

Archaeological Discoveries and Artifacts

*By: Mike Porter
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Archaeology has always played a crucial role in the debates about the contents and historical reliability of the Bible. Spectacular discoveries along with decades of archaeological excavations have suggested that the Bible's accounts were basically trustworthy in regard to the story of ancient Israel. Thus it seemed that even if the biblical text was written down long after the events occurred, it must have been based on accurately preserved memories.

Geographical Identifications

American Congregationalist minister Edward Robinson undertook two long explorations through Ottoman Palestine in 1838 and in 1852, in an effort to refute biblical critics by locating and identifying historical biblical sites. The locations of hundreds of places mentioned in the Bible were unknown. By using the geographical information contained in the Bible and carefully studying the modern Arabic place-names of the country, Robinson identified dozens of ancient mounds and ruins with previously forgotten biblical sites. Robinson and his successors were able to identify the biblical sites of Gibeon, Bethel, Shiloh, Megiddo, Hazor and dozens of other biblical locations.

Monuments And Archives From Egypt And Mesopotamia

Outside sources were needed to verify the Bible's inner chronology, and they were found among the archaeological remains of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics on the basis of the Rosetta Stone in the 1820's made it possible to verify historical events in the Bible.

Beginning in the 1840's representatives of England, France, Germany and the United States uncovered cities, vast palaces and cuneiform archives of the empires of Assyria and Babylonia. For the first time since the biblical period, the main monuments and cities of those powerful Eastern empires were uncovered. Places like Nineveh and Babylon, previously known primarily from the Bible were now viewed as powerful empires.

Laban's Stolen Images

J.P Free's "*Archaeology and the Bible*" gives a good explanation of the Laban episode, and the background on the archaeological discovery of the Nuzi tablets:

Over 1000 clay tablets were found in 1925 in the excavation of a Mesopotamian site known today as Yorgan Tepe. Subsequent work brought forth another 3,000 tablets and revealed the ancient site as "Nuzi." The tablets, written about 1,500 B.C., illuminate the background of the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One instance will be

cited: When Jacob and Rachel left the home of Laban, Rachel stole Laban's family images or "teraphim." When Laban discovered the theft, he pursued his daughter and son-in-law, and after a long journey overtook them (*Genesis 31:19-23*). Commentators have long wondered why he would go to such pains to recover images he could have replaced easily in the local shops. The Nuzi tablets record one instance of a son-in-law who possessed the family images having the right to lay legal claim to his father-in-law's property, a fact which explains Laban's anxiety.

The Historicity of Joseph

Sold as a slave:

K.A. Kitchen brings out in his book, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, that *Genesis 37:28* gives the correct price for a slave in the 18th century B.C.:

Finally, the price of twenty shekels of silver paid for Joseph in *Genesis 37:28* is the correct average price for a slave in about the eighteenth century B.C.: earlier than this, slaves were cheaper (average, ten to fifteen shekels), and later they became steadily dearer. This is one more little detail true to its period in cultural history.

The visit to Egypt:

The possibility of Joseph's family visiting Egypt has been questioned by some. Millar Burrows in his, *What Mean These Stones?*, points out:

Accounts of going down to Egypt in times of famine (*Genesis 12:10; 42:1,2*) bring to mind Egyptian references to Asiatics who came to Egypt for this purpose. A picture of visiting Semites may be seen on the wall of a tomb at Beni Hasan, which comes from a time not far from that of Abraham.

Joseph's tomb in Shechem?

Genesis 50:25,26

Joseph had said,

"God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place. So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin.

Joshua 24:32

The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become the inheritance of the children of Joseph.

John Elder in his *Prophets, Idols and Diggers* made this comment:

In the last verses of *Genesis* it is told how Joseph adjured his relatives to take his bones back to Canaan whenever God should restore them to their original home, and in *Joshua 24:32* it is told how his body was indeed brought to Palestine and buried at Shechem. For

centuries there was a tomb at Shechem revered as the tomb of Joseph. A few years ago the tomb was opened. It was found to contain a body mummified according to the Egyptian custom, and in the tomb, among other things, was a sword of the kind worn by Egyptian officials.

Did King David Exist?

Biblical critics once stated that King David was "no more a historical figure the King Arthur". Biblical critics have argued that David and Solomon and the entire biblical description of the history of Israel were no more than elaborate, skillful stories created by priests in Jerusalem.

Yet in the summer of 1993, at the biblical site of Tel Dan in northern Israel, a fragmentary artifact was discovered that would change forever the nature of the debate. It was the "House of David" inscription, part of a black basalt monument, found broken and reused in a later stratum as a building stone. Written in Aramaic, it related details of an invasion of Israel by an Aramean king whose name is not mentioned on the fragments that have so far been discovered.

Did The Hittites Exist?

The Bible makes dozens of references to the Hittites, but critics charges that there was no evidence that such people ever existed. Now archaeologists digging in modern Turkey have discovered the records of the Hittites library.

