

NEW TESTAMENT AMONG DEAD SEA SCROLLS?

Carsten Thiede has claimed that in the caves of Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were uncovered there are tiny fragments that can be identified as New Testament writings.

“Not long ago, an attempt was made to identify a few very small parchment fragments found at Qumran with several minute portions of the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of Mark. This, it was charged, is proof-positive that the ancient sect possessed in its library at least part of the New Testament. Perhaps it shows that the sect was itself Christian. But when the fragments were examined closely, all that could be made out were just a few Greek letters, which could have come from just about any document. It would be like claiming to have found the original copy of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, based on a single piece of Elizabethan parchment, bearing the words, “...to be...”. How do we know that the next words in the missing line would read, “or not to be... that is the question”? The scholarly community has not taken this claim seriously, and the consensus remains that no New Testament manuscript fragments have ever been found among the many thousands of parchments and papyri which have come to light in the vicinity of the Dead Sea” (page 211, Dead Sea Scrolls). Thiede is the Christian crank author of the silly book *The Jesus Papyrus* who claims to have found that the New Testament was among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Even if snippets of the New Testament were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves where the Scrolls were placed so long ago it would mean they got there after the scrolls were put there perhaps even a century after Jesus died. The evidence is that most of the Gospel material was hidden in the first century and the other New Testament writings would not have been copied well enough. Christianity was a tiny sect in those years and its writings would not have been sought after much.

Why would Essenes who wanted to protect their holy books by putting them away waste time storing any New Testament books? The Essenes were not Christians and would have seen Jesus as a threat for he grounded himself in the Pharisee side and ignored their holy teacher of righteousness. The Essenes believed that God could abandon his people to the extent that the true faith and scripture would be lost but the New Testament did not share this paranoia. Jesus said he would be with his Church forever.

It is mad to suggest like Thiede that a hunted people would store Christian documents and ask for trouble! They left their documents there for Jews to find them. To have gospels there risked the whole thing being burnt and regarded as bastardised scripture. The Jews had an aversion to any book that altered the word of God. The Law of Moses required zero tolerance for heresy.

Nothing was deposited in the cave after 68 AD when the Romans ruined the settlement in that area. Archaeology has shown that the caves were uninhabited from that year on. Some think that during the thirties of the next century that scrolls were deposited there because of the need to keep texts safe during the rebellion of Bar Kochba. The objection to this is that scrolls were not used any more then. They used books. But the caves would have been visited after the attack in 68 AD to be checked on and for more materials to be added. And if anybody was going to write texts and put them in the cave it would have been communities that liked to stand aloof from the world like the Qumran community did. Some would still have used scrolls just like some people like to use Lifebuoy soap today though there are fancier and better soaps. This would account for the old-fashioned way of recording.

Since testing the allegedly New Testament bits would destroy them it is impossible to determine if the texts are forgeries which were slipped in when nobody was looking after the Scrolls grabbed the world’s attention. That is just what the Christian Church which treated the scrolls as if it had a monopoly on them for decades would want somebody to do. All you had to do was to scrape a bit off here and write a bit there to alter them. If a scholar gets a fragment that could look like a match with the New Testament all he has to do to make it fit is break a tiny piece off here and there and scrape off some ink and presto a perfect or near-perfect fit!

It does not matter if some of the epistles were found for they give no evidence for Jesus or the existence of the gospels. The only worrying alleged quote among the scrolls is Mark 12:17, “Jesus answered them saying, Give to Caesar...etc”. But Jesus means the Saviour. It could well be part of something like, “Jacob is my saviour for he saved me from drowning and I asked him about giving Caesar the girl. The saviour answered, ‘Give to Caesar the girl he wants.’” Since the text is so fragmented you can make any construction you wish of it out of suitable writings but they all add up to being mere speculation.

Think about this. A fragment was found among the Scrolls that seemed to quote James 1:23,24, “Don’t just listen to the word but do it.” How could something Christians often say like this spontaneously be provably a quote from James? We all

say, "Practice what you preach". The alleged quote from Acts 27:38, "When they had eaten they left the ship", could have come from any number of books. There are seven such fragments.

It is a fact that some of the material in the writings was stolen by the New Testament authors. The Son of God scroll is close to Luke 1:32-35. This is plagiarism. If that scroll had been a bit more tattered Christians would be thinking that it was from Luke's gospel even if the wording was not exactly the same.

