A few posts ago I discussed, very briefly, the Dead Sea Scrolls. I received a number of questions about the post, one in particular with some frequency: how did the discovery of the Scrolls contribute to our understanding of Jesus and early Christianity? For me as a NT scholar, it is obviously an unusually important question.

Let me stress that the Scrolls are *mainly* important for understanding early Judaism, and only secondarily for understanding early Christianity. But with that said, they are *really* important for Christianity as well, though not in ways you might suspect (especially if you acquire all your historical knowledge from random searches on the Internet!).

As it turns out, I received virtually this same question seven years ago on the blog, and here is how I addressed it there.

**Question:**
Can you write a post on how the Dead Sea Scrolls advance our understanding of the birth of Christianity?

**Response:**
This is a question that can be answered in one sentence, or in a very long and dense book or anything in between. I’ll go with the in between, erring on the side of the short, for the sake of the post; but if anyone has follow-up questions, I can try to deal with those as well.

If I were to do the one-sentence version, the shortest iteration I could come up with is: The Dead Sea Scrolls are a set of texts written by Jews living at about that same time and about the same place as Jesus, and so inform us about the milieu out of which his ministry, and the earliest Christian church, emerged.

The first thing to stress is that the Scrolls are thoroughly Jewish in every sense. There is nothing about Jesus in them. And nothing about ...

If you are a member of the blog, you can see the rest of this response. If not, sorry, no cookies! But it’s easy to join. For a few more days we still have free one-month memberships, to anyone who wants one. Or even better, pay the small membership fee: every penny will go to charities dealing with those in need in this ongoing crisis.