

A Story of Remarkable Recovery  
by Nicholas Van Cleve<sup>1</sup>

*“[The act of preserving damaged] books ... means much the same thing as burial means in the case of men. When the spirit is gone, we put the corpse out of sight to protect it from abuse. In like manner, when the writing is worn out, we hide the book to preserve it from profanation.”*

*- Solomon Schechter, 1908<sup>2</sup>*

The russet-colored parchment of the Exodus Scroll dating from the Medieval Ages

by 1025, the second version of the synagogue included a two-story genizah.<sup>6</sup> In a tiny space of only 12 by 14 feet, generations of Jewish people stored away their worn-



It is a battlefield of books, and the literary production of many centuries had their share in the battle, and their *disjecta membra* are now strewn over its area. Some of the belligerents have perished outright, and are literally ground to dust in the terrible struggle for space, whilst others, as if overtaken by a general crush, are squeezed into big, unshapely lumps, which even with the aid of chemical appliances can no longer be separated from their contents.<sup>20</sup>

After a brief examination of the vast array of literary elocution, romantic aspiration, theological ponderings, and bureaucratic scratches in the crumpled folios that lay before him, Schechter

Presumably, the Exodus Scroll was sequestered in the Cairo Genizah based on its condition and not the error of a scribe.<sup>25</sup>

The painstaking accuracy with which the Jewish scribes kept the sacred words of the Torah preserved enabled modern Jews and Christians to have surprisingly accurate copies of what we believe are the inspired, revelatory words of God.<sup>26</sup> *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* quotes Gleason Archer on the subject, stating,

even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran...were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.<sup>27</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As demonstrated by the background and “discovery” of the Cairo Genizah, the Exodus Scroll certainly possesses a unique history. The Genizah itself reveals myriad stories from the lives of remarkable and ordinary Jewish people. Just as they preserved God’s word to the benefit of the nations, the Cairo Genizah preserved much of the identity and culture of the Jewish people during the Medieval Ages for our study today. Six years after entering the Cairo Genizah, Rabbi Schechter wrote, “Every discovery of an ancient document giving evidence of a bygone world is, if undertaken in the right spirit...an act of resurrection in miniature.”<sup>28</sup> Through displays like that

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<sup>25</sup> This conclusion is based primarily on the caption for the scroll in Dunham Bible Museum and the fact that the scroll seems complete. Had the scribe erred, I would assume the scroll would have been fixed or destroyed before it was finished and reached full length.

<sup>26</sup> This accuracy is reflected by the lack of any serious differences between later Old Testament book copies available before the discovery of Scriptural books among the Dead Sea Scrolls which date from circa “200-100 B.C.” Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 1999), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Evidence I & II Fully Updated in One Volume to Answer Questions Challenging Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 70.

<sup>28</sup> Glickman, xi.

within Houston Baptist University's Dunham Bible Museum, ordinary people have the opportunity to partake in a remarkable story of preservation and discovery.

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