

The Bible and Archaeology

Sections 1–12



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Can You Believe the Bible?

William Ramsay didn't set out to prove the Bible's accuracy. In fact, the young Oxford graduate and budding scholar set sail in 1879 from England for Asia Minor convinced that, based on his university studies, the New Testament—and the book of Acts in particular—was largely a hoax. After all, his professors had taught him that the Bible had been written much later than it claimed to be, so its stories had been fabricated long after the fact and weren't to be taken seriously.

The focus of his work was ancient Roman culture. But the more he dug into it, literally and figuratively, the more he came to see that the myriad of tiny details in the book of Acts—place names, topography, officials' titles, administrative boundaries, customs and even specific structures—fit perfectly with newly discovered historical and archaeological finds. He was gradually convinced that, to use his own words, "in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth."

Contrary to all his earlier education, he was forced to conclude that Luke, the author of Acts, was "a historian of the first rank" and that "not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

In an outstanding academic career Ramsay was honored with doctorates from nine universities and eventually knighted for his contributions to modern scholarship. He shocked the academic world when in one of his books he announced that, because of the incontrovertible evidence he had discovered for the truthfulness of the Bible, he had become a Christian. Several of his works on New Testament history are considered classics.

When confronted with the evidence of years of travel and study, Sir William Ramsay learned what many others before him and since have been forced to acknowledge: When we objectively examine the evidence for the Bible's accuracy and veracity, the only conclusion we can reach is that the Bible is true.

The evidence from archaeology is only one proof of Scripture's accuracy, and that's the focus of this series of articles. We offer you a sampling of the evidence that's available—documentation showing that details of the people, places and events described in the Bible, many of them mentioned only in passing, have been verified by archaeologists and historians. Many excellent books have been published in recent years that verify the dependability of Scripture, and no doubt more will follow as new discoveries come to light.

What are the implications of this for you? All the evidence in the world does us no good if we are not willing to believe the Bible enough to put it to the ultimate test—that of *doing what it tells us to do*.

James, the half brother of Jesus, reminds us that mere belief is not enough, because even the demons believe. Instead he tells us we must put our beliefs *into action* if we are to please God (James 2:19-26).

In *The Good News* we regularly offer articles such as those in this issue to help build your faith. But be sure that you don't neglect the articles that show you how to put your faith and belief into action. God is interested to see how you *respond* to the truth He makes known to you. Ultimately that is the far more important test.

—Scott Ashley

How Archaeology Confirms the Biblical Record

by Mario Seiglie

“I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out,” said Jesus (Luke 19:40). He was referring to what would happen if His disciples did not bear testimony of Him.

The original disciples aren’t around to provide their eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ, but we do have the inspired Word of God, which they, along with many others, wrote.

Significantly enough, we also have the testimony of stones that really can bear witness to the veracity and inspiration of God’s Word. The physical evidence unearthed by present-day scientists can and does speak to us through biblical archaeology.

Archae, which comes from the Greek, means “ancient,” and *ology*, which comes from the Greek *logia*, means “science.” Archaeology, then, is the scientific study of ancient things.

Unearthing the origins of archaeology

Englishman Flinders Petrie is generally considered the individual who put archaeological methodology on a scientific footing. He is credited with transforming archaeology from a treasure hunt into a disciplined search for information about the past. It was not until the 19th century that scientific methods were rigorously applied to excavations of historical sites.

A curious fact of history is that the person who indirectly contributed to this process was not a scientist but the French emperor and conqueror Napoleon Bonaparte. During his conquests of Europe and the Middle East, Napoleon arrived in Egypt in the late 1700s hoping to build the Suez Canal and drastically reduce the navigation

time for the trade route from France to India. In Egypt, before a battle in the vicinity of the famous pyramids of Gizeh, he told his soldiers, “Forty centuries are looking down upon you from these pyramids.”

His inquisitive mind led him to study the Egyptian culture and try to decipher strange drawings he saw in the ancient monuments. For that purpose, he brought along 175 French scholars and researchers, and together they set up an institute in Egypt to study the writings and ancient relics of the area.

The deciphering of the Egyptian hieroglyphics (a word meaning priestly or sacred writings) can be attributed mostly to a young scientist of that time, Jean François Champollion. Accurate translations were made possible largely by the discovery in 1799 of a large black basalt rock by French soldiers at the town of Rosetta. Later to be known as the Rosetta Stone, it bore a trilingual inscription in Old Egyptian hieroglyphic, demotic (a later, simplified form of Egyptian hieroglyphics) and Greek. With this stone as a key, Champollion in 1822 could finally decipher the ancient hieroglyphics.

The deciphering of the Egyptian hieroglyphics brought the culture of the Pharaohs to light, and the educated classes of Europe gained insight into this fascinating subject. Soon, many amateur archaeologists were on their way to fame and fortune, finding fabulous monuments and other treasures. Museums throughout Europe and America vied with each other to house these marvelous finds. The treasure-laden tomb of Tutankhamen, discovered in 1922, was one of the most

Scholars have queued up to ridicule the biblical accounts as mere myth.

A tug of war continues between scoffers and believers in the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible.

spectacular. Many early archaeologists would be honored for their efforts and would become a part of history in their own right.

Deciphering ancient writing

Elsewhere in the region, strange writings on monuments and other objects were waiting to be deciphered.



Jean François Champollion deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphics, which opened the door to understanding the culture of ancient Egypt.

Curious scratches, resembling bird footprints, were found on thousands of hardened clay tablets. Initially, some scientists thought they were decorations rather than writing. Since the marks had apparently been made with a wedgelike knife in soft clay, the experts called them cuneiform, or letterforms made by *cunei*, Latin for “wedges.”

The credit for the deciphering of cuneiform would go mostly to an agent of the British government, Henry C. Rawlinson, stationed in Persia. He began a systematic study of cuneiform writing found on the Behistun Rock inscription, sometimes known as the “Rosetta Stone of cuneiform.”

Thousands of years earlier, Darius the

Great, king of Persia, had on the face of this 1,700-foot cliff overlooking a valley engraved an account of his exploits. The inscription appeared in three scripts: Persian, Elamite and Babylonian in the cuneiform style of writing.

Over a period of two years, Rawlinson traveled to the site and made the perilous climb, dangling from a rope while painstakingly transcribing the inscription. By 1847, he had deciphered cuneiform writing, opening understanding of Babylonian culture and history to the world. For his



The Rosetta Stone, with its trilingual inscription, was key to understanding Egyptian hieroglyphics.

efforts, Rawlinson received a knighthood from Queen Victoria in 1855.

Digging up forgotten cities

Another young British subject, Austen Henry Layard, drew inspiration from such discoveries and the fame it

had brought men like Champollion and Rawlinson. Layard began digging in Iraq, home of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires thousands of years before. He unearthed great cities mentioned in the Bible, including the ancient Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and Calah. Many of his finds, including enormous winged bulls and other important Babylonian and Assyrian artifacts, made their way to the British Museum. He, too, was knighted by Queen Victoria.

Not to be outdone by the French and British, German archaeologists also began their quest for riches and fame. One such explorer, Heinrich Schliemann, began searching for the legendary city of Troy, described by the ancient

Greek poet Homer.

Believing Homer’s sagas to be pure imagination, contemporaries ridiculed Schlie-

mann’s efforts, thinking him to be on a fanciful search. But, incredibly enough, heeding the descriptions in Homer’s *Iliad* and those by other Greek writers, Schliemann began to excavate. In 1871, he found the remains of the ancient city of Troy.

Following in the footsteps of these dashing adventurers came the patient archaeologists who would study and classify these discoveries in a systematic way, giving birth to the scientific methodology of field archaeology.

The age of skepticism

Unfortunately, the zeal for fame and treasure of many of these early archaeologists also led to unfounded claims of the discoveries of biblical sites. Some of these claims, such as the supposed discovery of King Solomon’s mines and David’s tomb, were later

proved false. Seeds of doubt began to be planted regarding the accuracy of the biblical account.

The 20th century inherited the skepticism of the preceding hundred years. Charles Darwin and others, espousing theories of evolution, had posited explanations for the origin and development of living creatures apart from a divine Creator. Such notions encouraged a questioning of the historicity of the Bible.

Also strong in Europe was the thinking inspired by Karl Marx, who in an economic, materialistic interpretation of history, discounted God and miracles. Many scholars ridiculed the biblical accounts as myth. The Bible became fair game for higher criticism; a tugging match ensued between believers in the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible and scoffers.

Biblical and theological scholars of the day declared the Bible was more recent in origin than it claimed; some argued the people of the Old Testament did not even know how to read and write. Some scholars concluded that most of the Old Testament was little more than myth.

Authors Norman Geisler and Paul Feinberg observe: “Perhaps the best example of those who hold the ‘reason over revelation’ view are known as ‘liberals’ or ‘higher critics.’ Roughly speaking, this refers to a theological movement that sprung from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European thought. It was influenced by Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, who concluded by human reason that parts or all of the Bible are not a revelation from God. Other higher critics have included men such as Jean Astruc (1684-1766) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918).

“In contrast to the historic, orthodox view that the Bible *is* the Word of God, liberals believe that the Bible merely *contains* the Word of God. When they apply the canons of human reason or

modern scholarship to the Bible they feel that some parts of it are ‘contradictory,’ and others are simply myths or fables. Some Old Testament stories are rejected by these critics because the events seemed to be ‘immoral’” (*Introduction to Philosophy, a Christian Perspective*, 1980, p. 261).

Rejecting the divine inspiration of the Bible, archaeologists from liberal biblical institutes allowed



Sir Henry C. Rawlinson deciphered cuneiform, the style of writing used in the ancient Babylonian empire. themselves to be influenced by the age of skepticism in theology. Consciously or unconsciously, they became biased against the biblical account.

Skeptical of fall of Jericho

An example of such bias surfaced recently in the matter of dating the fall of Jericho. According to the biblical record, Jericho was destroyed by the Israelites under Joshua when they began their conquest of the promised land. However, excavations of the site of Jericho led some—most notably, renowned British archaeologist

Kathleen Kenyon—to reject the biblical version.

In *Biblical Archaeology Review*, archaeologist Bryant Wood explains the earlier antibiblical view: “The archaeological evidence conflicted with the Biblical account—indeed, disproved it. Based on [archaeologist Kathleen] Kenyon’s conclusions, Jericho has become the parade example of the difficulties encountered in attempting to correlate the findings of archaeology with the Biblical account of a military conquest of Canaan. Scholars by and large have written off the Biblical record as so much folklore and religious rhetoric. And this is where the matter has stood for the past 25 years” (Bryant Wood, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April, 1990, p. 49).

Evidence reexamined

Yet a reevaluation of Kenyon’s work showed that her conclusions challenging biblical chronology were suspect, while the biblical account gained the strongest supporting evidence. Wood observes that Kenyon’s “thoroughgoing excavation methods and detailed reporting of her findings, however, did not carry over into her analytical work. When the evidence is critically examined there is no basis for her contention that City IV [the level of the city that was thought to correspond to Joshua’s time] was destroyed . . . in the mid-16th century B.C.E. [before the Christian era]” (*ibid.*, p. 57).

Time magazine added the following: “Over the past three decades, the consensus has gone against the biblical version [of the fall of Jericho]. The late British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon established in the 1950s that while the ancient city was indeed destroyed, it happened around 1550 B.C., some 150 years before Joshua could have shown up. But archaeologist Bryant Wood . . . claims that Kenyon was wrong. Based on a re-evaluation of her research,

Wood says that the city's walls could have come tumbling down at just the right time to match the biblical account . . . Says Wood: 'It looks to me as though the biblical stories are correct' (Time, March 5, 1990, p. 43).

And so, the lively debate regarding the Bible's accuracy continues between conservative and liberal archaeologists.

Discoveries verify biblical accounts

As the 20th century has progressed, several archaeological finds verifying

the biblical record have come to light. In the early 1900s, German excavators under Robert Koldewey mapped the ancient capital of Babylon and found that it closely corresponded to the bib-

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TWO JIGSAW PUZZLES, TWO PURPOSES

What can we say about the relationship between the Bible and archaeology? An illustration can help. Let us imagine two jigsaw puzzles. The first is the Bible, put together under the inspiration of God Himself. The pieces fit together perfectly. As God's Word says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, emphasis added).

This first puzzle's primary purpose is to reveal not science and history per se but the record of God's dealings with humankind. Much of this revelation is knowledge that cannot be examined under a microscope or perceived through our senses. It is knowledge revealed by God.

Throughout the Bible, a common theme is God's participation in human history. Whether it be the creation account, His dealings with Israel or the early New Testament Church, God is central.

Much of this information is not the kind that archaeology can discover through the study of ancient remains. Yet God's inspired account of His interaction with living, breathing people is inserted into writings about the physical surroundings of those people. Such information is genuine and true, since God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).

Limits of archaeology

The physical evidence can be likened to a second jigsaw puzzle, one based on scientific evidence and that is valuable to our faith by its ability to confirm the veracity of the biblical accounts.

The second jigsaw puzzle concerns how archaeology and related disciplines can reveal physical evidence concerning biblical history. The picture presented is partial; not all archaeological evidence has survived. Conclusions derived from archaeological discoveries are necessarily uncertain. Like a puzzle, pieces can be initially misplaced. As new discoveries are made or better interpretations are offered, the position of some pieces can shift. Many pieces are faded and worn, making placement difficult.

Dating of biblical sites is based primarily on surviving pottery, with its distinctive styles associated with specific historical periods. What remains is an incomplete picture of the past. As archaeologist Paul W. Lapp com-

mented, "Palestinian archaeology may be past infancy but has hardly gotten beyond childhood." Archaeology is a developing and imperfect science.

Some archaeologists estimate that only one thousandth of the original artifacts have survived. Some 5,000 sites are known to scientists in Palestine, and only about 350 have been excavated. Of these, fewer than 2 percent have been extensively excavated. All conclusions, then, are based on small amounts of evidence.

Significant portions of the Bible now corroborated

How should the relative scarcity of evidence affect our Christian beliefs? Our faith should not be based on possession of all the material and historical evidence. Definitive analysis is not a prerequisite for determining whether or not the Bible is historically accurate and true.

In spite of the relatively small amount of material that has been excavated and analyzed, considerable evidence confirming the biblical account is available. More is being uncovered all the time. Significant portions of the Old Testament historical record have now been corroborated by archaeology.

Bryant Wood notes the consensus of archaeologists on the following point: "The purpose of Biblical archaeology is to enhance our comprehension of the Bible, and so its greatest achievement, in my view, has been the extraordinary illumination of the . . . time of the Israelite monarchy" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June, 1995, p. 33).

From c. 1000 B.C. through the New Testament period, the archaeological evidence is strong. Before that time, it is sparse. This is quite natural, considering the circumstances. As Wood explains: "Exploring that pre-history [before 1000 B.C.] is challenging: It requires tracing the archaeological record of a pastoral community, rather than an agrarian-based political entity that built cities and made contacts with surrounding nations" (*ibid.*, p. 35).

We will never possess all the physical evidence. Most has been destroyed by time and wear. We cannot reproduce miracles, nor can God's presence be examined and confirmed in a laboratory. Faith will always be based primarily on spiritual discernment and trust in God's Word. *GN*

—Mario Seiglie

Archaeology

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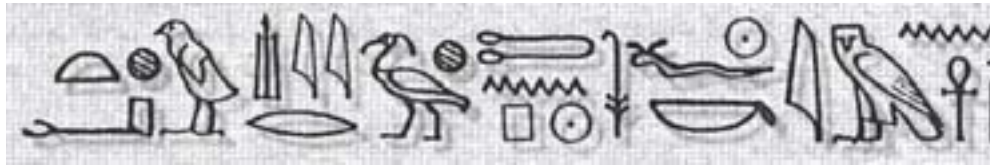
lical description. Egyptian history and culture generally matched the biblical accounts.

The archaeologist's spade has uncovered evidence of other ancient peoples mentioned in Scripture. One such example is the Hittite kingdom, mentioned only in the Bible, which had been dismissed by many critics as mythological. As Gleason Archer mentions: "The references [in the Bible] to the Hittites were treated with incredulity and condemned as mere fiction on the part of late authors of the Torah" (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 1974, p. 165). Yet, excavations in Syria and Turkey revealed many Hittite monuments and documents. These discoveries proved the Hittites to have been a mighty nation, with an empire extending from Asia Minor to parts of Israel.

