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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

June 19, 2016

The Dust of Qumran (Location: Qumran)

*“Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.”*  
2 Timothy 3:16, 17 (Common English Bible)

Overlooking the Dead Sea at a site not far from Jerusalem is a place that is widely considered as one of the most important archaeological finds of modern times. It is called Khirbet Qumran. Here in 1947, an Arab shepherd boy entered one of the numerous caves that dot the landscape looking for a lost sheep. Throwing a stone into a dark portion of the cave, hoping to frighten the sheep back out, he heard breaking pottery. Closer examination would reward the shepherd with the discovery of ancient scrolls that were over two thousand years old. After his discovery, archeologist conducted a search of other caves in the region. More than eight hundred ancient manuscripts were found, known today as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

What is significant about this discovery is that included among the scrolls were the oldest copies of every Old Testament book, except the Book of Esther. Each manuscript was approximately a thousand years older than those used to translate the Bible from Hebrew into modern languages. Perhaps even more remarkable was the discovery that, upon close examination of each book of the Old Testament, there was very little that had been altered during the thousand-year interval between these scrolls and those used to make the translations of the Bible we have now. This provides strong evidence that the manuscripts available today are extremely close to the original writing of these books.

Interestingly, it is precisely these Old Testament books to which Paul refers here, in his second letter to Timothy, since the New Testament had not yet been written when Timothy was a child (verse 15). Paul reminds Timothy that the chief aim of scripture is for both information and transformation. It is not enough to learn more about God. Through scripture, each person of faith experiences an encounter with God that tears out what is old and corrupt and refurbishes their life with what is new, holy and necessary for doing what is pleasing to God. Becoming well formed spiritually is the essential function of God’s Word.

My first visit to Qumran was the most meaningful portion of my trip to the Holy Land. It is here that an ancient faith community, the Essenes, labored carefully to preserve Holy Scripture for future generations. These scriptures, the Dead Sea Scrolls, are gone now, placed in a museum in Jerusalem for optimal preservation and enjoyment by the thousands who visit the museum each year. What remains in Qumran are empty caves, parched earth and dust. It is that dust, the dust of Qumran, that remains to remind the spiritual pilgrim of what life would be without the living waters of God’s Word.

Doug Hood