# 119 Ministries and the Copper Scroll (Part 1)

by Caleb Hegg



Recently Rob Vanhoff and I discussed 119 Ministries backing of a group called The Copper Scroll Project (from now on referred to as CSP) on our podcast. After our show aired several of our listeners asked 119 Ministries (from now on referred to as 119) to respond to some of the objections we raised. 119 responded to our friends that the hour and twenty minute video was quite long and they had not had a chance to watch it. I decided to make a short video that would put forth one argument that would discredit the entire foundation that CSP is based on. Once I made the video I contacted 119 to let them know I had published this short movie, and this began some dialogue. Below is just some of the evidence I provided along with some more reasons the claims of CSP are false. I also have given some of their responses, along with Jim Barfield's attempt to answer some of our questions.

### *CSP Sources and Reasoning*

Perhaps one of the most shocking things is that both 119 as well as CSP completely reject ALL of the scholars who have worked on the copper scroll. Instead they all rest on the research of Jim Barfield, director of the CSP. Barfield is not a scholar (which he admits) but seems to think that his knowledge of the copper scroll and Qumran are superior to scholars who have dedicated their lives to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

CSP claims that the copper scroll was written by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and is a treasure map that describes where the prophet Jeremiah hid the treasures of the first temple. What is more, they claim that the copper scroll is in fact describing Qumran as the place where these treasures are hidden. Before we look at what is wrong with these claims, lets first see how they arrive at such fantastic conclusions.

Barfield sites two different sources for these claims. The first comes from 2 Maccabees 2, and the second from a kabbalistic rabbinical writing from the 17th century. This document describes how four men (Zechariah and Haggai listed among these four) helped hide and guard the treasures from the first temple. Within this document it claims that the location of this treasure was written on a copper tablet. This document also claims that the treasure described within are hidden in various locations. These locations span from Jerusalem all the way up into modern day Turkey. Why Barfield would take a kabbalistic document from the 17th century as truth is beyond me.

The second source for Barfield's claims is 2 Maccabees 2. This document was written during the time that the exiled Jews were returning to their homeland, and were building the second temple. Scholars continue to debate whether or not this document is in anyway historically accurate. Many believe that this part of 2 Macc. was written to give the Jewish people hope. The second temple was being rebuilt, but the temple treasures such as the ark of the covenant, and the menorah were nowhere to be found. Many scholars believe that this document was written as a way to bolster the Jewish people's spirits, and give them hope that the temple would once again have its treasures. This document tries to assure the people that the temple treasures were safe, and at the right time they would be returned back to the temple. There are good reasons 2 Macc. is not included in our canon. Barfield, however, has decided that this story is 100% true, and has now based his research on it.

***Could the Copper Scroll be Talking About 1st Temple Treasure?***

One of the first things I did when researching Barfield's claims was to reach out to Dr. Martin Abegg. Dr. Abegg is one of the leading DSS scholars in the world, and teaches DSS studies at Trinity Wester University in Vancouver BC. Dr. Abegg responded and explained that he was too busy to devote time to such claims, but asked me if one of his students could help me. It just so happens that Dr. Abegg's student is a long time friend named Ryan Blackwelder. Ryan agreed to do a little digging for me on the copper scroll, and to send me any information he might find. Ryan's red flag to CSP theory was that the paleography didn't match with the claims. What does this mean? Since the CSP claims that this document originated from Jeremiah, or at the latest Haggai and Zechariah, the latest this document could have been written (according to CSP) is the first half of the 5th century BCE. Ryan's point is that the paleography of the scroll does not match such a date. In one of his emails to me Ryan writes:

> "The paleography of the Copper Scroll was detailed by Frank Moore Cross, Jr. in M. Baillet, J. T. Milik and R. de Vaux, Les 'petites grottes' de Qumrân (DJD III; vol 1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 217–221. The script of the Copper scroll is of the late Herodian, semiformal scripts, which dates to the second half of the Herodian era, i.e., 25–75 C.E."

The work cited by Ryan is written by one of the foremost authorities on the copper scroll. Ryan went further and presented a quote from Judah K. Lefkovits. Lefkovits, also an authority on the copper scroll, wrote a book titled The Copper Scroll. 3Q15: A Reevaluation. A New Reading Translation, and Commentary. In this work, on pages 18-19, Lefkovits states:

> "The language of the Copper Scroll can be classified as being proto-Mishnaic Hebrew. It resembles 4QMMT (Miqṣat Maʿaseh hatTorah, "Some Rulings Pertaining to the Torah"), some Bar-Kokhba letters (second cent. CE), and Mishnaic Hebrew (third cent. CE). Therefore, Copper Scroll Hebrew may represent a link between late Biblical and early Mishnaic Hebrew.
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> The language of most non-biblical Dead Sea Hebrew scrolls resembles Late Biblical Hebrew, their authors apparently imitated Biblical Hebrew. However, the Copper Scroll is an exception, and this is understandable. It is a list of hidden objects, written in the language of its compilers, without mimicking Biblical Hebrew. This is also true concerning MMT and the Bar-Kokhba Letters. Likewise, the Mishnah and Tosephta were written in the vernacular used at the academies when Hebrew was still a living language.
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> There are similarities between the Copper Scroll and Megillat Taʿanit. Although the latter is written in Tannaic Aramaic, its style resembles that of the Copper Scroll. Both employ non-contracted and contracted teens, a feature found in the Hebrew literature only in the Copper Scroll.
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> Finally, the various proto-Mishnaic dialects used in the Copper Scroll, MMT, and the Bar-Kokhba documents establishes that Mishnaic Hebrew was indeed a living language, not artificially created by the Rabbis of the Mishnaic era, as some scholars suggest."