Also important was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, written in ancient Hebrew script. The scrolls were found in caves near the Dead Sea in 1947. Some of them are books of the Old Testament written more than 100 years before Christ's time. Nevertheless, questions raised by earlier critics about the Bible's authenticity have shaken the faith of many.

Added dimension in understanding

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains: "There were nineteenth-century scholars who were convinced that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and perhaps even Moses were simply imaginary creations of later Israelite authors. But archaeology has put these persons in a real world. As a result, a scholar such as J[ohn] Bright, after devoting thirty-six pages to the subject, can write, 'the Bible's picture of the patriarchs is deeply rooted in history' . . . Archaeology supplies means for understanding many of the biblical situations[;] it adds the dimension of reality to pictures that otherwise would be strange and somewhat unreal, and therefore it provides an element of credibility. While the person of faith does not ask for proof, he does want to



feel that his faith is reasonable and not mere fantasy. Archaeology, by supplying him with material remains from biblical times and places, and by interpreting these data, provides a context of reality for the biblical story and reasonability for biblical faith" (1979, Vol. 1, p. 244).

Archaeological discoveries in Egypt and Iraq have been valuable in confirming the biblical account. However, much evidence still remains beneath

An atheist who set out to refute the Bible found himself accepting the Bible as God's Word because of his archaeological discoveries.

the surface. Much of the territory of the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah remains to be archaeologically explored.

Not until the end of World War I, when some of this area came under British control, did prolonged scientific surveys and excavations begin.

After the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Jews began to arrive in Palestine; the British, Americans and others were joined in digs by Jews in their ancestral homelands. Today there are some 300 sizable excavations underway in Israel, an extraordinary number for a country only 200 miles long and 60 miles wide.

Archaeology makes a believer

The abundance of archaeological evidence in support of the Bible can strengthen faith, and in some cases it has greatly contributed to giving birth to belief where none existed before.

An example of physical evidence building one's faith is the life of Englishman William M. Ramsay (1851-1939). Born in the lap of luxury, Ramsay was dutifully raised as a nonbeliever by his atheist parents. He graduated from Oxford University with a doctorate in philosophy and became a professor at the University of Aberdeen.

Determined to undermine the historical accuracy of the Bible, he studied archaeology with the aim of disproving the biblical account. Once ready with the necessary scientific tools and learning, he traveled to Palestine and focused on the book of Acts, which he fully expected to refute as nothing more than myth.

After a quarter-century of work, Ramsay was awestruck by the accuracy of the book of Acts. In his quest to refute the Bible, Ramsay discovered many facts which confirmed its accuracy.

He had to concede that Luke's account of the events and setting recorded in the narrative were exact even in the smallest detail. Far from attacking the biblical account, Ramsay produced a book, *St. Paul, the Traveler and Roman Citizen*, which supported it.

Eventually, William Ramsay shook the intellectual world by writing that he had converted to Christianity. Ironically, this man who set out to refute the Bible, found himself accepting the Bible as God's Word because of his explorations and discoveries. For his contribution to biblical knowledge with his many books, he was knighted also.

The study of archaeology can help fortify faith. It allows us to take a fascinating journey back in time to study the stones and artifacts that bear mute but compelling witness to the truth of Scripture.

What else has been found? Future articles in *The Good News* will describe discoveries that parallel and illuminate the biblical account. **GN**

Archaeology and Genesis: What Does the Record Show?

by Mario Seiglie

A century ago Charles Darwin advanced an alternative to the biblical account of creation.

About the same time, Karl Marx made use of the theory of materialism, which stated that matter has always existed and doesn't need a Creator. This provided his followers with an alternative to belief in God. Then literary criticism focused its sights on the Bible and slowly began to attempt to tear it to pieces. Literary critics claimed that the

Archaeologists excavating the site of ancient Sumer have unearthed fascinating artifacts that depict some of the events described in the book of Genesis.

Bible is filled with myths and is of much more recent origin than the Bible itself claims to be.

As one scholar explains, man began to think of himself, rather than God, as the center of the universe. "The idea of evolution had captured the thinking of that day, and was thought to furnish the best key to the understanding of history as well as of nature. Religion was discussed from the standpoint of its subjective benefits to man. All possibility of special revelation from a personal God was discounted, and the religious side of man was to be explained by a natural process. . . . They concluded that Israel's religion must have developed along similar lines" (A. Noordtzy, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 98-99, pp. 388-390, 1940-41).

When the 20th century dawned, the tide of criticism eroded belief in the literal truth of the biblical accounts. Then came a series of remarkable

archaeological discoveries. Archaeology began in the 19th century but came to full force in the 20th. Critics of the historical accuracy of the Bible were confronted with physical evidence attesting to the truthfulness of certain accounts.

As author John Elder comments, the study of archaeology had much to do with tipping the scales, in many people's minds, back in the favor of biblical credibility. "Little by little, one city after another, one civilization after another, one culture after another, whose memories were enshrined only in the Bible, were restored to their proper places in ancient history by the studies of the archaeologists. . . . Nowhere has archaeological discovery refuted the Bible as history" (*Prophets, Idols and Diggers*, 1960, p. 16).

In this article we take a look at some of the astounding discoveries of the last two centuries and show how physical evidence confirms aspects of the biblical record.

When Luke wrote the Gospel that bears his name, he carefully laid out the evidence in favor of the historicity of Jesus Christ and His miracles, including His resurrection. He wanted his account



This seal, with its impression at right, is known as the Temptation Seal. Discovered at the site of ancient Sumer, it depicts a serpent, woman, tree and man—all important elements in the account from Genesis of the temptation.

to meet the scrutiny of doubters. Luke said he intended to write "an orderly account" (Luke 1:1-4) so his readers could "know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (emphasis added throughout).

Luke then proceeded to augment his account

with historical references mentioning, for example, the contemporaneous rulers of Judah and the emperor of the Roman Empire (Luke 1:5; 2:1).

Because of the number of discoveries, we cannot examine all of the evidence here. We will discuss, however, some of the principal finds that corroborate parts of the biblical record of Genesis.

The Temptation Seal

Seals made use of some of the most ancient forms of writing. They were used to certify documents, to show authority and, on occasion, as amulets. The earliest seals were made of clay impressed with markings or writing, and some of them became hardened with time or were baked when fires swept through a city. Since they are made of clay, they have survived much longer than records written on papyrus or parchment.

Archaeologists' dating of some seals has found them to be more than 5,000 years old. They are among the few surviving materials that provide firm evidence of people's beliefs at the dawn of civilization. Seals have been uncovered that confirm several biblical accounts, including some in Genesis.

The first chapters of the book of Genesis cover the creation of humans and the temptation that induced Adam to sin. God had given Adam certain laws to keep and explained the consequences of disobedience. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Genesis depicts the tempter, Satan, influencing Eve and in turn her husband, Adam, to disobey their Creator. God had told Adam and Eve they would die if they ate of the tree. But the serpent said to Eve, "You will not surely die." So Eve partook, found the fruit pleasant, then offered it to

her husband, "and he ate" (Genesis 3:1-6).

Is this account only a myth? Many critics thought so. Yet archaeology has unearthed, not in biblical Israel, but in the site of the most ancient civilization known, Sumer, a seal depicting this very sequence of events described in the book of Genesis. This find, known as the Temptation Seal, is in the British Museum. It



This clay tablet, inscribed in cuneiform, was recovered from the ancient city of Nineveh. It describes a flood that devastated the entire world—an account remarkably similar to the flood of Noah's time described in the book of Genesis.

dates to the third millennium before Christ, some 5,000 years ago. This artifact shows a man and a woman viewing a tree, and behind the woman is a serpent. The man and woman are both reaching for fruit of the tree.

The Genesis account of the temptation was believed to be a fabrication by Jewish writers, yet this graphic portrayal of events described in Genesis existed thousands of years before critics believe the book of Genesis was written. This artifact, one of the earliest surviving records, demonstrates that humans knew the essentials of the

temptation incident, and not only from the biblical account written in Genesis.

The Adam and Eve seal

Another Sumerian seal, dated ca. 3500 B.C. and now housed in the museum of the University of Pennsylvania, shows events that took place after the man and woman ate the forbidden fruit. This seal depicts the naked figures of a male and a female,

bowed in humiliation, being driven out, followed by a serpent. This seal also describes the story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden: ". . .

Therefore the LORD God sent him [Adam] out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken" (Genesis 3:23).

It is difficult to explain what the three figures, engraved on a seal dating from the beginnings of human antiquity, are doing if the artifact is not another depiction of the Genesis account.

The flood epics

"And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered . . . And all flesh died that moved on the earth" (Genesis 7:19, 21).

One of the most questioned accounts of the Bible is the flood of Noah's time. A century ago liberal critics considered it one of the most fanciful biblical myths. Yet more than a century of archaeological digging has revealed accounts of the flood in the earliest of civilizations.

One of the most astounding finds is the Gilgamesh Epic, recorded on clay tablets that were translated in 1872 by George Smith of the British Museum. The tablets narrate the flood account from the perspective of the ancient Babylonians. A similar account was found on Sumerian tablets, which are the earliest writings yet discovered.

Which one is the more authentic account of the flood? That is easily answered. Professor Gleason Archer notes that the differences in the Gilgamesh and Genesis narratives are too great to allow one to have been borrowed from the other. "The stark contrast between the passion-driven, quarrelsome, greedy gods of the Babylonian pantheon and the majestic holiness of Jehovah is most striking and

significant,” he writes. “Likewise the utter implausibility of a cube-shaped ark and an inundation of the entire world by a mere fourteen-day downpour [of the Gilgamesh Epic] stand in opposition to the seaworthy dimensions and the gradual sinking of the waters in the Biblical record” (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 1974, p. 211).

Clearly, the Gilgamesh Epic shows evidence of corruption.

These ancient tablets are by no means the only external corroboration of the biblical flood narrative. An enterprising historian, Aaron Smith, is said to have patiently tallied all the flood stories he could find. He came across 80,000 works in 72 languages about the deluge (Werner Keller,

Excavations in Iraq at the beginning of this century revealed that an enormous tower had existed in Babylon at one time.

among the Algonquins? . . . All of these agree that all mankind was destroyed by a great flood (usually represented as worldwide) as a result of divine displeasure at human sin, and that a single man with his family or a very few friends survived the catastrophe by means of a ship or raft or large canoe of some sort” (Archer, p. 209).

The Tower of Babel

“Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said,

famous metropolis of the ancient world, the royal seat of Nebuchadnezzar, was brought to light, and at the same time, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the ‘Hanging Gardens’ . . . and ‘E-temen-an-ki,’ the legendary Tower of Babel . . .

“The bricklaying technique described in the Bible at the building of the Tower of Babel corresponds with the findings of the archaeologists. As the investigations confirmed, actually only asphalted bricks were used in the construction, especially in the foundation. That was clearly necessary for the security of the structure in

accordance with building regulations . . . Foundations and stonework were therefore made waterproof and damp-proof with ‘slime,’ i.e., asphalt . . . Seven stages, ‘seven squares,’ rose one above the other. A little tablet belonging to an architect which was found in the temple expressly mentions that length, breadth and height were equal . . . The length of the sides at the base is



This enormous mound, the remnant of a ziggurat similar to the destroyed Tower of Babel, was erected at Ur in 2300 B.C. Close to this court archaeologists excavated a complete record of the building of the tower.

The Bible as History, 1980, p. 38).

Certainly if Noah’s flood were just a local event affecting people in a limited geographic region, its impact would not have been etched indelibly into the minds of so many far-flung peoples.

One historian notes: “The Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians of Mesopotamia might well be expected to cherish a similar tradition to that of the Hebrews, since they lived so close to the presumed seat of antediluvian civilization . . . But what shall we say of the legend of Manu preserved among the Hindus . . . or of Fah-he among the Chinese . . . or of Nu-u among the Hawaiians; or of Tezpi among the Mexican Indians; or of Manabozho

‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens . . .’” (Genesis 11:3-4).

Many of us have heard about the Tower of Babel, but few know of the solid evidence behind the Bible account.

Excavations in Iraq at the beginning of this century revealed that an enormous tower had existed in Babylon at one time. Werner Keller writes: “In 1899 the German Oriental Society equipped a large expedition under the direction of Professor Robert Koldewey, the architect, to examine the famous ruined mound of ‘Babil’ on the Euphrates. The excavations, as it turned out, took longer than anywhere else. In eighteen years the most

given as being rather more than 290 feet. The archaeologists measured it as 295 feet. According to that the tower must have been almost 300 feet high” (*The Bible As History*, 1980 edition, pp. 302, 317-318).

This means the tower rose to the height of a 20-story building.

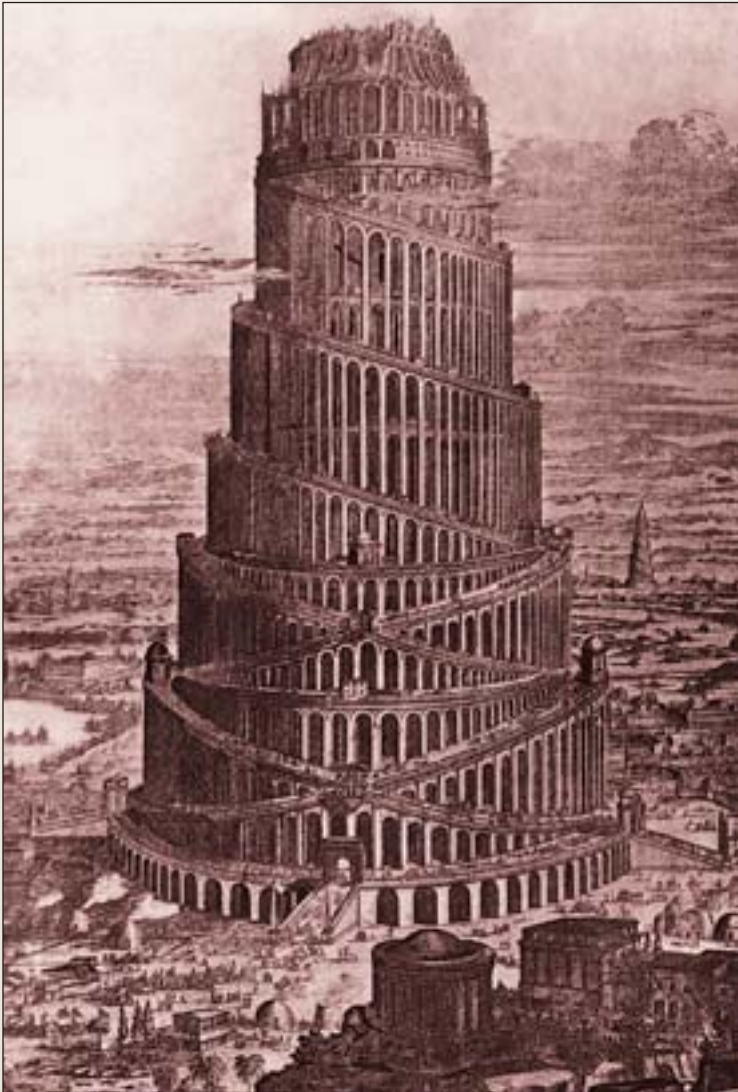
Further research has revealed that the original tower was destroyed, and on the same site a similar tower was later built at the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

D.J. Wiseman, professor of Assyriology, explains: “The tower was severely damaged in the war of 652-648 B.C. but restored again by Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.). It was this building, part

of which was recovered by Koldewey in 1899, which was described by Herodotus on his visit c. 460 B.C. . . . The base stage [of the later tower] measured 90 by 90 m[eters] and was 33 m[eters] high . . . The ziggurat [a sacred tower] at Babylon was demolished by Xerxes in 472 B.C., and though Alexander cleared the rubble prior to its restora-

Sacred towers were common in Mesopotamia. So far, the ruins of 35 such structures have been found. The first was the one at Babel.