The Gedaliah Seal

Jeremiah 34:6,7 reads as follows:

Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the remaining cities of Judah, that is, Lachish and Azekah, for they alone remained as fortified cities among the cities of Judah.

John Elder points out a discovery, which adds weight to the biblical story of Lachish: The nearby city fortress of Lachish provides clear proof that it had been twice burned over a short period of time, coinciding with the two captures of Jerusalem. In Lachish the imprint of a clay seal was found, its back still shows the fibers of the papyrus to which it had been attached. It reads: "The property of Gedaliah who is over the house." We meet this distinguished individual in *2 Kings 25:22*, where we are told: "And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah...ruler."

Babylonian Reference to Jehoiachin and Sons

Jeremiah 52:33,34

So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king of Babylon, a portion for each day until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

W.F. Albright reports on an archaeological discovery that proves *Jeremiah 52:33,34*:

In recent published tablets from a royal archive of Nebuchadnezzar, dating in and about the year 592 B.C., Jehoiachin and five of his sons, as well as at least five other Jews, are mentioned among recipients of rations from the royal court. It is significant that Jehoiachin was still called “king of Judah” in official Babylonian documents. The Bible makes dozens of references to the Hittites, but critics charge that there was no evidence that such people ever existed. Now archaeologists digging in modern Turkey have discovered the records of the Hittites library.

The Book of Daniel

Daniel Chapter 5 states that Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon at the time the city was destroyed by Cyrus. Because of this reference to Belshazzar, secular historians claimed the Bible was in error because Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon.

It was discovered that Nabonidus had several sons and the oldest son was named Belshazzar. Nabonidus and Belshazzar were coregents and Belshazzar was the soul ruler of Babylon for eight years while Nabonidus was out of the country fighting the Amorites. Records have been found showing that Belshazzar entered treaties and purchased land. Daniel was accurate, and the historicity of the Bible was proven once again.

The Temples of Dagon and Ashtoroth

Samuel says that after Saul's death his armor was put in the temple of Ashtoroth, who was a Canaanite fertility goddess, at Bethsham, while Chronicles reports that his head was put in the temple of the Philistine corn god named Dagon. Now, archaeologists thought that must have been an error and therefore the Bible was unreliable. They didn't think enemies would have had temples in the same place at the same time.

Archaeologists later confirmed through excavations that there were two temples at that site, one each for Dagon and Ashtoroth. They were separated by a hallway. As it turned out, the Philistines had apparently adopted Ashtoroth as one of their own goddesses. The Bible was right after all.

Did Balaam the Prophet Exist?

Numbers 22:4

Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!"

Numbers 22:8-13 and 22:19-21 states that God talked to Balaam at night.

Another piece of outside verification is an ancient inscription housed in the Amman Museum. Dating around the 8th century BC, it was found in the Jordanian village of Deir Alla, which was Moabite territory in biblical times. The inscription tells of a person named Bilaam ben Beor, known to the locals as a prophet who would receive his prophecies at night. These features match precisely the Balaam described in the Bible.

Did Pilate Exist?

Until 1961 the only historical reference to Pontius Pilate were secondary. That is, they referred to Pilate, it was thought, only because the Gospels referred to him. Then two Italian archaeologists excavated the Mediterranean port city of Caesarea that served as the Roman capital of Palestine. During the dig they uncovered a two by three foot inscription in latin. Antonio Frova was able to reconstruct the inscription. To his surprise it read: "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, has presented the Tiberium the Caesareans." This was the first archaeological discovery of a historical reference to the existence of Pilate.

Is The Book Of Acts Accurate?

Sir William Ramsay, of Oxford University, was raised by atheist parents and was himself an atheist. He set out to disprove the book of Acts because it was full of so many details and could easily be proven wrong. But after decades of digging he declared in his book that he had become a Christian. Titles of officers and names and locations of cities uncovered by archeologists had always proved the Bible correct. He concluded that "in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth."

Roman historian Colin J. Hemer, in *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, shows how archaeology has confirmed hundreds of details from the biblical account of the early church. Small details have been corroborated like how deep the water is a certain distance from shore, what kind of disease a particular island had, the name of local officials, and so forth.

Oxford University historian A.N. Sherwin-White said, "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming," and the "any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd."

Statements from Archaeologists

The great archaeologist William F. Albright started out as a liberal but became more and more conservative as he studied the archaeological record.

Albright declared,

"There can be no doubt that archeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament traditions" and that New Testament critics are "pre-archaeological" and their views are "quite antiquated".

Sir Nelson Glueck, a Jewish archeologist, stated:

"It may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

Miller Broughs of Yale University stated:

"In many cases archaeology has refuted the view of modern critics... The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stem not from careful evaluations of available data but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural."

These are just very few examples of archaeological discoveries that have proven the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Acknowledgements & Further Reading

Most of this information was taken from the book “A Ready Defense” by Josh McDowell and from ChristianAnswers.Net