Lefkovits gives us several important pieces of information in this quote. He explains that the copper scroll has similarities to other pieces of works, all of which are dated late. The oldest of these texts is MMT, which dates to the late 2nd century to the 1st century BCE. Lefkovits also gives us a new title for the type of Hebrew used within the copper scroll, i.e. "Proto-

Mishnaic Hebrew." Before we address some of the more specific points in Lefkovits' quote, we should first look at Mishanic Hebrew.

Most scholars agree that Mishnaic Hebrew began to come onto the scene quite early. M.H. Segal states in his book A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew (p. 1) that Mishnaic Hebrew dates from the 400-300 BCE to about 400 CE. This dating is generally accepted by scholars, and the transition from Biblical Hebrew (BH) to Mishnaic Hebrew (MH) is an entire field of study unto itself. One thing that should be abundantly clear is that MH didn't just happen. Language changes, and these changes take time, hundreds of years in some cases. For instance, the language used by William Tyndale and his contemporaries of the 1500's is much different than the language we speak today. We are not able to say there was a specific date that modern English took over and middle English was placed on the shelf. It took hundreds of years, and plenty of cultural and social changes to get our language where it is today. The same thing is true for BH and MH.

Shelomo Morag from Jerusalem gives a very interesting account of some of these changes. Morag zeros in on a specific study that speaks directly to our discussion. Morag wrote an article published in Vetus Testamentum titled Qumran Hebrew: Some Typological Observations. This article is pertinent to our study because Morag tracks some of the transitions in language from three specific categories. 1) Late Biblical Hebrew, 2) General Qumran Hebrew, and 3) Copper Scroll Hebrew. Morag discusses how the Hebrew of the copper scroll is so different from the Hebrew within the rest of the corpus of Qumran texts, that he gives it a category unto itself. Within his article, Morag shows 10 features that make Late Biblical Hebrew distinct from Mishnaic Hebrew (late Biblical Hebrew represents the Hebrew found in some of the later Tanach writings such as Ezra and Nehemiah as opposed to the Hebrew of the Torah). These ten features include paleography, morphology and syntax issues. Morag shows that from the time of our latest Biblical texts to the time of the Qumran corpus, there were significant changes within the language.

At this point we must stop to look at what 119 Ministries says thus far. 119 agrees that there is a difference between BH and MH. But this is where they stop. Jon from 119 writes in an email to me:

> "I understand the arguments surrounding the writing style, though I have not formed conclusions as absolute as yours.
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> It is certainly very possible that the Copper Scrolls [sic] were written at a later date, and such conclusions are reasonable, but I cannot seem to determine with absolute certainty that they were. I believe it would be an error to assume an absolute conclusion in either direction, at least at this juncture. There appears to be a significant evidence based gap in the linear development of MH, both in timing and geography. It was certainly more fully formed in the first two centuries, yet we are not dealing with fully formed MH with the copper scroll. MH began to develop hundreds of years prior to the first century."

There are several problems with Jon's conclusion.

1) Jon says that "it would be an error to assume an absolute conclusion in either direction" yet leads his audience to believe that there is no room for speculation, but that the copper scroll is a work that speaks of treasure from Jeremiah's time.

2) Jon has not explained how scholars place the beginning formation of MH to at least one hundred years after Haggai and Zechariah, yet Jon wants to say that this scroll was written in MH by said prophets. In other words, he's at least a hundred years off, but he's only a

hundred years off if Mishnaic Hebrew was fully formed by 400BCE, otherwise he's hundreds of years off.

3) Jon says "There appears to be a significant evidence based gap in the linear development of MH, both in timing and geography." Yet Jon throws out all evidence we have of the morphology of the language. Full on Mishnaic Hebrew is not completely formed until the 200's CE. Thus we are able to somewhat track the way the language changed from Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) to MH.

The leading scholars of the copper scroll did not abstractly pick a time frame out of thin air and slap it on the copper scroll. There wasn't some meeting where the top copper scroll scholars sat around a table and said, "Lets just say its from… ummm… I don't know… 25 to 100 CE." There are specific reasons the scroll has been dated so specifically.

1) Within the copper scroll there are Greek letters that appear at the end of certain lines. The purpose of Greek within the copper scroll is still a matter of debate for scholars. One of the main things is shows us is that the Copper Scroll was not written by Jeremiah, Haggai or Zechariah. Babylon's language was Aramaic, and the Hebrews spoke Hebrew before the Babylonian exile. Greek was not a factor for these prophets, and the presence of this language within the scroll proves that it wasn't written until after the Israelites returned from captivity and began to be hellenized.