From this brief survey, we can see the light that archaeology has shed on questions about the veracity of the biblical record. Although doubters will always question the truthfulness of God's Word,



In 1899 the German Oriental Society equipped a large expedition to examine the famous ruined mound of "Babil" on the Euphrates. They brought to light the legendary Tower of Babel. This artist's rendition is from a copper engraving.

tion this was thwarted by his death. The bricks were subsequently removed by the local inhabitants, and today the site of Etemenanki is a pit as deep as the original construction was high" (*New Bible Dictionary*, 1982, p. 111).

fewer and fewer now doubt its historical statements.

Many other exciting archaeological finds have helped confirm and shed light on the book of Genesis, and these will be examined in a future article. **GN**

Archaeology and Genesis: What Does the Record Show?

by Mario Seiglie

In the September-October issue, *The Good News* examined several archaeological finds that illuminate portions of the book of Genesis. In this issue we continue our exploration of discoveries that verify the accuracy of other aspects of the Genesis account, beginning with the biblical patriarch Abraham.

Abraham and the city of Ur

“And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, . . . and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan” (Genesis 11:31).

A century ago, German liberal critic Theodor Nöldeke questioned the historical existence of

Abraham and of “Ur of the Chaldeans.” He, along with others, regarded the Genesis account of Abraham and his descendants as fictional. Yet this century has brought to light an enormous amount of evidence to back the biblical record of Abraham.

In 1922 Leonard Woolley thoroughly excavated the city of Ur in southern Iraq and found it had been a thriving metropolis around 2000 B.C., precisely the time of Abraham. Based on his findings, Woolley even drew a map of the city that showed its orderly boulevards and made up blueprints of spacious dwellings with indoor baths. Classrooms were excavated that yielded schoolchildren’s tablets with lessons on grammar and arithmetic still visible. In addition, variations on the name Abraham were found that

Although doubters will always scoff at the truth of God’s Word, fewer and fewer now doubt the Bible’s historical basis.



Demonstrating Egypt’s agricultural productivity, this carved relief from an Egyptian tomb depicts a row of granaries in the center, with workers harvesting fruit, above, and baskets of grapes. When nearby areas suffered drought and famine, abundant food supplies drew the ancient Israelites to settle in Egypt.

Photos courtesy Oriental Institute of Chicago



These panels from a wall painting discovered in an Egyptian tomb at Beni-Hasan depict foreigners entering Egypt. Many of the ancient Israelites' animals, tools, utensils and weapons

described in the Bible are shown in the paintings, including donkeys, goats, harps, spears, bows and arrows. This painting, almost 4,000 years old, depicts life in the time of the biblical patriarchs.

dated to a century or two after his death.

The International Standard Encyclopedia, rejecting Nöldeke's theory that Abraham was a mythical figure, concludes: "From the archaeological evidence it is apparent that Abraham was the product of an advanced culture, and was typical of the upper-class patriarch of his day: His actions are set against a well-authenticated background of non-biblical material, making him a true son of his age who bore the same name and traversed the same general territory, as well as living in the same towns, as his contemporaries. He is in every sense a genuine Middle Bronze Age person, and not a retrojection of later Israelite historical thought, as used to be imagined . . ." (Vol. 1, 1979, p. 17).

"Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land" (Genesis 12:10). "So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him" (Genesis 46:6).

What did the biblical patriarchs and their families look like? The Bible speaks of the wealth of Abraham in cattle and sheep (Genesis 12:16). Later it talks about the brothers' envy over the multicolored coat that Jacob gave to Joseph (Genesis 37:3).

It tells about the sheep and goats that Jacob cleverly bred to avoid their being confiscated by his father-in-law (Genesis 30:33-43). Mentioned are musical instruments such as the harp (Genesis 31:27) and weapons such as the bow and arrow used for protection (Genesis 27:3). Were all these only fabrications and the product of fables?

At the turn of our century, several royal tombs were excavated 150 miles south of Cairo. There on one of the walls is a beautiful painting, later dated ca. 1900 B.C., of Semites entering Egypt to sell their wares. Men, women and children are pictured, some with multicolored clothing. They have harps, bows and arrows and spears. Accompanying them are goats and donkeys for food and conveyance. This painting shows people of the same lineage as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob wearing the clothing, caring for the same type of animals and using implements as described in the Bible record. It is an impressive find that backs the biblical description of that time, even in minute detail.

Laban's teraphim

Some have puzzled over the biblical story of Rachel's desperate attempt to hide her father's household gods, even risking her life to carry them with her. We read in Genesis 31:

"Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels . . . Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's . . . And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead . . .

"And Laban said to Jacob: 'What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters . . .? And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?'

"Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, 'Because I was afraid, for I said, "Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force." With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take it with you.'

"For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them . . . Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find them. And she said to her father, 'Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is with me'" (verses 17-35).

Why were these "household gods" so

important? Archaeological evidence reveals the answer. Many of these domestic idols, called teraphim, have been found in the Middle East. In the 1920s more than 20,000 tablets, now called the Nuzi tablets, were discovered in northern Iraq. They include much information on law, commercial transactions and religion that has shed light on the customs of Abraham's time.

The teraphim are mentioned as household gods that were used to determine the inheritance and titles of the sons of a family. Although scholars dispute how much the patriarchs were influenced by such practices, the biblical account fits this picture well. Clearly, Rachel was worried about leaving these idols behind. Laban certainly thought they were of great importance and traveled with his other sons for several days to recover them. These actions on their part make sense if the teraphim were used to help his other sons confirm their rights of inheritance.

These idols were also used to bring good luck and even for calling upon other gods. After another encounter with the true God, when Jacob found that Rachel had stolen the idols, he had her get rid of them. "And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you . . .'" (Genesis 35:2).

Again, the biblical account fits with archaeological evidence of the customs of the people of that time.

Joseph in Egypt

"Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt" (Genesis 39:1).

Perhaps one can acknowledge that these findings fit Abraham and his descendants in Mesopotamia and Canaan, but do they confirm the abundant archaeological evidence of Egyptian life and culture?

The Bible tells of a young Joseph who was sold into slavery and taken to Egypt as a young man. If this account is nothing more than myth, surely the biblical story could easily be refuted, since much more is known of Egyptian history and culture than of any other civilization of the Middle East of that time. The Egyptians left monument after monument, their tombs with walls full of pictures and writings of their daily lives. They inscribed in stone much

of their history. If the biblical story is false, it should not be difficult to expose it as a fraud, since details in the account would surely be discovered to be out of place.

Yet the biblical account fits. In Egypt Joseph ended up as a slave in an important official's home. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph. When he fled from her, he was falsely accused by her and thrown into prison. These elements all reflect Egyptian customs as described in the monuments—the abundance of Semitic slaves and stories of frivolous Egyptian wives. Says one encyclopedia: "Egyptian sources indicate that both in literature and in daily life some other Egyptian women were no better than Potiphar's wife" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 1128).

When God intervened and Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream (literature of that time indicates that interpreting dreams was a common practice), he was placed as second in command under Pharaoh.

The Egyptian ruler complimented him: "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 41:39-43).

In one of the walls in a royal Egyptian tomb is a beautiful engraving of the investiture ceremony for a new prime minister. The official is clothed in a white linen gown and wears a gold chain around his neck. As Werner Keller maintains: "Joseph's elevation to be viceroy of Egypt is reproduced in the Bible exactly according to protocol. He is invested with the insignia of his high office, he receives the ring, Pharaoh's seal, a costly linen vestment, and a golden chain. This is exactly how Egyptian artists depict this solemn ceremony on murals and reliefs.

As viceroy, Joseph rides in Pharaoh's 'second chariot.' That could indicate the 'period of the Hyksos' at the earliest, for it is only during the period of the 'rulers of the foreign lands' . . . that the fast war chariot reached Egypt . . . Before their



This illustration, from an Egyptian tomb carving, shows a dignitary being installed into government office. A gold chain is being placed around his neck, an exact parallel of Joseph's inauguration described in Genesis 41:41-42.

day this had not been the practice on the Nile. The ceremonial chariot harnessed to thoroughbred horses was in those days the Rolls-Royce of the governors. The first chariot belonged to the ruler, the 'second chariot' was occupied by his chief minister" (*The Bible as History*, 1980, p. 89).

From this brief survey we can see some of the light that archaeology has shed on the biblical record. Although doubters will always scoff at the truth of God's Word—since God's way of life and His laws are not easy to keep—fewer and fewer now doubt the Bible's historical basis.

Such discoveries continue to verify the inspiration of God's Word. As Paul said: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Future issues of *The Good News* will present more archaeological evidence that confirms the Bible account. **GN**

Archaeology and the Book of Exodus: Exit From Egypt

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues, *The Good News* examined several archaeological finds that illuminate portions of the book of Genesis. In this issue we continue our exploration of discoveries that illuminate the biblical accounts, focusing on Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

Exodus in English derives from the Latin and means simply “to exit.” The book of Exodus describes the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, an event distinguished by a mighty struggle between two unequal opponents. On the one hand was an oppressed nation of slaves and on the other the most powerful nation in the Middle East, if not the world. Viewed strictly physically, the odds in this struggle between Israel and Egypt were stacked against the Israelites.

What has archaeology found that pertains to the Exodus and the Israelites’ time in Egypt? Scientists have made several significant discoveries

that make this part of the Bible come alive.

Egyptian brick-making

In the book of Exodus we see the Egyptians forcing the Israelites to build great cities for Pharaoh: “Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses” (Exodus 1:11).

Most of us know a little about the Egyptian pyramids, which were built of stone. But not all Egyptian pyramids were made of stone; brick was the principal building material used in the country. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes that “throughout Egyptian history sun-dried brick was the chief building material. Stone was reserved for temples and other monumental constructions” (Vol. 1, p. 546).

Therefore the Egyptians needed millions of

Archaeologists have made many significant discoveries that make the book of Exodus and the Israelites’ time in Egypt come alive.



Egyptian brick-making is depicted in this wall painting from the tomb of Egyptian nobleman Rekhmire from the mid-second

millennium B.C. The painting shows workmen gathering materials, forming bricks and carrying the finished bricks after drying.

bricks, and the Israelites labored long and hard to supply the demand. The Egyptians “made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in *brick*, and in all manner of service in the field” (Exodus 1:14, emphasis added throughout).

When Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh that God wanted His people, the Israelites, to stop working and observe a religious festival in the wilderness, Pharaoh was incensed. Instead of yielding, he increased the work load: “So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, ‘You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves’” (Exodus 5:6-7).

This cruel measure added to the Israelites’ already arduous tasks. The Israelite slaves had to head for the fields to gather straw to mix with the mud.

The biblical detail about using straw in brick-making is puzzling to some. How, they ask, could the addition of straw as an ingredient make bricks stronger?

In Egypt the mud-straw combination was commonly used to strengthen building blocks. It also prevented the bricks from cracking or losing shape. Modern investigators have run tests that show that when straw is mixed with mud the resulting bricks are three times as strong as those made without straw. Fluids in the straw release humic acid and harden the bricks (Gerald Vardaman, *Archaeology and the Living Word*, 1966, p. 37). To this day, after thousands of years, mud-brick monuments still stand in Egypt.

The 10 plagues

Egyptology has illuminated our understanding of the Bible’s description of the plagues that struck Egypt and led to the Israelites’ departure from that land.

The Egyptians were religious people. They had gods for everything and scrupulously tried to please them. They had 39 principal gods, many of them depicted in Egyptian art with animal bodies or heads. In Egyptian temples, priests cared for many types of sacred animals that represented deities.



This statue of the Egyptian Nile god Hapi dates to about 900 B.C. God’s first plague intended to free the Israelites struck the mighty Nile River, and their gods proved powerless to protect the Egyptians.

In one respect the Israelites’ exodus out of Egypt was a confrontation between the true God, Yahweh, and the false gods of that land. It would remove any doubt in the Israelites’ minds as to who was the true God and which was the true religion. God had in mind not only to take His people from Egypt, but to discourage worship of the supposedly powerful Egyptian gods. He made this clear when He told Moses: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against *all the gods of Egypt* I will execute judgment: I am the LORD” (Exodus 12:12).

Later, in Numbers 33:4, we read that “on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.” God directed each of the 10

plagues against the Egyptian gods that ostensibly held sway over an aspect of nature. The plagues represented, collectively, a dramatic demonstration to Israelite and Egyptian alike that the gods were false; they were powerless to come to the aid of anyone who implored them.

An ancient Egyptian calendar reveals numerous holidays dedicated to the gods—so many that it appears that not many working days remained in the year. When Moses told Pharaoh that Israel would leave for several days to celebrate a feast to God, Pharaoh was indignant: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go . . . Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor” (Exodus 5:2, 4).

Pharaoh apparently thought that the Israelites enjoyed plenty of free time, so he refused the petition. Observing Pharaoh’s recalcitrance, God acted.

Plagues against the deities

The first plague was aimed at the most venerable and valuable resource of Egyptian civilization, the powerful Nile River, along with the gods the Egyptians associated with it. Egypt’s food supply depended on the flooding of the Nile, as well as its annual deposits of silt to replenish the fertility of the soil. Sometimes, as in Joseph’s day, failure of the Nile to overflow its banks would result in a famine. So the Egyptians prayed regularly to their gods for abundant water. The first plague made the water undrinkable and rancid. The fish, a valuable source of food, perished.

The Egyptians counted on the Nile goddess Hapi and the powerful Osiris to protect the Nile. Nothing resulted from the clamor and prayers of the Egyptians that their gods would purify the Nile. Only when Moses and Aaron prayed to the true God were the waters refreshed. Yet Pharaoh remained proud. He believed a host of powerful gods were waiting to do his bidding; indeed Pharaoh himself was considered a god by most Egyptians.

The second plague targeted one of the

creatures the Egyptians associated with the Nile. Egyptians worshiped the frog in the form of Heqt, whose statue bore the head of a frog. This god was symbolic of good crops and blessings in the afterlife. Egyptians noticed that, when the Nile reached a certain level and overflowed, frogs abounded. Their presence was an omen of bountiful crops and control of the insect population. A low Nile with few frogs meant a lack of silt, poor crops and many insects.

Heqt, god of the frogs, supposedly controlled the frog population. When the second plague produced too many frogs, it appeared to the Egyptians that the god who governed them had lost control. No amount of prayers and incense altered the situation. Only when the true God intervened did the frogs die and the crisis end.

The third and fourth plagues featured another favorite god of the Egyptians, Kheper, the scarab deity represented by beetles and other insects. The image of the scarab god appeared frequently on amulets. “The cult to flies, and especially of the beetles, was an important part of the ancient Egyptian religion” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Exegetical Commentary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 67). “Various types of beetles were venerated in Egypt; among them the dung beetle [which] became the emblem of resurrection and continual existence . . .” (*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 258).

When a swarm of lice or gnats (or possibly mosquitoes) and horseflies stung the populace, the court magicians asked the insect god to control them, but to no avail. Only when Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to ask the God of Israel to remove the pests did the plague abate.

Sacred bull

The next plague affected cattle, which the Egyptians considered to be under the control of Apis, the bull god, and Hathor, the cowlike mother goddess. The bull was considered sacred. When the bull in a temple died, it was mummified and buried with great pomp. The fifth plague struck at this mode of worship. “So the LORD did this thing on

the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one of them died” (Exodus 9:6). No amount of pagan prayer could alter the outcome.

Next came a plague of boils, which the Egyptians thought they could cure by resorting to their god of medicine, Imhotep, a legendary Egyptian physician who came to be worshiped. They also revered Thoth, the god of magic and healing. But again in this case the boils did not go away. Even worse, the court magicians who besought these entities were themselves covered with the pestilence: “And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians” (verse 11).



This enormous Egyptian stone scarab, some four feet long and three feet high, illustrates the Egyptian fascination with and worship of beetles and other insects. At the time of the Exodus, the third and fourth plagues were directed against the Egyptian deity thought to control insects.

Again, Pharaoh and other Egyptians pleaded with Moses that God would take away the problem. God’s power to remove this plague served as a witness not only to the Egyptians and the Israelites, but to the rest of the world. God told Pharaoh: “But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth” (verse 16). This witness remains with us today through the Bible account.

