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# The Qummon Scrolls

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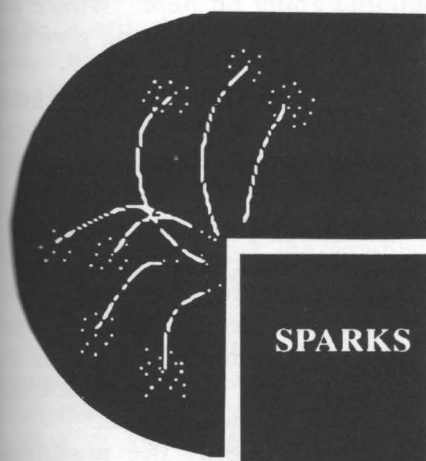
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## The Qummon Scrolls

**Bruce Berner**

*A version of this article was delivered as an after-dinner speech to the Valparaiso University Institute for Law & Pastoral Ministry, 1 February 1993. Persons who are likely to think it not entirely serious enough should save it for 1 April.*

—The Editor

The publication of this material at this delicate time risks my professional life and threatens to trigger a debate within the archaeological community of unparalleled viciousness and scope. Nevertheless, I am impelled to these disclosures by an unremitting commitment to Truth, an undying belief in the marketplace of ideas, and a firm note from the Cresset editor about a Wednesday deadline. For the past several summers, I have been privileged to work with two of the greatest archaeologists alive today, Dr.

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Bruce Berner, a member of the faculty of the VU School of Law, is Associate Dean of that college, and writes frequently for The Cresset. His other interests include singing in his church choir and trying to quit smoking.

Heinz Scholl and Dr. Harlan Pepper. Eschewing the all-too-easy and timeworn approach of looking for biblical-era relics in the Middle East, Dr. Scholl and Dr. Pepper have been concentrating on digs just southeast of Sandusky, Ohio. This past August, they hit paydirt (as Harlan likes to say) in a little unincorporated area known as Qummon, OHIO. Unlike the Qumran scrolls, fragments and remnants which must be fitted painstakingly to fit a still-incomplete mosaic, the Qummon Scrolls were found completely intact, an integrated whole, unblemished except for a slight rip in the dust jacket. This is, in short, the discovery of our Age.

Just some brief background on these magnificent scientist/scholars. Dr. Heinz Scholl this academic year is a full-time Professor of Archaeology at the University of Chicago, UCLA, University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, Baldwin-Wallace, Texas Tech, and Pomona Community College. Dr. Pepper is Director of the New Jersey State Home for the Theologically Bewildered.

To be sure, malcontents upset at having been outmaneuvered by these resourceful professionals will challenge the authenticity of this marvelous manuscript. A few so-called experts, given a sneak-preview, are already rehearsing the predictably ungracious, myopic criticism. O.K., so the manuscript seems to have been originally formatted as ASCII text. Big deal. Just as tellingly in the other

direction, the scrolls clearly bear the typewritten date "Thursday, March 16, 1288 B.C." Take that, critics! One especially picky sourgraper is trying to build an argument for inauthenticity around the musical markings of the Psalms which alternate between Selah! and Da-doo-ron-ronn! Small minds tear down. Big minds find Scrolls.

Alas, all the pressure of this criticism has precipitated something of a falling out between Drs. Scholl and Pepper. This schism was perhaps inevitable anyway due to the fact that Dr. Scholl began by converting the scrolls on a Mac whereas Dr. Pepper converted them first to WordPerfect 5.1 through a DOS environment. These were fateful choices. For example, in a short Chapter called Daniel, three persons with the unlikely names Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, emerge incredibly from a fiery furnace unhurt. (Some of the stories in this manuscript require a lot of faith to believe.) Dr. Scholl's translation of the utterance of King Nebuchadnezzar who saw them emerge is: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego who delivers his believers, lo, from all manner of death, even death by fire." Dr. Pepper, on the other hand, renders the same text: "Hey, dudes, it's Miller Time!" And the discrepancies in a Chapter called Job (the Drs. are, by the way, quarreling bitterly over how to pronounce this name) are proving something of a thicket. In the Scholl account, the title

character keeps his faith through deaths, locusts, famine, etc.; in Pepper's account Job finally goes over to the devil's side when his cable coverage fails during the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl.

A few critics, jealous of the success of Drs. Scholl and Pepper, claim that although the text of the Chapter called Song of Solomon may be authentic, the accompanying photographs are (a) in very bad taste and (b) proven inauthentic by the word FUJI stamped on the reverse. It is sad that serious scholars must endure these petty assaults. (It is also sad that Dr. Pepper's announced need to study these pictures "with scrupulous scholarly care" set the project back several months.)

But why ask the reader to judge authenticity through secondary criticism when portions of the manuscript can be released for all to evaluate? I take great pride in bringing you the first published extract from the Qummon Scrolls, this selection from the 20th part of the second Chapter which Dr. Scholl, always the European formalist, translates as "EXODUS." Dr. Pepper, whose graduate training was at Cal-Berkeley, has it as "BLOWING TOWN."

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After Moses had gone up the mountain, God gave these words to Moses on two tablets: "I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me. Thou shalt not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Honor your father and your mother. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor. Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's house or your neighbor's spouse or slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Then God said, "This is the law of the Lord. Take these Ten Commandments to the people; then return with your brother Aaron."

