



Gratz Insider, July 2012 - Story Continuation

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## **Traveling This Summer? Try Ancient Israel - Without Ever Leaving Philly**

Reflecting on the Franklin Institute's Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit, Gratz professor Dr. Joseph M. Davis recalls a story recounted by his colleague Lyndall Miller. According to the story, Miller knew someone whose ancestor had received an authentic letter written by Abraham Lincoln. In the epiphanic moment when Miller had the opportunity to touch this letter, Lincoln was instantly transformed for her from a legendary historic figure into a real person.

The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit engenders this same type of personal bond with history - though much more distant history. "The Dead Sea Scrolls are the closest we can get to the original books of the Bible, and when you see them up close, you can feel that real Jews wrote these things on real pieces of papyrus or parchment," says Davis, who included a trip to the exhibit as part of his Gratz Summer Institute course "Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Bible."

According to the Franklin Institute's website, the Dead Sea Scrolls "have been called the most significant archaeological find of the last century" ([www.fi.edu/scrolls/](http://www.fi.edu/scrolls/)). Ironically, this historic discovery began when a shepherd inadvertently uncovered the first scrolls in 1947 in a cave along the Dead Sea's northwest shores. In the almost ten years of searching that followed, more scrolls were discovered, ultimately totaling 972, only a small sample of which are on display at the Franklin Institute. The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of biblical text and other religious documents. They are of great interest to theological scholars because they shed light on ancient Judaism and can be used to determine the accuracy of later biblical transcription.

In addition to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the exhibit includes over 600 archaeological relics from life in ancient Israel, with some objects dating back over three thousand years. A well-worn pair of leather sandals inspires thoughts about who may have walked in these simple shoes more than two thousand years ago. Seals used to imprint signatures on clay tablets stir up thoughts about the identity of the signers. Through

hundreds of real-life objects like these, visitors are drawn back into the daily lives of ancient peoples.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, along with these time-honored relics, transcend eras, creating a personal connection to history. Through this exhibit at the Franklin Institute, visitors are able to experience all of this history - without ever leaving Philadelphia.

*For more information about the exhibit “Dead Sea Scrolls: Life and Faith in Ancient Times,” consult the Franklin Institute website at [www.fi.edu/scrolls/](http://www.fi.edu/scrolls/). For background into the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves, consider the following references:*

- Berg, Simon. *Insights into the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Beginner's Guide*. BookSurge Publishing, 2009.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Paulist Press, 1992.
- Schiffman, Lawrence, H. *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity*. Anchor Bible Reference Library (Doubleday), 1995.