The seventh and eighth plagues struck Egypt’s crops. First, a horrible hailstorm hit the harvest, then a horde of locusts completed the destruction. The crops

were supposed to be guarded by Seth, the harvest god, and it was up to Nut, the sky goddess, to prevent weather disasters. Yet the pleas of the Egyptians fell on deaf ears. Pharaoh was running out of gods to protect his people.

God strikes the mightiest

The final two plagues were directed at the two mightiest gods of the Egyptians, Ra the chief god, represented by the sun, and Pharaoh himself.

Egyptians believed Ra to be the source of life, bringing light and heat to the earth. The ninth plague brought three days of no sunlight. The darkness was so “thick,” says Scripture, that even lamps could not dispel the blackness. “So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings” (Exodus 10:22-23).

In spite of the prayers and supplications the Egyptians must have offered up to Ra, the sun god did nothing.

The final god in dire need of humbling was Pharaoh himself, who supposedly descended from the god Ra. Pharaoh’s patron gods were Osiris, the judge of the dead, and Horus, the god of light. Egyptian worship of the Pharaohs found expression in the construction for their leaders of great pyramids as tombs. The 10th plague struck even the offspring of the Egyptians’ man-god.

Pharaoh himself was powerless to stop the death of his firstborn son, who was next in line to sit worthy of Egyptians’ worship. “And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock” (Exodus 12:29). With his gods impotent and humiliated, mighty Pharaoh finally relented, and the Exodus of the children of Israel began.

Future issues of *The Good News* will present more archaeological evidence that illuminates the historical account of the book of Exodus. **GN**

Archaeology and the Book of Exodus: Exit From Egypt

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues, *The Good News* examined archaeological finds that illuminate portions of the books of Genesis and Exodus. In this issue we continue our exploration of discoveries that help us understand other aspects of the Exodus account, beginning with the incident of the Israelites' worship of the golden calf.

The golden calf

After crossing the Red Sea (see "The Red Sea or the Reed Sea?," p. 24), the Israelites made their way to Mount Sinai. The account of Israel's appropriation of a golden calf to worship was



This silver statue of a calf, excavated from the site of ancient Ashkelon, dates to more than a century before the Exodus. This find proved that calf-worship was practiced at the time of the Exodus, contrary to the opinions of some critics.

long questioned by secular scholars. They noted that bull-worship was common in both Egypt and Canaan, but not calf-worship. However, in 1991 a silver statue of a calf was found in an excavation of ancient Ashkelon on Israel's coast. Authorities dated this calf to more than 100 years before the Exodus.

When Aaron shouted to the people, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4), he knew well how popular calf-worship was. Four centuries later, almost the same words were uttered by King Jeroboam when he made two golden

calves and told the people, "Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (1 Kings 12:28). In *Biblical Archaeology Review*, an extensive article on the discovery of the silver calf notes: "The Golden Calf worshipped at the foot of Mt. Sinai by impatient Israelites (Exodus 32) may have resembled this statuette" (March-April 1991, p. 1).

The eating of quail

During their wilderness years the Israelites complained to God that they had only manna to eat: "Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: 'Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!'" (Numbers 11:4-6).

This list represents one of the 10 major murmurings of the Israelites against God and Moses (Numbers 14:22). God decided to give the people what they asked for: "Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, 'Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?'" (Numbers 11:18-20).

The next day, quail descended on the Israelite camp to a depth of 12 inches. These fowl were common in biblical times and remain so in the Middle East. They are migratory birds that fly at the end of the European summer to the Sinai peninsula, where they remain for six months.

"The old world quail . . . a small, mottled brown game bird about 18 cm. (7 in.) long, is the only member of the [pheasant] subfamily . . . that is migratory. The routes of migration run from southern Europe, along the eastern Mediterranean coast,

through the Sinai Peninsula, to Arabia or West Africa. The quails travel southward in the late summer and northward in early spring (the time of the Israelite exodus from Egypt) . . . As recently as the early decades of the 20th cent[ury], migrating quails were killed by Egyptians at the rate of two million annually; in 1920 a kill of three million was recorded" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, Vol. 4, pp. 4-5).

The miracle of God was to bring these quail to the Israelite camp and deposit them in huge numbers in that precise location.

Evidence of the prophet Balaam

When the Israelites began their final journey to the Promised Land, they passed through the land of the Ammonites close to Moabite territory. They needed passage

through this area to enter Canaan by way of Jericho. But King Balak of the Moabites refused to let the Israelites enter peacefully. He resorted to a known pagan prophet of the times, Balaam, to prevent them from entering his land.

"Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River [Euphrates] 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! Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me'" (Numbers 22:5).

Apparently, Balaam's renown was such that a Moabite king would pay a considerable sum for his services. In 1967 archaeologists digging up the remains of Deir Alla, an ancient Ammonite city on the east bank of the Jordan, found an inscription

that mentioned Balaam, the son of Beor. The 16 lines of an incomplete inscription on a wall turned out to be part of one of Balaam's prophecies, in language similar to that is recorded in Numbers.

The Bible describes God's censure of Balaam. One night God forbade him to curse the Israelites. Disappointed, he told Moabite messengers he could not help them. "So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, 'Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you'" (verse 13).

Later God forced Balaam to prophesy of Israel's blessings and victories. "Then he took up his oracle and said: 'The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor . . . who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! . . . God brings him out of Egypt; he has strength like a wild ox; he shall consume the nations, his enemies; he shall break their bones and pierce them with arrows'" (Numbers 24:3-8).

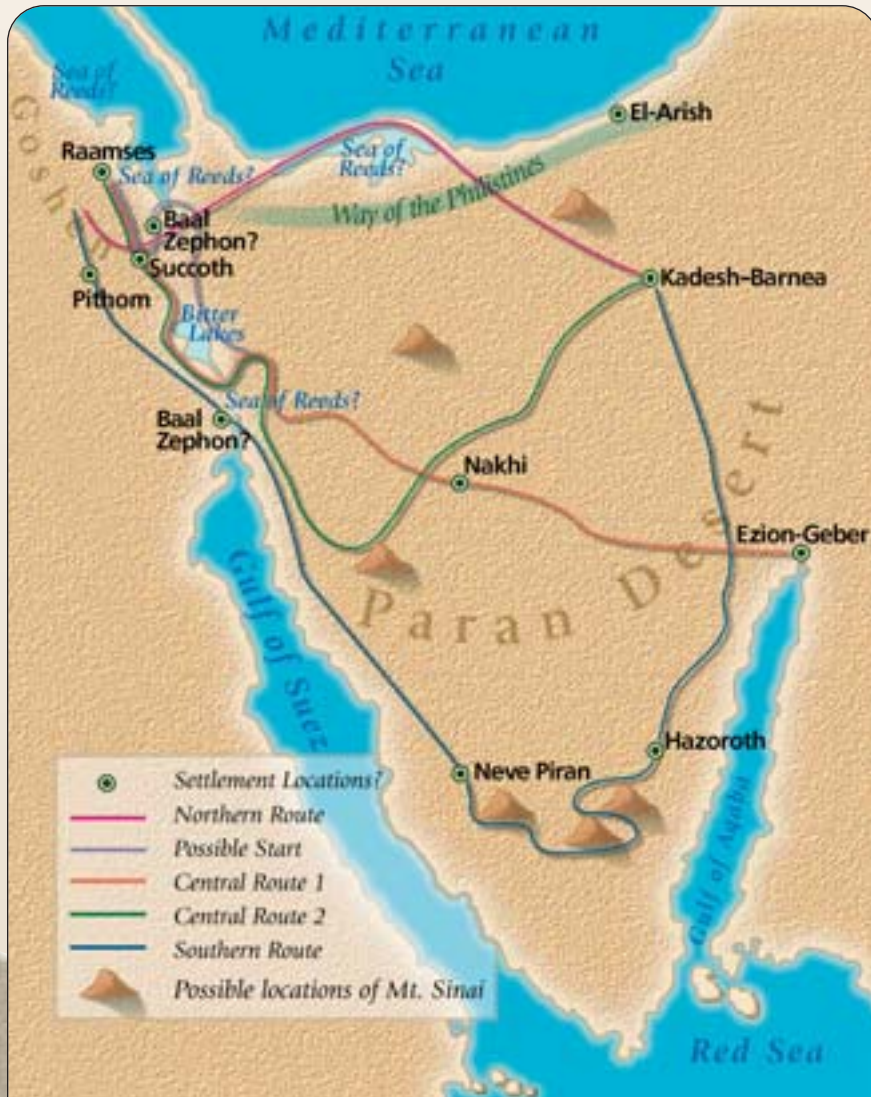
Shortly after these events Balaam, greedy for money (2 Peter 2:15), helped the Moabites induce Israel to sin. Not surprisingly, he perished after the defeat of the Moabites and Midianites (Numbers 31:8).

The restored text discovered in Deir Alla reads: "Inscription of Balaam, son of Beor, the man who was a seer of the gods. Lo, the gods came to him at night and spoke to him. According to these words, and they said to Balaam, son of Beor thus: 'There has appeared the last flame, a fire of chastisement has appeared!' And Balaam arose the next day and he could not eat and he wept intensely. And his people came to him and said to Balaam, son of Beor: 'Why do you fast and why do you weep?' And he said to them: 'Sit down! I shall show you how great is the calamity! And come, see the deeds of the gods! . . .'"

These words are strikingly similar in detail to the biblical account. Apparently the memory of what happened to this seer remained in the memory of the Ammonites and was recorded in their version.

Archaeologist Andre Lemaire, who pieced together the incomplete script, wrote: ". . . The inscription from Deir Alla,

Scholars advocate various routes for the Exodus and offer different interpretations of the biblical account of the parting of the Red Sea. Regardless of their views, the Red Sea miracle was so astounding that it left a permanent mark on Israel's history.



THE RED SEA OR THE REED SEA?

For many years scholars have disagreed over the identity of the sea the Israelites crossed and thus the site of the drowning of Pharaoh's army. Three routes for the Exodus have been proposed and continue to be debated.

Some believe that the Israelites' path took them north to the coast and that the "sea" they crossed was part of Lake Sirbonis, an arm or bay of the Mediterranean, after the crossing of which they turned south into the Sinai Peninsula.

Others have adopted the idea that the Israelites took a central route and crossed a shallow lake north of the Red Sea called the Reed Sea. The term in Hebrew is *yam suph*. *Yam* means "sea," and *suph* is generally thought to mean "reeds," "rushes" or possibly "sea-weed." That is why some versions of the Bible call it "the Sea of Reeds" or "Reed Sea" instead of the Red Sea. (See Exodus 15:4 in the Revised Standard Version, New American Bible and Jerusalem Bible.)

Some scholars prefer the translation "Reed Sea," noting that lakes north of the Red Sea are abundant with reeds. They usually designate one of these shallow bodies of water as the site of the Israelite crossing but say that the Egyptians, with their heavy chariots, got bogged down and somehow drowned.

Other scholars prefer a southern route, pointing to evidence that they feel demonstrates that *yam suph* may mean "sea at the end of the world," as some conceive it to have been. Says theology professor Bernard F. Batto: "What we call the Red Sea . . . was regarded by the ancients as the sea at the end of the world. Interestingly enough, the Greeks applied the name Red Sea not only to our Red Sea but also to the Indian Ocean and, later when they discovered it, even to the Persian Gulf . . . *Yam sup* came to refer to the Red Sea because like other ancient peoples, the Israelites did not distinguish the Red Sea from

oceans further to the south. To their way of thinking, the Red Sea—the *yam sup*—was the sea at the end of the earth" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August 1984, p. 59).

In other biblical references, *yam suph* means Red Sea or its arms, the Gulf of Suez and Gulf of Aqaba. In 1 Kings 9:26 we read: "King Solomon also built a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea [*yam suph*], in the land of Edom." If this were a marshy lake close to Egypt, this would certainly be a strange place for Solomon to build his great fleet. But geographers know Elath is a port at the northernmost end of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Notice also Numbers 33, which mentions the stops the Israelites made in the wilderness of the Sinai. After crossing "the sea," they camped in Marah, then Elim. And "they moved from Elim and camped by the Red Sea [*yam suph*]" (verse 10). How could they have crossed a "sea of reeds" and, after many days of travel, still camped by that same "sea of reeds"? No body of water in the region except the Red Sea would have been large enough for the Israelites to have traveled so long and still be close to its coast. Other references that support the Red Sea are Numbers 21:4 and Jeremiah 49:21.

Which route did the Israelites take, and at what point did they cross the sea? We cannot know for sure. However, one author of several works on biblical history offers this perspective: "The crossing of Israel . . . cannot be explained as a wading through a swamp. It required a mighty act of God, an act so significant both in scope and meaning that forever after in Israel's history it was the paradigm against which all of his redemptive and saving work was measured" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 66). *GN*

—Mario Seiglie

dated to about the middle of the eighth century B.C. and written on the wall of what may have been some kind of religious teaching center, is very likely the earliest extant example of a prophetic text. The principal personage in the Deir Alla text is the seer Balaam, son of Beor, well known to us from the stories in Numbers" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1985, p. 39).

Here we have another biblical figure who cannot be dismissed as myth.

The route from Egypt

Another source of scholarly controversy concerns the route the Israelites took to enter the Promised Land. "The Bible is very specific in its list of places along the final stage of the Exodus route taken by the Israelites on their way to the

Promised Land. Yet it is this very specificity that has made it vulnerable to criticism from some scholars. Many of the places in question, they say, did not exist when the Exodus is said to have occurred" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1994, p. 5).

Yet three lists showing the very route the Israelites took to enter Canaan have been found in Egyptian monuments.

Numbers 33:45-49 describes the Israelites passing through Ijim, Dibon Gad, Almon Diblathaim, Nebo, Abel and finally the Jordan. The route the Egyptians took to supervise this area, which they ruled for many centuries, includes eight places, of which six appear in the same

COMBINED EGYPTIAN ROUTE	BIBLICAL ROUTE
(Yamm) ha-Melach	Melah (means "salt," or the Dead Sea)
Iyyin	Yyyim
Heres/Hareseth	Heres/Hareseth
Aqrabat	
Dibon-Qarho	Dibon
Iktanu	
Abel	Abel-shittim
Jordan	Jordan

(Source: *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1994, pp. 57-59).

sequence mentioned primarily in Numbers 33: Melah, Ijim, Heres-Hareseth (mentioned only in Judges 8:13), Dibon, Abel and the Jordan.

Charles Krahmalkov, a professor of ancient Near Eastern languages, speaks of the accuracy of the biblical account: "In short, the Biblical story of the invasion of Transjordan that set the stage for the conquest of all Palestine is told against a background that is historically accurate. The Israelite invasion route described in Numbers 33:45b-50 was in fact an official, heavily trafficked Egyptian road . . ." (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1994, p. 58).

Thus, archaeology, notwithstanding scholarly criticism, confirms another part of biblical history. *GN*

Archaeology and the Book of Joshua: The Conquest

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues *The Good News* examined archaeological finds that illuminate portions of the biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In this issue we continue that series, focusing on the book of Joshua, which chronicles Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

After wandering in the desert for 40 years, the Israelites were finally permitted to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Moses was about to die, and God instructed him: "Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him" (Deuteronomy 31:14). Shortly afterwards, Joshua was named as the new leader, and Moses died on top of Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1, 5). Thus begins the story of the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Debated dates at Jericho

"Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in" (Joshua 6:1).

The first city the Israelites faced was Jericho. According to the archaeological evidence, it is one of the oldest settlements in the world. How accurate is the biblical description of Jericho's destruction?

The question spurred a lively debate throughout this century after several major excavations of the city took place.

The first extensive dig employing modern techniques was conducted by British archaeologist John Garstang in the 1930s. After six years of excavations he reported:

"In a word, in all material details and in date the fall of Jericho took place as described in the Biblical narrative. Our demonstration is limited, however, to material observations: the walls fell, shaken apparently by earthquake, and the city was destroyed by fire, about 1400 B.C." ("Jericho and the Biblical Story," *Wonders of the Past*, Wise, New York, 1937, p. 1222).

In the 1950s Garstang's conclusion was rejected by another British archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon. She placed the destruction of this stage of the city 150 years earlier than Joshua's time and believed that no 15th-century city existed for him to conquer. This argument lent support to many scholars who dismissed the biblical story as a myth. Archaeologist and pottery expert Bryant Wood observed: "Scholars by and large [had] written off the Biblical record as so much folklore and religious rhetoric. And this is where the matter has stood for the past 25 years" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1990, p. 49).

