

Almost a year passed before the outside world heard about this discovery. Then in February, 1948, a representative of the Syrian Archbishop went to the American School of Oriental Research and asked if its members could identify some old Hebrew scrolls. The messenger said that these scrolls had been found uncatalogued in the library of the Syrian monastery. When the scrolls were examined, it was discovered that one of them contained a practically complete text of the Book of Isaiah. Its type of writing suggested that it came from the time of Christ, or even a little before.

This was exciting news. Our earliest dated manuscript of any portion of the Old Testament in Hebrew came from the tenth century, A. D. There was little reason to consider that any known Old Testament manuscript, aside from one small piece of papyrus, had been written earlier than the ninth century, A. D. Was it possible that this scroll of parchment contained a copy of the Book of Isaiah, written almost a thousand years earlier?

As quickly as was consistent with careful work, the entire scroll was unrolled, and photographed. Copies were sent to the United States and to other countries. Scholars began to study it, and noted its similarity to the text of Isaiah in our present Hebrew Bibles. Despite a number of errors such as any copyist is apt to make, and a few minor divergencies, its general agreement with the text of our manuscripts of a thousand years later is most remarkable, and gives evidence of the great care shown by the Hebrew scribes as they toiled over the copying and recopying of the sacred books. Many scholars were greatly thrilled at this remarkable evidence, carrying our knowledge of the Hebrew text of Isaiah back almost a thousand years.