Here’s a topic I haven’t discussed in a while! Just about every thinking human being in our context has heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls, even if they have no clue what the scrolls are, what they contain, and how they were found. And it’s no surprise they’ve heard of them. The Dead Sea Scrolls are by virtual consensus the most significant manuscript discovery of the twentieth century, of major importance for understanding Judaism at the time of Jesus and, in some respects, the teachings of Jesus himself.

Here is what I say about the scrolls in my New Testament textbook. I begin by talking about the Jewish group widely thought to have been responsible for producing, using, and eventually hiding the scrolls — which remained hidden from 70 CE until 1947! The group is called the Essenes.

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The Essenes are the one Jewish sect not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. Ironically, they are also the group about which we are best informed. This is because ...

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