Evidence examined and evaluated

Unfortunately, Kathleen Kenyon died before her work could be published, making careful evaluation of her reports difficult. Fifteen years later her findings were published, and the task fell to Bryant Wood to methodically review them.

After studying her work and taking into account new discoveries, his startling conclusion was that Kenyon had been completely wrong on her date of the fall of Jericho. He found a direct correlation between the archaeological evidence and the biblical account.

What led to such a turnaround?

First was the use of a tool not available in Kenyon's days—radioactive dating. When a piece of charcoal from the burned city was examined by carbon-14 testing—generally reliable for materials up to 4,000 years old—it yielded the date of 1410 B.C., almost precisely the time of the conquest and burning of Jericho as determined from biblical chronology. (According to 1 Kings 6:1, Solomon's temple was inaugurated 480 years after the Exodus, which would place this event at approximately 1443 B.C. After 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites would have entered the Promised Land around 1403 B.C.)

Concerning the evidence that the city was incinerated, Kenyon found a layer of ash and burnt debris a yard thick in this level of the city.

How accurate is the biblical description of Jericho's destruction? The question spurred a lively debate throughout this century after several major excavations of the city took place.

“The destruction was complete,” she reported. “Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire . . . In most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt . . .” (“Excavations at Jericho,” *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly*, 1955, p. 370).

This description of the devastation fits the biblical account of the fate of the city: Israel “burned the city and all that was in it with fire” (Joshua 6:24).

Moreover, evidence included three Egyptian scarabs—beetle-shaped amulets—discovered in a cemetery inside the city. These bore the names of three pharaohs who ruled from 1500 to the 1380s B.C. Such dates clearly contradict Kenyon’s belief that the city had been abandoned around 1550 B.C.

Biblical details confirmed

A third type of evidence was the unusual amount of stored grain found in the ruins of Jericho. “The most abundant item found in the destruction apart from pottery,” says Wood, “was grain . . . In her limited excavation area, Kenyon recovered six bushels of grain in one season! This is unique in the annals of Palestinian archaeology. The presence of these grain stores in the *destroyed* city is entirely consistent with the Biblical account. The city did not fall as a result of a starvation siege, as was so common in ancient times. Instead, the Bible tells us, Jericho was destroyed after but seven days (Joshua 6:15, 20).

“Successful attackers normally plundered valuable grain once they captured a city. This of course would be inconsistent with the grain found here. But in the case of Jericho the Israelites were told that ‘the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction,’ and were commanded, ‘Keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction’ (Joshua 9:17-18). So the Israelites were forbidden to take any plunder from Jericho. This could explain why so much grain was left to burn when [the city] met its end” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1990, p. 56).

Finally, the type of pottery found confirmed the traditional date of the conquest, since some bore a style that appeared only

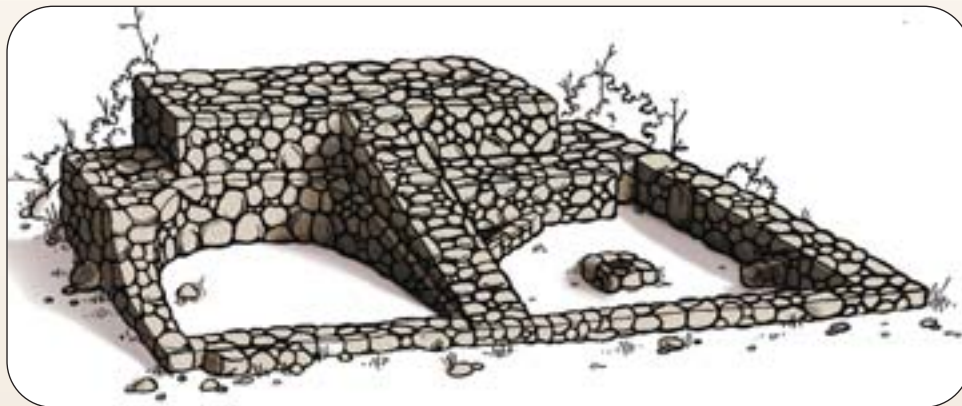
during the period of 1450-1400 B.C. Wood concludes: “Despite my disagreements with Kenyon’s major conclusion, I nevertheless applaud her for her careful and painstaking field work . . . Her thoroughgoing excavation methods and detailed reporting of her findings, however, did not carry over into her analytical work.

“When the evidence is critically examined there is no basis for her contention that City IV [the level corresponding to a violent destruction and burning of the city] was destroyed by the Hyksos or Egyptians

and sacrificed peace offerings” (Joshua 8:30-31).

The barren region of Mount Ebal had lain undisturbed for centuries. In 1982 a team of archaeologists began to scratch its surface. This was in the West Bank area and had not been explored until 1967, when Israel occupied the territory.

Adam Zertal, an Israeli archaeologist, supervised the excavation of a strange mound found on top of Mount Ebal. Slowly, after months of work, the site began to yield its secrets.



An artist's rendering shows the stone structure discovered on Mount Ebal as it might have appeared in the time of Joshua. Its excavators believe the central platform was Joshua's altar, to which priests ascended via the ramp in the center.

in the mid-16th century B.C.E. The pottery, stratigraphic considerations, scarab data and a Carbon-14 date all point to a destruction of the city around the end of Late Bronze I, about 1400 B.C.E. Garstang’s original date for this event appears to be the correct one!” (ibid., p. 57).

When *Time* magazine published an article about these new conclusions on Jericho, the evidence appeared so convincing that *Time* writers remarked, “Score one for the Bible” (Michael D. Lemonick, *Time*, March 5, 1990, p. 43).

Unusual remains discovered

“Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: ‘an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.’ And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD,

It was a rectangular structure made of large, uncut stones with a ramp leading to the center. It was quite a massive formation, 28 feet by 24 feet and 9 feet tall. Inside the construction was a fill of ashes, rocks, dirt, potsherds and animal bones. More than 4,000 animal bones were found and sent to a laboratory for analysis.

At first Zertal thought the structure had been a farmhouse, but it had no doors and no floor. All the houses in that period had floors, even if only of compressed earth.

From nearby Jerusalem came the analysis of the animal bones. Almost all of them were from bulls, sheep and goats, precisely the animals prescribed for sacrifice in the book of Leviticus. None of the bones came from typical farm animals that the Bible defines as unclean—horses, donkeys, pigs, dogs and cats. After further examination, this did not look like the remains of a

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Archaeology

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farmhouse at all. What could it be?

Based on four more years of excavations, Zertal finally completed the picture of the structure. The resulting illustration bore a striking resemblance to the biblical specifications of an altar.

As per God's instruction, the stone ramp did not have steps: "And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it" (Exodus 20:25-26). This was a precaution so the priest's tunic would not expose his legs as he ascended the altar.

Also, the Bible describes an altar with four surrounding walls and completely filled with earth and rocks. On top of this fill a fire could be lighted for the sacrifice. This is precisely what was found.

Around this altar Zertal discovered a small wall that apparently served to define a perimeter of an area for many people to congregate. He concluded that this area was a prototype of an Israelite worship center with an altar and an open-air meeting place. He thinks this could be the altar built by Joshua at Mount Ebal (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, January-February 1986).

On God's instructions Moses had said: "Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall white-wash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 27:4-7).

Therefore, there is strong evidence that God's orders were solemnly carried out by Joshua. An altar at Mount Ebal was built with the unusual specifications of uncut stones and a ramp instead of steps. At this site only remains of animals biblically approved for sacrifice were found.

Future issues of *The Good News* will examine other archaeological finds that confirm and illuminate biblical history. **GN**

Archaeology and the Book of Judges

by Mario Seiglie

Previous issues of *The Good News* have examined archaeological finds that illuminate sections of the five biblical books of Moses and the book of Joshua. In this issue we focus on a tumultuous time in ancient Israel's history, the era covered by the book of Judges.

During this period of more than 300 years, God periodically raised up judges to rescue and rule over Israel as the Israelites struggled with indigenous peoples over control of the land.

Judges begins by describing the settlement of the Israelite tribes in Canaan. The aged Joshua distributes the territory among the tribes. A short while later he dies at the age of 110 (Judges 2:8). Then comes a period during which faithful elders who had lived over from Joshua's time governed Israel. When they died, no leader immediately succeeded them. A dangerous political void existed.

Many among the younger generation, born in the land of Canaan, had largely forgotten the miracles accomplished during Moses' and Joshua's time. "When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

The new generation found itself surrounded by many Canaanites who adhered to their own popular religion. Instead of eliminating this foreign influence, as God had commanded, in many instances the Israelites simply coexisted with those holding false beliefs. God had warned them what would occur if this situation were allowed to continue: "Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, "I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.'" But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, "I will not drive them before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you'" (Judges 2:1-3).

During this period of more than 300 years, God periodically raised up judges—we find at least 12 of them described in the biblical account—to rescue and rule over Israel as the Israelites struggled with indigenous peoples over control of the land. Judges ruled simultaneously with each other in various regions of Israel. The surviving Canaanites frequently attacked and reconquered territory taken by the Israelites.

What does the archaeological evidence reveal about this time?

A change in cultures

The extensive scientific evidence points to a gradual change from a Canaanite building-and-pottery culture to a less-advanced Israelite cultural style.

Charles Fensham, a professor of Semitic languages, argues that "archaeology has shown that [around] 1200 B.C. certain cities in Palestine were demolished. A flowering culture of Late Bronze [Canaanite] was obliterated. The new developments . . . were of a lower culture than the preceding. The break is thus obvious and points to seminomadic groups in process of settling down. This evidence is clearly to be connected with the



The religion of the Canaanites held great appeal for the early Israelites. Shown are a statuette of Baal, left, the weather god, and a fertility figurine. The Baal figure apparently originally held a lightning bolt in its hand.

invading Israelite tribes” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, Vol. II, p. 1158).

This is consistent with the biblical record, which shows that the Israelites, initially slaves in Egypt and culturally impoverished, at first simply took over the existing Canaanite cities as they conquered them. God had told them, “So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

Gradual replacement

The book of Judges indicates that this cultural change was gradual. “And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out” (Judges 1:28). The Canaanite culture survived for many years until the Israelites finally replaced it.

“The Israelites had lived in Egypt as enslaved [people], and then spent 40 years as seminomads before entering Canaan; this makes it unlikely that they brought a distinctive material culture into Canaan . . . At the end of the Late Bronze Age and the start of the Iron Age, around 1200 B.C., a major change occurred in settlement patterns [in Canaan] . . . While we do not believe the new settlements mark the arrival of the Israelites, we are still happy to call them ‘Israelite’ settlements. This is because, in our view, the Israelites had been in the land for some two centuries by 1200 B.C. and were therefore involved in the changes that took place at that time” (John Bimson and David Livingstone, “Redating the Exodus,” *Biblical Archaeological Review*, September-October 1987, pp. 52-53).

Here, then, is additional evidence from archaeology that appears to confirm the biblical account. It shows a

The First Mention of Israel

During most of the last century, many liberal critics believed the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament was little more than the fabrication of later Jews from around the sixth century B.C. For instance, they believed there was no solid evidence of Israel being a nation at the time of the events described in the biblical book of Judges.

Yet, in 1896, British archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie found evidence of Israel’s existence as far back as 1200 B.C., precisely the time of the events in Judges. In the ruins of an Egyptian temple, he discovered a monument that narrated the military victories of Merneptah, an Egyptian pharaoh. In this beautifully carved pillar, dated around 1207 B.C., the monarch mentions the nation of Israel.

For this reason the monument, technically termed a stele, is called “the Israel Stele.” It can be seen in the Cairo Museum. On it Merneptah recorded his victories in Canaan and mentioned Israel as one of his vanquished enemies. This would place the battle during the time of the judges of Israel, when Israel was continually being attacked and invaded by nearby peoples and then liberated by the judges God chose and used to deliver His people.

In the last two lines of the text, the stele mentions four of Merneptah’s defeated foes in Canaan: “Ashkelon has been overcome. Gezer has been captured. Yanoam was made non-existent. Israel is laid waste, [and] his seed is not.”

The reign of Merneptah is dated around 1212-1202 B.C. By recording his victory over Israel, Merneptah shows that during this time the Israelites were already in possession of the central portion of the land.

Of the other places mentioned on the monument, Ashkelon was one of the coastal cities of the recently arrived Philistines. Gezer and Yanoam were in the lowlands, still under the possession of the Canaanites. As recorded in the Bible, Gezer was not conquered by the Israelites under Joshua. “Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer among them” (Judges 1:29). Thus Merneptah’s statement corroborates that this city was not in Israelite territory.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia sums up the findings: “Among Merneptah’s conquests in Syria-Palestine is Ysr’r (Egyptian for Y’sr’l), clearly recognizable as ‘Israel’ . . . Thus the Israel Stele provides a terminus ad quem [limit from which to date] for the presence of the Israelites in Palestine . . .” (Eerdman’s, Grand Rapids, 1986, Vol. 3, p. 324).

—Mario Seiglie

gradual supplanting of Canaanite culture by Israelite settlers.

Worship of Baal and Asherah

After Joshua’s generation had died out, “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths” (Judges 2:11-13).

Why the seemingly irresistible tendency for the Israelites to worship Baal over Yahweh? Again, archaeology sheds

much light on the Canaanite religion and helps us understand the deadly allure the indigenous religious practices held for the Israelites.

In 1929 excavations began in Ras Shamra (the ancient port town of Ugarit) in northern Lebanon. This work continues. The remains of a palace discovered in the first year of excavation yielded a library containing hundreds of ancient documents that provided a wealth of information about the Canaanite religion. What did these tablets reveal? “The texts show the degrading results of the worship of these deities; with their emphasis on war, sacred prostitution, sensuous love and the consequent social degradation” (*The New Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1982, p. 1230).

Forbidden worship

The pagan religion was enticing to the Israelites for two primary reasons. First, it was not as morally demanding as the biblical religion. Second, the Israelites fell victim to a superstitious respect for the gods that supposedly controlled the land of the Canaanites.

“The Canaanite religion was completely different from the Israelite. So far, no evidence has been found in Canaanite culture of a series of rules of conduct similar to the Ten Commandments . . . It was a great temptation for the Israelite invaders to respect the existing gods of the land which were regarded as being responsible for the country’s fertility. In addition, the worship of these gods was much less demanding than the rigid Israelite laws and rituals. Consequently, many of God’s people yielded to this temptation. The result was a gradual moral decline of the nation” (*The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Lion Publishers, 1983, p. 153).

Recognizing the great danger to fledgling Israel, God insisted that His people destroy every aspect of the degenerate native religion. “According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwell, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe my judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 18:3-4).

“And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire [be sacrificed] to Molech . . . You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination . . . Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants” (verses 21-25).

Sexual perversion as religion

The corruption found expression in grotesque cultic sexual practices. “The pagan world of the ancient Near East worshipped and deified sex.” So intertwined were sex and religion that “the term ‘holy ones’ [was used] for its cult

prostitutes” (*Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1971, p. 79).

Although the details are crude, they reveal why biblical proscriptions against the Canaanite perversions are so pervasive. “[A] ritual involved a dramatization of the myth . . . [and] centered in sexual activity since the rainfall attributed to Baal was thought to . . . fertilize and impregnate the earth with life just as he impregnated Asherah, the goddess of fertility, in the myth. Canaanite religion, then, was grossly sensual and even perverse because it required the services of both male and female cultic prostitutes as the principal actors in the drama.

“Unlike the requirement in Israel, there was no one central sanctuary. Baal could be worshipped wherever there was a place especially visited by the numinous presence of the gods. These places were originally on hills (hence, ‘high place’) but later could be found in valleys or even within the cities and towns” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, Baker Book House, 1987, pp. 160-161).

Infants sacrificed to Molech

Included in these Canaanite practices was child sacrifice, described in the Bible as having children to “pass through the fire to Molech” (Jeremiah 32:35). The Ras Shamra tablets also mention the god Molech. Some unrighteous kings in Israel instituted the practice of sacrificing infants to Molech. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, denounced this ghastly ritual. “For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,” and “they have built the high places of Tophet [related to Molech worship] . . . to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart” (Jeremiah 7:30-31).