After several moments, Moses

returned with Aaron and his sister Miriam. "Here are my brother and my sister, Lord!" said Moses. "You should know that the three of us just completed law school." And God said, "How could you so defile yourselves?" And Moses said, "The economy has not been good. Manna is nice, but, c'mon, how about a little variety? Plus, all this wandering. We were bored. We went to law school. Sue us." Aaron interjected, "The people have hired us to represent them. And on what you have written and told our brother, Moses, our clients have, it turns out, many questions and concerns."

Miriam continued: "Indeed, my clients have deep worries about these Ten Commandments as you call them. Some matters we are simply not clear on and others we'd like to negotiate a bit on." And God screamed, "Negotiate? You want to negotiate? With the Creator of the Universe? Are you serious? These are not Ten Suggestions or Ten Guidelines or Ten Goals or even Ten Strategic-Planning Action Steps, these are the Ten Commandments. Do you not know that I make the wind to blow, the sun to shine, the oceans to rage?"

And Aaron said, "Posturing is no answer. Lighten up, for your own sake! With all due respect, God, how does creating the universe immunize you from listening to our concerns? As a matter of brute fact, creating the universe strictly entails listening to us. And terminology is not critical. We have no objection to whatever you wish to call them. If 'Commandments' pleases you, fine. We simply wish to deal with a few issues by toning down some of the more categorical verbiage. Surely these ideas aren't written in stone."

And Moses took Aaron aside and whispered something to him. And Aaron turned back to God and said, "Oh, sorry. What I meant was, can't these words be changed? Uh, surely you can get more tablets?"

And Miriam interjected: "Before we get back to the content of these laws, my clients have great difficulties with the process used here. Where was

our input? There is no consensus building going on here. Where was the public discussion, the give and take?"

To govern wisely, don't you know you must have the consent of the governed? How will the people ever take ownership of these principles if they feel they have been imposed on them? It's like you're operating with some kind of divine right. This all seems to have been decided at a secret, executive session in violation of the Sunshine Laws. How undemocratic this all is. There was no vote."

And suddenly the mountain shook, 10,000 trumpets blasted, birds stopped stockstill midair in their flights, rivers froze to their banks, the Earth stopped spinning on its axis, Lutherans stopped bickering, and God said in a powerful voice "I VOTED! ... THE COMMANDMENTS PASSED! ... 2 to 1!"

And Aaron continued: "Much of our problem with these commandments is that they are in conflict with our most deeply-held beliefs, which we call The Ten Assumptions. For example, your very first one, 'Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.' That's pretty wide open, don't you think? I mean, somebody might some day interpret that to mean not just Baal or The Golden Idol, as we're sure you mean, but money or power or fame. Can't we pin that down?"

And God replied: "It means to include all those things. It means that if you put anyone or anything before me, you will have pain."

And Miriam said: "Now, that's just what my brother was talking about. Assumption #1 of our Ten Assumptions is 'We have an absolute right to a pain-free life.' And now this Commandment will cause pain. Why are you sending us on this guilt trip?" And God said: "Guilt comes from within. I do not threaten guilt. I threaten condemnation! Pain inheres in wrong human choices. Sin brings pain. Do you not suppose that your sins will weigh on you?"

And Miriam said, "No. We suppose Assumption 2: 'All pain is



someone else's fault.' That is why, as night follows day, a lawsuit follows pain. Look, let's get down to the basics here. Exactly who are you to issue laws?"

And a great stillness descended upon the mountain, so great that the three could not breathe. And then God replied in a voice so loud it shattered the very rock the mountain was made of, "I . . . AM . . . WHAT . . . I . . . AM."

The three siblings were frozen for what seemed to them, as lawyers, an eternity. Ten seconds later, Aaron replied, "I AM WHAT I AM? That's responsive? I AM WHAT I AM? That begs the question by simply restating the major premise as the conclusion. In Latin, that is *Petitio Principii*. A college freshman could see the logical flaw in that. Care to try again?"

And God said, "Yes. How about this one? YOU ARE, BUT YOU WON'T BE!"

And God continued. "Look! Why not stop worrying about all the

technicalities and just trust me, follow me, leave the legal work to me?"

And Moses said, "Well, we've discussed that. But both our psychological counsellors and daytime-TV hosts assure us that such would be the beginning of a dangerous relationship of dependency. We need to become self-reliant and independent and stay out of all relationships which might cause us to trust others or them us. Our Third Assumption is 'You can't trust anybody.' Our philosophy on dependency is set forth in many books with titles like 'I'm O.K., You're O.K.'"

And God said, "I've read that book. I'm writing a reply. Well, actually, I'm not writing it. I'm inspiring it. My book will be called many things by many people. But, in any event, I like to think of its subtitle as 'I'M O.K.! YOU'RE OUT OF LINE!'"

Moses said, "God, while we've got you here, could you answer a few final questions we have? We each have one

question. And we may not see you again soon as you are not locked in time." And God replied, "Yes, and when confronted by three lawyers, that is some blessing! There are times when omnipresence is a drag."

And Moses asked his question: "Will my people walk in the promised land?"

And God said, "Yes, Moses, but not in your lifetime."

And Miriam asked, "Will there be a day when members of my gender can be Missouri Synod ministers?"

And God said, "Miriam, there are some questions which, for political reasons, even I do not like to have a position on. But, at any rate, Miriam, not in your lifetime."

And Aaron asked, "God, will final interpretation of the Ten Commandments ever be turned over to members of our profession, the legal profession?" And God said, "Maybe, Aaron, but not in my lifetime." □

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