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CONTACT: [Gene Sasse](#)
(909) 941-3993

Local Photographer Restores the Dead Sea Scrolls

Gene Sasse Photographer, located in Alta Loma California, was recently commissioned by the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center (ABMC) of Claremont, California to scan and print the original transparencies of the Great Isaiah Scroll. The Great Isaiah Scroll is part of the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran Cave I. The photographs were taken by John C. Trever shortly after they were found in 1949. The newly restored photos will be used for a new book being written, by Peter Flint of Canada and Eugene Eulrich at Notre Dame.

The color and contrast of the transparencies of the Dead Sea Scrolls had faded considerably over the years despite the climate-controlled vault they were stored in. Mike Phelps, Director at ABMC said. "The transparencies are irreplaceable and what makes these transparencies even more valuable is the continuing deterioration that has taken place in all the original Scrolls in Jerusalem. Despite the continuing efforts of some of the world's most gifted scientists to preserve the Scrolls."

"Gene Sasse was chosen by ABMC to carry out the restoration because of his experience, attention to detail, and their willingness to work under our demands. Time was a large concern. We did not want to keep the images out of the vault any longer than necessary. We would only deliver 12 transparencies at a time. Then they would then pick them up several hours later," according to Mike Phelps. "It was a long but worthwhile process".

Gene Sasse has almost 30 years experience in the photography industry. Sasse has worked on various projects where getting the color right is crucial. The projects have ranged from fine art reproduction for artists and galleries, product swatches for the furniture industry to subtle tones of roses for catalogs and advertisements.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, is one of the earliest collections of Biblical texts, were found in the caves along the Dead Sea. While Sasse was not working with the original scrolls the job was still a challenge. He said; "This was an interesting project trying to restore the tones of the sheepskin along with the legibility of the Hebrew and Aramaic writing". As you can see in the enclosed photographs that there is a dramatic change from the before to the after restoration. Since the transparencies were the only original photographs from the discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls it was crucial to keep the photos in good condition. Now that they are restored, these priceless photos will continue to serve as documentation of our past and a source of materials the scholar.

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