In the ancient Phoenician city of Carthage—part of the Canaanite culture—some 20,000 urns containing the remains of sacrificed children were found. The archaeologists at the site apprise us that “the Carthaginian Tophet is the largest of these Phoenician sites and indeed is the largest cemetery of sacrificed humans ever discovered. Child sacrifice took place there almost continuously for a period of nearly 600 years” (Lawrence Stager and

Samuel Wolff, *Biblical Archaeological Review*, January-February 1984, p. 32).

Kleitarchos, a Greek from the third century B.C., described this sacrifice as the heating up of a bronze statue with outstretched arms. Infants placed into these red-hot arms quickly perished.

Struggle for a nation’s heart

Obviously, God did not want the Israelites to destroy their own offspring. When righteous kings such as Josiah ascended the throne, they obeyed God and abolished the practice. “And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom [in Jerusalem], that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:10).

Some might think the prophets were overly harsh in condemning the Canaanite religion. Yet now, with detailed evidence of Canaanite practices found by archaeologists in this century, it is clear why the prophets were uncompromising.

“The prophets and chroniclers tended to be thought of as men who, in their zeal for Yahweh and their anger against foreign religions, had probably gone too far,” writes one author. “This objection was leveled at the Bible right up to the present day . . . With us it is accepted as a matter of course that every half civilized community controls the morality of its citizens. But in Canaan in those days the cult of sensuality was regarded as the worship of the gods, men and women prostitutes ranked as ‘sacred’ to the followers of the religion, the rewards for their ‘services’ went into the temple treasuries as ‘offerings for the god.’

“The last thing the prophets and chroniclers did was to exaggerate. How well founded their harsh words were has only become fully understood since the great discoveries of Ras Shamra . . . What temptation for a simple shepherd folk, what perilous enticement! . . . Without its stern moral law, without its faith in one God, without the commanding figures of its prophets, Israel would never have been able to survive this struggle with the Baals, with the religions of the fertility goddesses, with the Asherim and the high places” (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, Bantam Books, New

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York, 1980, pp. 286, 289).

Thus the periodic backsliding of Israel into Baal worship described in the book of Judges is a realistic depiction. The description draws support from the archaeological finds that document the struggle for the soul of Israel. God persevered in sending His messengers to warn His people of the dangers of Baalism. An apt description of this struggle was penned by Nehemiah:

“And they took strong cities and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all goods, cisterns already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations.

“Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers [judges] who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies . . . Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies” (Nehemiah 9:25-28).

A nation's early years

The book of Judges is not just documentation of ancient victories and heroic acts. It represents a realistic description of a fledgling nation that began to assimilate the perverse culture of its defeated foes. The book candidly reveals Israel's struggle—not always successful—against the barbaric Canaanite religion. It explains Israel's frequent relapses and resultant humiliating defeats at the hands of its enemies. Through it all one constant factor shows through: God, who is concerned about the moral and spiritual life of His people.

Future issues of *The Good News* will examine additional archaeological finds that confirm and help us understand the biblical record. **GN**

King David's Reign: A Nation United

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues *The Good News* has examined archaeological discoveries that confirm and help us better understand the biblical accounts in the five books of Moses and Israel's history as recorded in Joshua and Judges. In this issue we focus on the beginning of the Israelite monarchy, the time of King David. The Bible discusses this period in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles.

When the period described in the book of Judges ended, a new age arrived with the kings of Israel, an era lasting more than 400 years. (It came to a tragic close with the kingdoms of Israel and Judah both being taken into captivity and exile.)

The monarchy lacked an auspicious beginning. God eventually rejected Saul, the first king, because of his continual disobedience. David, the son of Jesse, replaced Saul.

David's reign began the golden age of Israel. This powerful king wisely governed the tribes of Israel, forging them into a unified nation. God blessed this obedient and multitalented man. David was not only a valiant soldier, but a great military strategist, able administrator,

diplomat, composer and musician.

Under David's inspired leadership, Israel soon became powerful, extending its northern frontiers to the River Euphrates and its southern borders to the Red Sea. "And David defeated Hadadezer king of Zobah as far as Hamath, as he went to establish his power by the River Euphrates . . . So David reigned over all Israel, and administered judgment and justice to all his people" (1 Chronicles 18:3, 14).

After centuries of Israelite struggle against the Canaanites and Philistines, it was David who finally triumphed decisively over Israel's enemies. The ensuing peace freed the Israelites to make full use of the formidable natural resources of the area. This liberty produced great prosperity. From their humble beginning as a slave people, then as pastoral tribes, they ascended to great heights. David transformed Israel into a highly organized state that would later leave a lasting mark on Western civilization.

"The reign of David," comments one authority, "marks—politically speaking—Israel's golden age. A power vacuum in both Egypt and Mesopotamia made it possible for the tribes that had entered Canaan under Joshua a few centuries earlier to become a mighty nation . . . David was king of an area extending from the Red Sea to the Euphrates" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, Vol. II, p. 915).

With the flourishing of the material culture of Israel comes enough physical evidence of Israelite presence to be confirmed by archaeology.

"The purpose of Biblical archaeology," explains archaeologist Bryant Wood, "is to enhance our comprehension of the Bible, and so its greatest achievement, in my view, has been the extraordinary illumination of . . . the time of the Israelite monarchy, c. 1000-586 B.C.E. . . . [whereas] exploring that prehistory [the pre-monarchic age] is challenging: It requires tracing the archaeological record of a pastoral community, rather than an agrarian-based political entity

Secular historians once questioned the historicity of King David. However, recent archaeological discoveries confirm the evidence for his existence and reign.



Fragments of an inscription recovered at the site of biblical Dan prove that David was a historical figure. The inscription refers to the "house of David," the dynasty founded by King David.

[as in David's time] that built cities and made contacts with surrounding nations" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June 1995, pp. 33, 35).

Jerusalem as Israel's new capital

David was originally headquartered in Hebron, in southern Judah, but now, with all 13 tribes accepting his rulership, he needed a central base from which to govern. An ideal place was on the northern border of Judah, the city of Jebus, also called Jerusalem, but it was in the hands of the Jebusites, a remnant Canaanite tribe that had heavily fortified the city. "And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land" (1 Chronicles 11:4).

A few centuries earlier, Joshua had attempted to conquer the city of Jebus but had failed. "As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day" (Joshua 15:63).

After Joshua's death the Israelites briefly conquered Jerusalem. "Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire" (Judges 1:8). Yet the surviving inhabitants soon rebuilt the city. From that moment they successfully resisted Israelite attacks until the time of David. "But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day" (Judges 1:21).

The city was built on a mount in the midst of a large valley in the Judean mountains. It seemed impenetrable. When the Jebusites noticed David and his men were ready to attack them, they mocked their feeble efforts. "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, 'You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you, . . .'" (2 Samuel 5:6).

Yet David did not attempt a frontal attack on the fortress. Instead, he found



An artist's rendering shows Jerusalem as it may have appeared when David made it his capital. The city is connected by a narrow ridge to Mount Moriah, future site of the temple, in the background. Eventually the ridge was expanded and the entire area was called Mount Zion. At lower right, a procession bearing the ark enters the city.

the Achilles' heel of the Jebusite defenses, a hidden water shaft that wound its way up into the city. Such a shaft for transporting water was a common feature of many fortified cities of that time. "As was characteristic of all the great walled cities of Canaan," notes Eugene Merrill, "Jerusalem had a vertical water shaft connecting with a tunnel leading to an underground water supply outside the walls. As necessary as these systems were for the

survival of a city under siege, they also constituted a major weakness in that they provided access into the city for anyone who could find the entrance" (*Kingdom of Priests*, Baker Book House Co., Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 236).

When David discovered the entrance, he realized it was a way to secretly enter the city and open its gates. "Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites," he told his men, "shall be chief

and captain” (2 Samuel 5:8).

In 1 Chronicles 11:6-7 we find who gained the honor: “And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and became chief. Then David dwelt in the stronghold; therefore they called it the City of David.”

More than a century ago Charles Warren, a British officer, found a water shaft in Jerusalem with features similar to those described in the Bible account. Charles Pfeiffer, a professor of ancient literature, explains the significance of the discovery. “The capture of Jerusalem by David is of interest to archaeologists,” he wrote, “since he used a strategy which involved the Gihon Spring, on the eastern slope of Mount Zion . . . Joab went up first and was rewarded by becoming commander of David’s army . . .

“This tunnel has been identified with Warren’s Shaft. The shaft was dug through the limestone above the Gihon Spring all the way up to the surface, a distance of 24 meters . . . The discovery of a

Jebusite wall farther down the slope toward the Gihon Spring increases the possibility that Joab could have secretly entered the city . . . through Warren’s Shaft” (*The Biblical World: A Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, 1966, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, p. 373).

King David’s Jerusalem

After David conquered the Jebusite fortress, it became known as the City of David. As his reign prospered he soon began building to extend the city. “Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. So David went on and became great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him” (2 Samuel 5:9-10).

The mount on which the Jebusite fortress stood was called Mount Zion. “Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David)” (verse 7). Close by, to the north, was a hill called

Mount Moriah, which David bought from Ornan the Jebusite.

“Therefore, the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite . . . So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place. And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering” (1 Chronicles 21:18, 25-26).

Eventually David moved the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant to this area, and later King Solomon built his magnificent temple on Mount Moriah. “Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of

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The Battle at the Pool of Gibeon

In 1956 another remarkable discovery was made that provides additional evidence of the authenticity of the biblical accounts of David’s days.

Before David had secured leadership over all the tribes of Israel, Abner, who had been Saul’s general, served one of



The Pool of Gibeon was a massive 37-foot diameter shaft cut into solid rock to reach the water table 82 feet below.

Saul’s sons. Abner brought his army to fight David’s army, led by Joab. Abner’s and Joab’s troops met beside a famous water supply of that day called the pool of Gibeon.

“And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on the other

side of the pool. Then Abner said to Joab, ‘Let the young men now arise and compete before us.’ And Joab said, ‘Let them arise.’ So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, followers of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. And each one grasped his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent’s side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords, which is in Gibeon. So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David” (2 Samuel 2:13-17).

James Pritchard conducted an exploration of this site from 1956 to 1962. He discovered 31 jar handles bearing the Hebrew name Gibeon, which confirmed the site. Early in his search archaeologist Pritchard located a round water shaft, 37 feet in diameter, that led to a pool used by the city. This shaft, comments *Biblical Archaeology Review*, “was cut into the limestone bedrock to a depth of over 82 feet. Also cut into the limestone are a staircase and railing, which wind down to a level floor about halfway to the bottom of the shaft. From there, the stairs drop straight down another 45 feet—to the level of the water table” (May-June 1995, p. 43).

In the same issue archaeologist Bryant Wood concludes: “A large pool at Gibeon is no doubt the pool where the forces of Israel’s second king, David, fought under Joab against the forces of Saul’s son Ishbosheth under Abner” (p. 33).

This find was listed by *Biblical Archaeology Review* as one of the top 10 discoveries in biblical archaeology. It reveals yet another example of the accuracy of even the incidental details of the biblical account.

—Mario Seiglie

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Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles 3:1).

In Solomon's time the Israelites finally completed an earthwork that filled the area between the two mounts, making them one. The whole area was then called Mount Zion and was no more known as Moriah. "With the establishment of the ark first in the Jebusite fortress and then in the newly built temple," according to one source, "Zion became known as the sacred dwelling place of Israel's Lord, the One 'who dwells in Zion' (Ps. 9:11)" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1982, Vol. 4, p. 1198).

Eventually *Zion* would be used not only to denote the temple area, but as a symbol for Jerusalem, its inhabitants and, finally, the people of God.

Confirmation of David's existence

Some historians and critics have questioned the existence of King David and have relegated Old Testament accounts about him to the status of mythology. "I am not the only scholar," remarks Philip Davies, "who suspects that the figure of King David is about as historical as King Arthur" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August 1994, p. 55). Such professors cast doubt on the reliability of the biblical record and undermine the faith of others. They also rarely acknowledge the many discoveries that have corroborated the biblical account.

For instance, in 1993 archaeologists discovered the names of David and Israel in an inscription carved in stone only 100 years after David's death. Reports *Biblical Archaeology Review*: "It's not often that an archaeological find makes the front page of the *New York Times* (to say nothing of *Time* magazine). But that is what happened last summer to a discovery at Tel Dan, a beautiful mound in northern Galilee, at the foot of Mount Hermon beside one of the headwaters of the Jordan River.

"There Avraham Biran and his team of archaeologists found a remarkable inscription from the ninth century B.C.E. that refers both to the 'House of David' and to the 'King of Israel.' This is the first time that the name David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible" (*Biblical Archaeological Review*,

March-April 1994, p. 26). More and more extrabiblical evidence involving Bible names and places is being discovered as the years go by. The skeptics are gradually having to retreat.

Later another scholar found the name "House of David" in the inscriptions of the famous Moabite Stone, also called the Mesha stela, dated to the ninth century B.C., about 100 years after David's reign. It is hard to understand how David's name could appear in historical records if he were nothing but a later literary creation.

Anson Rainey, professor of ancient Near Eastern cultures, cautions the unwary about believing that the accounts of David and other biblical characters are but legends. "As someone who studies ancient inscriptions in the original, I have a responsibility to warn the lay audience that the new fad, the 'deconstructionist school,' . . . is merely a circle of dilettantes. Their view that nothing in Biblical tradition is earlier than the Persian period [540-330 B.C.], especially their denial of the existence of a United Monarchy, is a figment of their vain imagination. The name 'House of David' in the Tel Dan and Mesha inscriptions sounds the death knell to their specious conceit. Biblical scholarship and instruction should completely ignore the 'deconstructionist school.' They have nothing to teach us" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 1994, p. 47).

Although some critics will not admit as much, the accumulating physical evidence confirms rather than denies what is written in God's Word. But, for those who have faith in what God has said in the Bible, it is not necessary to find material remains to corroborate these accounts. The apostle Paul boldly affirms that God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).

However, in some cases physical evidence of the events and people described in the Scriptures has survived the ravages of time and serves as a witness to His faithfulness. This comforts and consoles us in our faith, as Paul wrote, "for whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The Good News will continue to examine archaeological finds that verify the accuracy of the Bible and help us better understand the biblical record. **GN**

King Solomon's Reign: Israel's Golden Years

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues *The Good News* has discussed various archaeological finds that illuminate and verify the biblical record. In this issue, we focus on the reign of Solomon, successor of David as king of Israel.

Once David had consolidated the Israelite empire, under the guidance of God he chose his son Solomon to be his successor. The reign of this young man became truly legendary. Under Solomon's rule Israel reached the pinnacle of wealth and power. Tragically, the glory of Solomon's kingdom barely outlasted his own lifetime.

What has archaeology revealed about King Solomon's reign in the 10th century B.C.? Remarkably, there is much evidence to corroborate the biblical account.

Unusual period of peace

What does the Bible say about the wider international condition during Solomon's time? God had told David: "Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; *and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around*. His name shall be Solomon [meaning 'peaceful'], for *I will give peace*

and quietness to Israel in his days" (1 Chronicles 22:9, emphasis added throughout).

Was this a time of peace in Israel? What do the archaeological records show? From contemporary Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions, we find these once-powerful kingdoms afflicted by military weakness.

Assyria was occupied with constant battles against the Arameans. Internal strife over dynastic disputes further weakened the kingdom. "These Assyrian pre-occupations," states Donald Wiseman, professor of Assyriology, "left David and Solomon free to extend their own territory into south Syria. The intruders from the Syrian desert impoverished Assyria under the aged Ashumasirpal I . . ." (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 334). Meanwhile, the Assyrians held the Babylonians in check, blocking any Chaldean intrusion into Israelite territory.

On Israel's southern flank, the Egyptians were also experiencing a general decline. Commenting on the beginning of this long period of weakness, one authority observes: "After the empire [of the previous centuries], Egypt never regained her former dominance in the eastern Mediterranean world . . . In large part this foreign weakness arose from domestic weakness. Egypt kept breaking up into smaller states . . . From the time of Samuel to the fall of the kingdom of Israel, Egypt was normally in a state of divided weakness" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 52).

