

Dead Sea Scrolls now available online

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JERUSALEM (RNS) Five of the Dead Sea Scrolls that have been stored for decades in a climate-controlled exhibit at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem are now available in digital form to anyone with an Internet connection.

A website (<http://dss.collections.imj.org.il>) developed by the Israel Museum and Google allows online visitors to examine the scrolls in minute detail with the help of a magnifying feature.

Pages for each of the five scrolls -- the Great Isaiah Scroll, the Community Rule Scroll, the Commentary on the Habakkuk Scroll, the Temple Scroll, and the War Scroll -- also contain brief videos and explanatory notes.

According to the museum announcement, details invisible to the naked eye are made visible through ultra-high resolution digital photography at up to 1,200 megapixels each.

Photographer Ardon Bar-Hama used UV-protected flash tubes with an exposure of 1/4000th of a second to minimize damage to the fragile and light-sensitive scrolls, the museum said.

Dating from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D., the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in 11 caves near the Dead Sea. The region's arid environment helped ensure their survival.

"We have seen how people around the world can enhance their knowledge and understanding of key historical events by accessing documents and collections online," said Yossi Matias, managing director of Google's Israeli research and development center, in a statement.

"We hope to make all existing knowledge in historical archives and collections available to all, including helping to put additional Dead Sea Scroll documents online."