The Jesus Papyrus devotes a chapter to consideration of the idea that bits of the NT were happened upon in Cave 7 at Qumran. Jose O Callaghan claimed this in 1972. 7Q5 was taken to be Mark 6:52-53 and 7Q4 was thought to be from the first letter to Timothy. The other seven fragments can be traced to a much later time.

There is a word that starts off with the wrong letter making many believe the text is not Mark. It has what may be a spelling error (page 79). But The Jesus Papyrus says that it is more probably a change of spelling to reflect how the misspelled word was vocalised in Jerusalem! (page 80). So the book even turns errors into evidences that the fragment really is from Mark! It says it proves that gospel was written before 70 AD when people talked that way (page 82). Really! It could be a spelling error or it could be an indication that the fragment is not Mark. Two possibilities against and one for the text. It is still most probable then that the text is not pre-70AD. A warning notice for the Temple is supposed to have altered spelling to fit how the people pronounced the words (page 79). The notice was destroyed in 70 AD. So this notice is insanely supposed to prove or indicate that this gospel was written before that time in 70 AD! But Mark was just going to use whatever was handy for him even if it was forty years later. So a notice with spelling errors on it is used to defend the view that Jerusalem which had many Greeks about it according to the book of Acts wrote signs to those same Gentiles to fit the way how Jerusalem people spoke Greek! It is like spelling centre as center when Americans are not indigenous to the area. It doesn't happen. Mark was not even written for Jews but for Gentiles and Rome is the most likely place of authorship.

The fragment, 7Q5, according to Thiede, gives Mark 6:53 with three words missing. It says Jesus went to Gennesaret whereas our text says Jesus went to the land of Gennesaret (page 77). The cave was allegedly sealed in 68 AD so The Jesus Papyrus supposes that this was an earlier version of Mark that predates 68 AD. It states that the three words which mean "the land of" were omitted before the destruction of the land in 70 AD and were inserted after the disaster because the living area of the land would be mixed up with the lake Gennesaret (page 77-79). Thiede supposes that the words the land of were added to the Mark we have after 70 AD when it was necessary to be more specific for the land had met much destruction and people needed to be told that Genneseret was a land. But the ridiculous thing is that if this were true the words would have been added years after the event for in the aftermath of the disaster people would still remember what Genneseret was. Mark then must have got some drastic rewriting then decades later which no true Christian can admit. If that happened then there is no point in trying to prove that an early edition of Mark existed at Qumran before 68 AD. Thiede's clarification argument is hogwash. If you read the verse you see that no such clarification was necessary. Also, Mark was not writing for people who needed a geography lesson and if he said Gennesaret that was enough and nobody needed to clarify that it was townland. The three words are a bit awkward where they are now which seems to suggest that an alteration was made. But Mark wrote in sloppy Greek anyway.

Since part of the surface of the papyrus have worn off one letter is indistinct and might or might not be a nu. If it is not then the scroll is not from Mark. In the photograph of the reconstruction in The Jesus Papyrus the nu looks very big and does not match the size and design of the nu two lines below. This is why I doubt the reconstruction. The fragment is so small that you only have eight or nine letters on each side. It could be from anything which may be why it differs from Mark. If it is from Mark it only proves that our Mark was drastically altered. They even put in words there was no need for so heaven knows what else they did. It could have been a very short and unconvincing gospel. Perhaps the early Christians used the stories in the scrolls to make the Jesus story. The story could have been about John the Baptist and the Christians changed the name to Jesus in their version. Portions of the gospels can be proved to have been stolen from the Qumran writings. The fragment offers no hope to anybody who wants to prove the gospels are old or near the time of Jesus.

So Thiede has to posit some words not being in the original Mark, excuse a spelling difference from our Mark and pretend that a disputed letter is a nu to excuse identifying the scrap as the gospel of Mark. When all this has to be done it is clear that the fragment that only contains a few letters could easily not be Mark at all.

7Q5 was first on a scroll not a codex for it only has one side with writing on it. The end of Mark was lost indicating that the original Mark may have been a codex and the codex arrived in the second century. You cannot lose the end of a scroll for it is all one piece.