This international backdrop is faithfully reflected in the biblical account. In fact, the weak priestly dynasty ruling Egypt made great concessions to Solomon because of his increasing power and influence.

Opinion among scholars is divided over which pharaoh was Solomon's contemporary. Eugene Merrill believes it was Siamun. ". . . Siamun soon realized that Solomon was to be ruler of a kingdom which would rival or even exceed his own in power and influence. He therefore decided it was to his best advantage to cultivate amicable relations with the

What has archaeology revealed about King Solomon's reign in the 10th century B.C.? Remarkably, there is much evidence to corroborate the biblical account.



This aerial view of excavations at Hazor shows construction from Solomon's time. The same construction methods for the city gate were discovered at Hazor as at Megiddo and Gezer, confirming the account that Solomon constructed fortifications at these three cities (1 Kings 9:15).

young monarch, even to the extent of recognizing him as an equal. That this is the case is clear from his willingness to provide his own daughter as a wife for Solomon, a concession almost without parallel in Egyptian history since it was a candid admission to the world of Egypt's weakness and conciliation. Normally Egyptian kings took foreign princesses but did not give up their own daughters to foreign kings" (*Kingdom of Priests*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 292. Compare to David Rohl, *A Test of Time: The Bible—From Myth to History*, Arrow Books, London, 1996, pp. 173-185).

It is clear from the history of the neighboring countries that an unusual era of peace enveloped Israel, enabling Solomon to greatly develop and enrich his nation through many profitable commercial alliances.

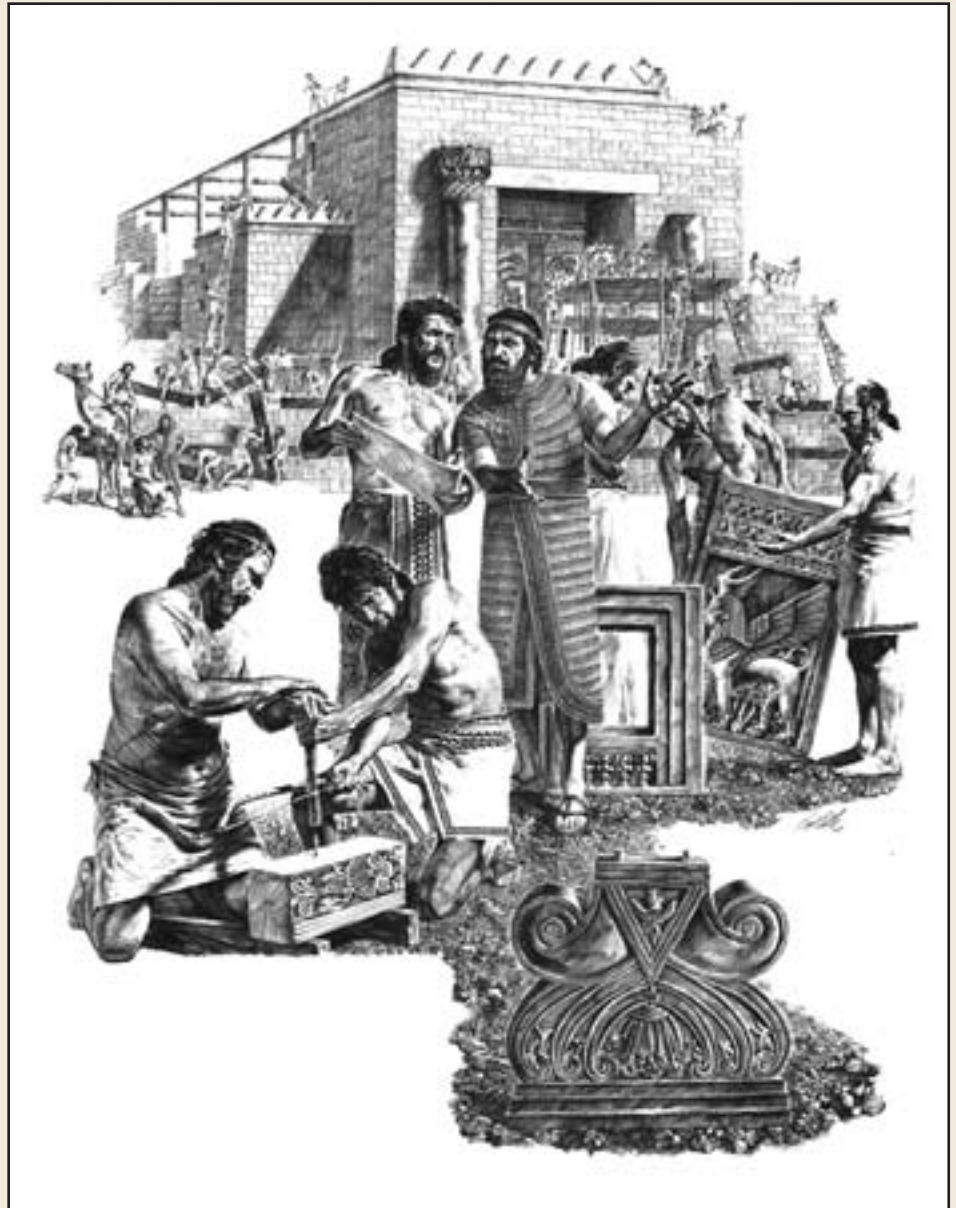
Prosperous alliance with Phoenicia

Not only did Solomon lack foreign enemies, he found a powerful ally in King Hiram, a faithful friend of his father, David.

"Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always loved David . . . So the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as He had promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty together" (1 Kings 5:1, 12).

Regarding this treaty, a thousand years later the Jewish historian Josephus noted that copies of this alliance could be read in the public archives in Tyre. "The copies of these epistles," writes Josephus, "remain at this day, and are preserved not only in our books, but among the Tyrians also; inasmuch that if any one would know the certainty about them, he may desire of the keepers of the public records of Tyre to shew him them, and he will find what is there set down to agree with what we have said" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book VIII, Chapter II, Section 7).

In Solomon's day, the Israelites were just beginning to clearly define their own culture. To initiate such vast projects as the temple (see G. Ernest Wright, "The Stevens' Reconstruction of the Solomonic Temple," *Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 18,



1955, pp. 41-44), fortified towns and maritime trade, Solomon could have found no more enterprising a people to help than the Phoenicians.

One author explains, "Solomon was a thoroughly progressive ruler. He had a flair for exploiting foreign brains and foreign skill and turning them to his own advantage. That was the secret, otherwise scarcely understandable, of how the [nation] . . . developed by leaps and bounds into a first class economic organism. Here also was to be found the secret of his wealth which the Bible emphasises. Solomon imported smelting technicians from Phoenicia. Hiram . . . ,

a craftsman from Tyre, was entrusted with the casting of the Temple furnishings (1 Kings 7:13, 14). In Ezion-Geber Solomon founded an important enterprise for overseas trade . . . The Phoenicians had behind them practical experience accumulated over many centuries. Solomon therefore sent to Tyre for specialists for his dockyards and sailors for his ships: 'And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea . . .' (1 Kings 9:27)" (Werner Keller, *The Bible As History*, Bantam, New York, 1980, pp. 211-212. On Ezion-Geber, see Gary D. Pratico, "Where Is Ezion-Geber?", *Biblical*

Archaeology Review, September/October 1986, pp. 24-35; Alexander Flinder, "Is This Solomon's Seaport?", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 1989, pp. 31-42).

Archaeologists who have studied the remains of Solomon's time clearly see the Phoenician influence which the Bible, instead of hiding the facts, candidly admits. "Where the Israelites replaced Canaanite towns, the quality of housing was noticeably poorer," says *The New Bible Dictionary*, "though standards improved rapidly in the days of David and Solomon, partly through Phoenician influence . . . The

Temple Mount is disputed between Arabs and Jews, no excavations are permitted in the immediate area where Solomon's temple existed. But the Bible mentions three other cities that Solomon expanded and fortified. Does any archaeological evidence support the biblical record?

The first city mentioned is Hazor, a northern Israelite habitation that was lost in time until a century ago. The first extensive excavations were done under the direction of archaeologist Yigael Yadin in the 1950s. He writes about Hazor, "What I'm about to say may sound like something out of a

Megiddo in 1993, archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin report, "The grandeur of Solomon's Megiddo is clearly evident in the archaeological finds at Megiddo—in large palaces, with fine, smooth-faced ashlar masonry and in elaborate decorative stonework" ("Back to Megiddo," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January/February 1994, p. 36).

Archaeologist Bryant Wood sums up the discoveries: "Probably the most famous of the architectural finds related to the kingdom period are the early tenth-century 'Solomonic gates' at Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, built by David's son Solomon . . ." ("Scholars Speak Out," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May/June 1995, p. 34). So the biblical account accords nicely with the archaeological evidence.

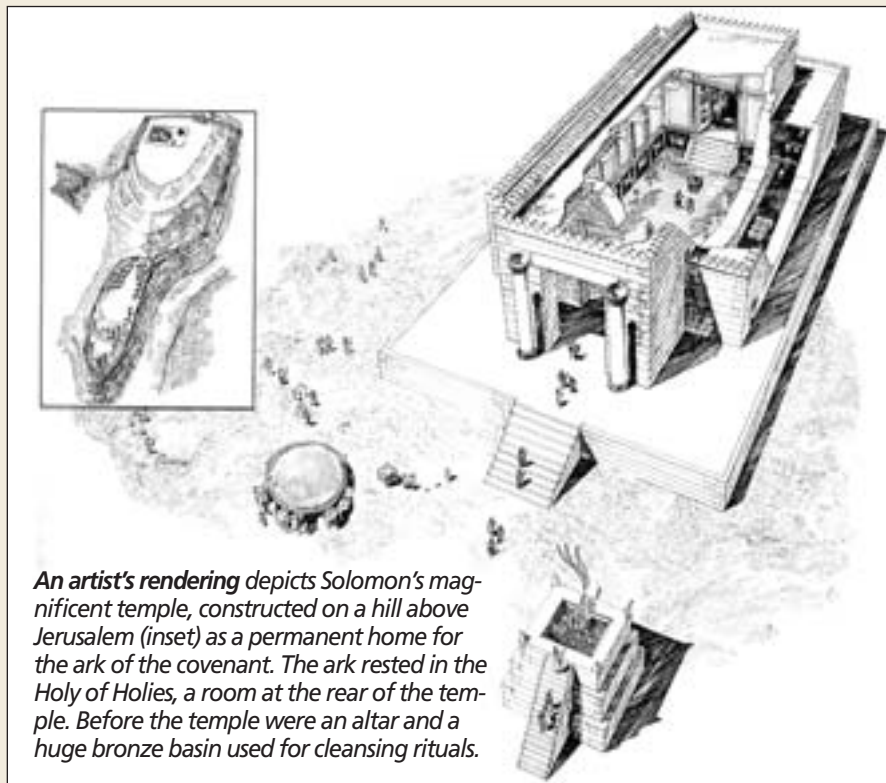
Enter the queen of Sheba

One of the most colorful accounts about Solomon is relegated to myth by some scholars. It concerns the visit of the queen of Sheba.

"Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her . . .

"Then she said to the king: 'It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God . . .' Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great quantity, and precious stones. There never again came such abundance of spices as the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon" (1 Kings 10:1-10).

This story has been the inspiration for many paintings and movies, but does it have



An artist's rendering depicts Solomon's magnificent temple, constructed on a hill above Jerusalem (inset) as a permanent home for the ark of the covenant. The ark rested in the Holy of Holies, a room at the rear of the temple. Before the temple were an altar and a huge bronze basin used for cleansing rituals.

commonest-type house . . . has become known generally as the four-room house, which appears to be an original Israelite concept" (Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1982, p. 490).

Great construction projects

Throughout Israel, Solomon fortified the great cities: "And this is the reason for the labor force which King Solomon raised: to build the house of the LORD, his own house, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer" (1 Kings 9:15).

Regarding Jerusalem, as long as the

detective story, but it's true. Our great guide was the Bible. As an archaeologist, I can't imagine anything more exciting than to work with the Bible in one hand and a spade in the other. This was the real secret of our discovery of the Solomonic period" (*Hazor*; Random House, New York, 1975, p. 187).

Yadin found the elaborate and sturdy main gate and part of the wall, which archaeologists now call the Solomonic style of architecture. Eventually, he found the same Solomonic-type gate in all three of the cities mentioned in the Bible.

In the most recent excavation of

historical backing? Where was the kingdom of Sheba? Until this century, the sands of time very probably covered up much of this great kingdom of the past.

Yet it was well known by some of the classical Greek and Roman writers. "In happy Arabia," wrote Dionysius the Greek in A.D. 90, "you can always smell the sweet perfume of marvelous spices, whether it be incense or wonderful myrrh. Its inhabitants have great flocks of sheep in the meadows, and birds fly in from distant isles bringing leaves of pure cinnamon."

Another Greek historian, Diodorus (100 B.C.), writes: "These people surpass in riches and luxuries not only their Arab neighbors, but also the rest of the world. They drink out of cups made of gold and silver . . . The Sabeans enjoy this luxury because they are convinced that riches which come from the earth are the favor of the gods and should be shown to others."

The Roman Emperor Augustus actually sent an army of 10,000 men to southern Arabia to plunder this wealth. But the withering desert and frequent plagues decimated the army before they could arrive in the capital. They never fulfilled their mission.

Scholars generally agree that the kingdom of Sheba is located in the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, now called Yemen. The area is quite isolated and desolate now, but this has not always been the case. "The most prominent of the Arab states . . . during the first half of the 1st millennium B.C.," comments *The New Bible Dictionary*, "Sheba was ruled by mukarribs, priest-kings, who supervised both the political affairs and the polytheistic worship of the sun, moon and star gods. Explorations [in 1950-1953] . . . found some outstanding examples of Sabean art and architecture, especially the temple of the moon-god at Marib, the capital, which dates from the 7th century B.C. . . ." (p. 1087).

Until this century, this area of Yemen was largely off-limits to archaeologists. Now, up to 4,000 inscriptions of this ancient kingdom have come to light, confirming that one of the four nations in the area was called Sheba and that the population of at least one of its cities totaled a million.

This part of the world was not always

dry and barren. It once had abundant water which irrigated the precious spice crops. The two most popular spices grown were frankincense (a resin of incense) and myrrh. The fragrant perfume of frankincense was used in temples and homes of the rich to ask favors from the gods. Myrrh was an indispensable oil used as a beauty aid to keep the skin smooth and soft, and was also used to embalm the dead. The Magi gave these two valuable spices to the infant Jesus as gifts fit for a newborn king (Matthew 2:11).

The evidence of abundant water in Sheba comes from the remains of a huge dam found in the area, and explains how it could be called "Happy Arabia" by the ancients.

"A gigantic dam blocked the river Adhanat in Sheba," writes Dr. Keller, "collecting the rainfall from a wide area. The water was then led off in canals for irrigation purposes, which was what gave the land its fertility. Remains of this technical marvel in the shape of walls over 60 feet high still defy the sand-dunes of the desert. Just as Holland is in modern times the Land of Tulips, so Sheba was then the Land of Spices, one vast fairy-like scented garden of the costliest spices in the world. In the midst of it lay the capital, which was called Marib. That was until 542 B.C.—then the dam burst. The importunate desert crept over the fertile lands and destroyed them" (*The Bible As History*, p. 225). This is the present state of most of the country.



Solomon's territories stretched from the Red Sea in the south to the Euphrates River in the north. It encompassed most of modern Israel and parts of present-day Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

It has lost much of its fertility due to lack of water.

There is much to explore in this area of ancient Sheba, and it is still a dangerous place to go, but much scientific progress has been made. Investigations continue up to the present time. What the famed archaeologist W.F. Albright remarked about these excavations in 1953 still holds true: "They are in process of revolutionizing our knowledge of Southern Arabia's cultural history and chronology. Up to now the results to hand demonstrate the political and cultural primacy of Sheba in the first centuries after 1000 B.C." (Keller, p. 227).