Lefkovits has written on the two main views that scholars take in regards to Greek letters within this Hebrew scroll. The first view is that these Greek letters could represent the numeric value of the treasure that is being discussed within the Hebrew lines. The other hypothesis for Greek within the scroll is that they represent the names, or nicknames, of the individuals who hid the treasure. In an article by Matthew Richey titled The Use of Greek at Qumran: Manuscript and Epigraphic Evidence for a Marginalized Language, (p. 194) Richey states:

> Regardless of the specifics involved, it should be noted that each of the above conjectures would have important implications for the larger picture of Greek usage at Qumran. In the case of the first, the rather tenuous numerical hypothesis, such usage would imply familiarity with a peculiarly Greek system of numbering, which was, whether learned outside of the sect or not, thought appropriate for usage by whoever inscribed the Copper Scroll. Alternatively, the use of Greek letters to abbreviate personal names would seem to suggest that some or all of those who hid the treasures had Greek names or at least had no objection to their Hebrew names being written in Greek characters.

Richey's entire article speaks about Greek as a whole at Qumran, but this specific section about the Copper Scroll speaks directly to our study. The idea that the prophets suggested by CSP and 119 as the authors would have Greek names for each other, or that they would have an elaborate Greek numerical system simply holds no basis within any information that we have. The presence of Greek within the scroll proves a later authorship, and in and of itself disproves the claims of 119 and CSP.

2) As stated above, MH did not just explode into existence. MH was not completely solidified until the 200's CE. Thus in the quote above by Lefkovits, he names the Copper Scroll Hebrew, "Proto-Mishnaic Hebrew." Thus the Hebrew of the scroll is not completely in the style of LBH, but rather shows specific similarities to later works. Thus the copper scroll gives us a link between these two forms of Hebrew. The works that Lefkovits sights as similar to the Copper Scroll are all much later works. MMT, Bar-Kokhba and the Copper Scroll all have similarities, and are all later works. Dr. Al Wolters, another leading voice when it comes to the copper scroll puts it all into perspective:

The Copper Scroll is written in an early form of Mishnaic Hebrew, and thus constitutes an invaluable linguistic link between Late Biblical Hebrew and the language of the Mishnah. Its affinity with Mishnaic Hebrew can be demonstrated in the areas of morphology (e.g., ־ין instead of ־ים as the regular masculine plural ending), of syntax (e.g., the frequent use of שֶׁל to indicate the genitival relationship), and of lexicon (some fifty vocabulary items illustrate words or usages characteristics of Mishnaic Hebrew). Another feature which it shares with Mishnaic Hebrew, and which sets it off from the literary Hebrew of the other scrolls, is the frequent use of Greek loanwords (e.g., פרסטלטן for περιστύλιον, "peristyle," in i.7). The language of the Copper Scroll, therefore, is important evidence that there was a form of Hebrew used around the turn of the era that already had clearly Mishnaic features, and that this Hebrew differed significantly from the classical language used in literary works. Linguistically speaking, the closest analogue to the Copper Scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls is 4QMMT, although the latter still differs in important respects from Mishnaic Hebrew (e.g., the absence of ־ין and שׁל). (Al Wolters, "Copper Scroll," EDSS 1:145)

This quote might seem technical, but it is important. Wolters gives specific examples of syntactical morphology that didn't occur until the first century and later. Let me give you an example from English. If I were to say to you, "we have found a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to his wife." This would be a very interesting find, and people would want to see what was written. If I then produced a letter that said, "my dearest Mary, I look forward to the theater tonight. I hope you wear your bling. I expect this night to be cray cray." Everyone would instantly know that this letter was a fraud. Why? Because the words "bling" and the term "cray cray" are modern terms that were not around in the time of Abraham Lincoln. What 119 and CSP is suggesting is basically the same thing.

Another thing that should be considered, I took the particle שׁ (who, which, where) and looked in the copper scroll to see where it was substituted as a personal pronoun. This occurs 31 times within the scroll. I then looked in Jeremiah, Haggai and Zechariah to see how many times it showed up in each book. The answer is that the particle שׁ is never substituted as a personal pronoun once within any of these books. Its not a slam dunk, but once again shows that stylistically as well as paleographically, the copper scroll was not written by any of these men.

**Part 1 Conclusion**

The evidence from the paleography of the Copper Scroll dates it to the first century CE. This has been confirmed by the leading scholars of the Copper Scroll. The language used within the Copper Scroll not only shows that it is a late creation, but that it was written in or after the first century, and was not simply a copy of something much earlier. 119 and the CSP reject the scholarly world and their knowledge, and rely instead on their own personal feelings about the scroll instead of the evidence that is readily available. 119 says they are not willing to make a decision one way or the other on the dating of the scroll, but are more than happy to sell their customers a specific date and a fantastic story, that all evidence disproves. In so doing, 119 is knowingly misleading those who so eagerly listen to their ministry.