and what He did. So they just had the writings that were important to them, which would have been the Old Testament.

Now, as I said earlier, several of the Dead Sea Scrolls were parts of the book of Isaiah. In fact, one of the scrolls that Mr. Sukenik bought is quite a bit of the book of Isaiah. But another scroll (one of the ones that Mr. Samuel bought) is all of the long book of Isaiah!



The whole thing!! This is now called the Isaiah scroll.

This Isaiah scroll is made out of 17 pieces of very thin leather (of parchment). Then these 17 pieces had been sewn together, making one long piece of leather. This Isaiah scroll is 24 feet long and 11 inches high! (In metric that is almost 7½ meters long and 28 centimeters high.) Wow! Why, 24 feet would be as long as if 4 tall men were lying down on the ground, head to toe, in a line!

But just imagine! We now have an over 2,000 year old copy of one whole book of the Bible -- and it's a big, long book of the Bible. A copy of Isaiah which had been copied over 100 years before Jesus came to earth!

Well, over the years scholars have examined and translated the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls, and what do you think they found? Why, they found that these Bible scrolls say the same thing that our Bibles say today!! Of course, as the scholars translated these Dead Sea Scrolls, sometimes they would find a little different spelling of a word or a little different word here or there or something else that was just a little different in the different Dead Sea Scrolls or a little different from other old copies of the Bible that we have that aren't the Dead Sea Scrolls. But these were not important differences. In fact, some of the scrolls were in the old Hebrew that the Bible was first written in, but then some other scrolls were in not so old Hebrew to make it easier for the people back then who would be reading them. It is just like when now we change the old English word "runneth" into "runs" or "thine" into "yours" or "thou shalt" into "you shall". They mean the same thing, don't they? But one way is easier for us to understand than the other, isn't it? In the same way, the ancient Jews sometimes had some copies of God's word where the words were made easier for them to understand.

Now, there are many ways we can know that the Bible is the same now as it was when first written, but one way we can know is because of those ancient Dead Sea Scrolls. You see, the Dead Sea Scrolls show us that God's word is the same today as it was thousands of years ago. And that is very important, isn't it?

Yes, the Dead Sea Scrolls show us that God's word doesn't change!! What the Lord God was telling people thousands of years ago is the same as what the Lord God is telling you and me today, isn't it? So, this young Bedouin shepherd boy really had discovered a very great treasure that day after all, hadn't he?!

Yes, God's word, the Bible, is the very most important book in the whole world, isn't it? After all, it tells us about the Lord God and how He made the whole world and everything in it. The Bible tells us how God wants us to treat each other. It tells us how to live in a way that makes God happy, and, of course, if we make God happy, we will be

happy, too, won't we? But most importantly, the Bible tells us about Jesus.

But, as I just said, most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written years before Jesus came to earth and died for our sins. So, of course, those don't tell about when Jesus was on earth, do they? -- But do you remember that I said that one of the Dead Sea Scrolls was the whole, long book of Isaiah (which is in the Old Testament)? Now, the prophet Isaiah had written this book 700 years before Jesus came to earth. And this copy of the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll was copied at least 100 to 200 years before Jesus came to earth, and it had been copied from other even older scrolls. But -- in part of the book of Isaiah there is a long prophesy about Jesus! Did you know that? The Isaiah scroll doesn't say Jesus' name, but it describes the Jewish Messiah. And Christians know that the Lord Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the Christ. (Messiah and Christ mean the same thing in different languages.)

Why, in the 53rd chapter of this Isaiah scroll which had been copied about 200 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up, then died on the cross for our sins but was alive again, in this 53rd chapter Isaiah tells of how Someone would have a trial and not say anything, and how He would die for our sins, how He would die with some wicked people (remember the two thieves who were put on crosses when Jesus was?), that He would be buried with the rich (remember how Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb?), and that He would be alive again. That can only be talking about Jesus, can't it?

But why is it so important to know about Jesus? That's right. Because Jesus is the One Who made a way that we can be with God someday. And how did Jesus do this? Yes, God the Father loves us so very much that He sent Jesus (God the Son) to earth. Jesus never did any sins Himself, did He? But Jesus loves us so very much that He willingly died on the cross for our sins. Did Jesus stay dead? No. The Bible tells us that 3 days later Jesus was alive again and that hundreds of people saw Him alive before He went back to heaven. And God promised that all we have to do to have our sins forgiven is to trust in the Lord Jesus, and then He will forgive our sins. (And God always keeps His promises, doesn't He?) And then He will be our King, and someday we can be with Him. This was what the prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus and we have in the Dead Sea Scrolls, copied over 100 years before Jesus came to earth.

So Isaiah was actually talking about Jesus even though Isaiah didn't say Jesus' name, wasn't he? And you can read for yourself what Isaiah wrote in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah in your own copy of the Bible. And when you do read it, remember that what you are reading now is the same as that ancient Isaiah Dead Sea Scroll. That ancient Isaiah scroll that had been copied at least 100 to 200 years before Jesus had come to earth and had fulfilled these prophesies about Himself! And there were other prophets who wrote books that are in the Old Testament who also told about when Jesus would come to earth to save us from our sins.

Also, the prophet Isaiah and other prophets tell that the Lord Jesus will come back someday and be King of everyone and everything. And those who had trusted in Him would be with Him. That hasn't happened yet though, has it? But the prophecies that Jesus would come the first time and die for our sins, those prophecies really happened, didn't they? And since those prophecies happened, then, of course, we can know that the prophecies about Jesus coming back again will also happen, can't we?

And just think! When you read those prophecies, you are reading the same thing that people over 2000 years ago were reading (but in a different language, of course)! Why, God's word doesn't change, does it?! No! We know that our Bible today says the same things as it said when it was first written thousands of years ago!

And now today, 70 years after I graduated from junior high school, because that young Bedouin shepherd had lost his goat, I can tell my own great-grandchildren one way the Lord has shown us that His word, the Bible, doesn't change! That we can trust the Bible to say what God wanted it to say when it was first written! How wonderful! And also how funny! Because the Lord did this by using a lost goat!

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