As time goes by, more archaeological evidence continues to indicate that Solomon's reign was actually as magnificent as the Bible faithfully records. **GN**

The Early Kings of Israel: A Kingdom Divided

by Mario Seiglie

Recent issues of *The Good News* have covered some of the archaeological evidence that confirms and clarifies the biblical record from Genesis through Solomon's kingdom. We continue the story with the breakup of Israel, looking first at the archaeological evidence for the northern 10 tribes of Israel and their rulers. Later we will direct our attention to the nation of Judah, which outlived the kingdom of Israel by more than a century.

After Solomon's tragic apostasy as a ruler, God removed the blessings of national unity from the tribes of Israel. He had told Jeroboam, the future king of the northern 10 tribes of Israel: "Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you (but he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem . . .), because they have forsaken Me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians . . . and have not walked in My ways to do what is right in My eyes and keep My statutes and My judgments, as did his father David" (1 Kings 11:31-33).

Around 930 B.C. the united kingdom was divided, with Jeroboam governing the northern 10 tribes and Rehoboam, Solomon's son, governing the two southern ones, Judah and Benjamin. (As priests, a good portion of the tribe of Levi eventually either resettled in or remained with the southern kingdom.) As both of their wicked reigns came to an end—and according to God's prophecies of punishment for disobedience—ominous clouds began to appear over Israel's northern horizon. Assyria began to awaken as a powerful enemy in that region.

Eugene Merrill suggests: "Perceptive observers of the world scene could already discern by 900 [B.C.] the stirrings of the Assyrian giant. Though it would be almost fifty years before they fell beneath its heel, the little kingdoms of the west could hear it coming" (*Kingdom of Priests*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 336).

Once Israel came under Assyria's expanding imperial reach, archaeological evidence attesting to Israel's historical evidence increases. Not only were the Assyrians meticulous recorders of their political, economic and religious life; they also developed an

exquisite stone-carving technique, called bas-relief, which records their lives and accomplishments on numerous palace walls.

In the 19th century British archaeologists excavated many of Assyria's principal cities. Nineveh, one of several capitals during the history of the empire, has been extensively explored. Archaeologists have even found in one of those capitals a vast library of cuneiform tablets that belonged to one of Assyria's final kings, Ashurbanipal (ca. 669-627 B.C.).

With this wealth of information about Assyrian history, it would be natural to expect some mention of the long relationship between Israel and Assyria, as well as the final Assyrian victory over the northern tribes. This is precisely what has been found.

Omri, king of the house of Israel

After Jeroboam's short-lived dynasty came to an end around 905 B.C., the next dynasty of importance was founded by Omri (881-870 B.C.). He is mentioned in Assyrian monuments for his military exploits and his establishment of Samaria, a vast fortress city that became the capital for the northern tribes. Because of his impressive military and political achievements and Omri's line of powerful successors, the Assyrians would refer to Israel as "the land of Omri" even long after the Omride dynasty had ceased to exist.

"The reputation of Omri won by his achievements," says *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, "is evidenced by the fact that for over a century after his death, Samaria was called in the Assyrian records 'House of Omri' and the land of Israel the 'land of Omri'" (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962, p. 601).

Not only is King Omri mentioned in Assyrian records, but he is named on a monument made by one of Israel's eastern neighbors, the Moabites.

The Moabite Stone

More than a century ago an Arab chieftain showed an Anglican missionary a beautiful black monument that had been discovered at Dibon, east of the Jordan River, the region of ancient Moab. This discovery triggered fierce competition among the

With this wealth of information about Assyrian history, it would be natural to expect some mention of the long relationship between Israel and Assyria, as well as the final Assyrian victory over the northern tribes. This is precisely what has been found.

Western nations, which sought to acquire this Moabite Stone (also called the Mesha Stela), dated to the ninth century B.C. What has survived of the monument is found today in the Louvre museum in Paris. The monument itself is a record of how King Mesha of Moab rebelled against and finally rolled back Israelite domination of Moab established by King Omri and perpetuated by his son Ahab.

At the beginning of the reign of Omri's grandson, Jehoram, the Moabites sensed opportunity and rebelled. They were successful in gaining independence.

The first few lines of the text record the king's boast: "I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[it], king of Mesha, the Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab for 30 years, and I ruled after my father . . . Omri (was) king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab many days . . . And his son succeeded him, and he too said: 'I will oppress Moab' . . . And Omri had taken possession of the land . . . and he dwelt in it in his days and the sum of the days of his sons: 40 years; but [the god] Kamosh restored it in my days" (translated by Andre Lemaire, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June 1994, p. 33).

Here we find confirmation by Israel's enemies of what is recorded in the biblical narrative. The Bible documents the Moabite rebellion and subsequent independence, but adds what king Mesha failed to explain: that he won the Moabites' independence only after he had sacrificed his son to their pagan god.

The Bible even relates the pivotal story of that battle in the rebellion. "Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheepbreeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel [referring first to Omri, then to Ahab and now to his grandson Jehoram] one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. But it happened that when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel . . .

"And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom [his ally], but they could not. Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him *as a burnt offering upon the wall*; and there was great indignation

against Israel. So they departed from him and returned to their own land" (2 Kings 3:26-27, emphasis added throughout).

King Mesha did triumph, but (perhaps understandably) in the Moabite stone he refrains from any mention of the costly price he paid for independence.

Some critics have doubted the biblical account of King Mesha's human sacrifice, since it seemed far-fetched that a king would



The Moabite Stone records the Moabites' rebellion against three kings of Israel—Omri, Ahab and Jehoram—described in 2 Kings 3:26-27.

offer up his own son and successor to the throne. Yet in 1978 a tablet from the Syrian city of Ugarit mentions just this type of sacrifice during war. The text said: "O Baal, drive away the force from our gates, the aggressor from our walls . . . *A firstborn, Baal, we shall sacrifice, a child we shall fulfill.*"

Baruch Margalit, associate professor of Bible at Haifa University in Israel, explains what was meant in the biblical text by Israel having been "indignant" with Mesha's sacrifice of his son. "The word denotes the psychological breakdown or trauma that affected the Israelite forces when they beheld the sign of human sacrifice atop the walls of Kir-Hareseth. The author of the

Ugaritic text apparently anticipated this reaction of mass hysteria when he confidently predicted the withdrawal of the attacking force . . . It follows that Mesha's sacrifice of his son, rather than unprecedented, was in fact an integral, if seldom implemented, part of an age-old Canaanite tradition of sacrificial warfare" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 1986, p. 63).

Ahab's clash with the Assyrians

Not only did the Assyrians have great respect for King Omri. They also had high regard for his son Ahab, who was a skilled and powerful military leader. The Bible, however, is not so much concerned with Ahab's military exploits as with his establishment of Baal worship in Israel after he married the Phoenician king's daughter Jezebel.

States *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: "Ahab followed a wise policy in defense, entering into alliance with Phoenicia, Judah, and even his erstwhile enemies the Arameans. On the other hand, he fell under the influence of his fanatical pagan queen Jezebel, who led him to worship Baal as Yahweh's peer, and consequently to introduce such horrors as tyranny (1 K[ings] 21), religious persecution (18:4), and human sacrifice (16:34)" (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 75, "Ahab").

Although the Bible is quite critical of Ahab's morality, it does acknowledge his military prowess and that he defeated the Arameans and Syrians several times (1 Kings 20:1-30). The Assyrians also record a major battle with Ahab and a coalition of other neighboring states. Although they dealt Ahab's confederation heavy losses, the battle did temporarily halt the Assyrian advance to the west.

"Ahab is mentioned in the Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.), which tells the story of the great battle Shalmaneser fought at Qarqar against an Aramean-Israelite coalition . . . Ahab alone is said to have contributed two thousand chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers. Ten lesser kings who took part made important contributions in infantry and cavalry" (ibid., p. 76).

King Ahab's house of ivory

Archaeologists haven't found only Assyrian

ian evidence for the existence of King Ahab. While excavating Samaria they have found indications of another biblical description connected to Ahab's reign—his house of ivory. The Bible says of Ahab, "Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, *the ivory house* which he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" (2 Kings 22:39).

Herschel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, writes: "An important ivory find from the Iron Age comes from Ahab's capital in Samaria where over 500 ivory fragments were found . . . The Bible speaks of Ahab's 'house of ivory' (1 Kings 22:39). Does this refer to the paneling of the walls or to the furnishings? To put the matter differently, did the ivory fragments found at Samaria decorate the walls of the building or the furniture? There is some evidence from Nimrud that a room in an Assyrian palace was, in fact, paneled with ivory veneer. Was this the case at Samaria? On the basis of the evidence at hand, it is difficult to tell.



The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III records Assyria's domination of its neighbors. Included among the scenes of the tribute brought to Shalmaneser is the Israelite king Jehu (or his representative) bowing before the Assyrian monarch.

"Whether paneling for the wall or decoration for furniture, the houses of ivory—based on a highly sophisticated Phoenician ivory industry—were for the Hebrew prophets symbols of social oppression and injustice; the 'ivory houses' [mentioned in Amos 3.15] were also evidence of participation in the barbarous pagan practices and heathen worship of Phoenicia. Based on the archaeological evidence, the prophets knew what they were talking about" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1985, p. 46).

Jehu kneels before an Assyrian king

Because of the wicked rule of the "house of Omri," God sentenced Ahab, Jezebel and their descendants to death. He would use a general of the Israelite army, Jehu, to accomplish most of these sentences. God told the prophet Elijah: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha . . . you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill" (1 Kings 19:15-17). God would not allow the enormously wicked acts of the House of Omri to go unpunished.

Jehu eventually killed not only Jezebel, but all of Ahab's children, in effect exterminating the dynasty of Omri. Although Jehu became God's rod of retribution, he failed to purge Israel of all vestiges of false religion.

'Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.' But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin. In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel . . ." (2 Kings 10:28-32).

During the spiritual decline of Jehu Assyria again began directly to threaten Israel. Soon Israel was paying Assyria tribute—protection money—to spare itself warfare and invasion. The Assyrians carved an impressive monument, called the Black Obelisk, to the achievements of King Shalmaneser III. The monument includes detailed panels portraying King Jehu (or his emissary) bringing tribute to the Assyrian king. This elaborate illustration is the earliest known depiction of an Israelite (king or commoner).

This famous monument of the ninth century B.C., now prominently displayed in the British Museum in London, was discovered in 1846 in the Assyrian city of Nimrud. It includes scenes depicting the tribute given to the king and the bearers of that tribute. On one side, in the second scene from the top, the inscription reads, "Tribute of Iaua [Jehu], son of Omri. Silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, tin, staves for the hand of the king, [and] javelins, I [Shalmaneser] received from him" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, January-February 1995, p. 26).

The scene is startling. There before the Assyrian king is either Jehu himself or one of his chief representatives kneeling in submission. The monument, including not only his name but his picture, is remarkable evidence of this biblical king.

This series in *The Good News* will continue covering archaeological discoveries relating to the later kings of Israel. **GN**



Photos courtesy trustees of the British Museum

The Later Kings of Israel: A Kingdom's Downfall

by Mario Seiglie

The July-August issue of *The Good News* presented archaeological evidence that confirms and clarifies the biblical record of the early kings of the northern 10 tribes of Israel after the death of Solomon. We continue the story with the later kings and downfall of the kingdom.

We come to the final stages of the northern kingdom (Israel) as a nation. Jehu's downfall came at the halfway mark of Israel's 19 kings and, tragically, the kings who followed him would all refuse to repent and turn to the true God. Meanwhile, Judah remained more faithful to God and continued for more than a century after the fall of the northern 10 tribes of Israel. Much archaeological evidence validates the account of Israel's final years.

Another King Jeroboam

Jehu's great-grandson, Jeroboam II, although evil, was an able military leader. Eugene Merrill explains that through his political leadership "Jeroboam was able not only to recover the territories of Israel proper which had fallen over the years to Damascus, but to bring all of south Aram and the Transjordan back under Israelite hegemony (2 Kings 14:25-28)" (*A Kingdom of Priests*, 1987, p. 374).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the German Oriental Society mounted an

extensive archaeological dig of Megiddo, the site of an important northern-kingdom stronghold. The excavations produced a beautiful agate seal depicting a roaring lion. The Hebrew inscription read, "Belonging to Shema, servant of Jeroboam." From the dating of the city level, certain archaeologists proposed the king referred to was Jeroboam II (791-751 B.C.).

It is not uncommon for seals to appear in excavations in the Middle East. Bible commentator William Barclay explains: "It was not the signature [as we use today], but the seal that authenticated. In commercial and political documents it was the seal, imprinted with the signet ring, which made the document valid; it was the seal which authenticated a will; it was the seal on the mouth of a sack or a crate that guaranteed the contents. Seals were made of pottery, metal or jewels. In the British Museum there are seals of most of the Assyrian kings. The seal was fixed on clay and the clay attached to the document" (*Daily Study Bible Commentary*, Bible Explorer, Epiphany Software, San Jose, Calif.).

Since seals were durable and vital for political and commercial transactions, they were produced in abundance for the upper classes of society. As we see in this series, several seals have been found that include the names of monarchs mentioned in the Bible.

Collapse of a dynasty

Meanwhile, true to God's prediction, Jehu's dynasty lasted only "to the fourth generation" (2 Kings 10:30). Jeroboam II was of Jehu's third generation. His son, Zechariah, the fourth successor, was assassinated during his first year as king. From then on, because of ever-increasing evils on a national scale, Israel could no longer count on God's protection. The nation plunged headlong into a free fall of lawlessness and disregard for God.

"In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of



King Tiglath-Pileser strengthened the Assyrian empire, making it an early superpower. After ascending the throne, he expanded his empire by attacking and invading smaller nearby kingdoms—including Israel.



The conqueror of Israel, King Sargon of Assyria, receives a report from Tartan, his commander in chief. The Assyrians recorded their conquests in exquisite carved reliefs such as this, excavated at an ancient Assyrian capital city.

Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck and killed him in front of the people; and he reigned in his place . . . This was the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, ‘Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. And so it was’”(2 Kings 15:8-12).

So, after almost 90 years, Jehu’s dynasty came to a violent end. From then on, assassinations and political instability would be the rule until the final collapse of the northern kingdom. This military and political weakness would make the Israelites in the north an easy prey for the resurgent Assyrian Empire.

It is sad to reflect on how this once-mighty kingdom, which had halted the Assyrian war machine a century earlier, could muster hardly any resistance (except during the reign of Jeroboam II). According to an Assyrian inscription, King Ahab had contributed “two thousand chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers” to form a successful military coalition to stop the Assyrian

advance. A century later, when the Assyrian menace appeared again, the northern Israelite armies were reduced to “fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers; for the king of Syria had destroyed them” (2 Kings 13:7).

Shallum, the assassin of King Azariah, lasted only a month on the throne before he, too, was murdered. “Shallum the son of Jabesh became king . . . and he reigned a full month in Samaria. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; and he reigned in his place” (2 Kings 15:13-15).

Assyria gains control

Menahem reigned for 10 years but could not resist the advancing Assyrian army. To avoid outright conquest, he began paying the Assyrians tribute. “And he did evil in the sight of the LORD . . . Pul [Tiglath-pileser] king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control . . . So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land” (2 Kings 15:18-20).

The Assyrians, who meticulously

recorded their kings’ triumphs, mentioned the tribute money given by King Menahem. The annals show the amazing accuracy of the biblical account. “The outstanding event of Menahem’s reign,” notes *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, “was the supremacy of Assyrian power in the West. This is confirmed in detail from Assyrian sources . . . When Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria took the throne of Babylon in 729, he assumed the name Pulu [Pul in the Bible] . . . In his annals Tiglath-pileser records the receiving of tribute from various nations of the West—Menahem of Samaria, Rezin of Damascus, Hiram of Tyre, etc. A fragmentary text adds further details about Menahem. ‘He was overwhelmed like a snowstorm and fled like a bird, alone, and bowed to the feet of his conqueror, who returned him to his place and imposed tribute upon him’” (Vol. III, 1962, p. 348).

Menahem’s son, Pekahiah, ruled for only two years before he was murdered by Pekah. Once on the throne, Pekah rebelled against the Assyrians and refused to pay tribute money. “With Pekahiah out of the way,” Eugene Merrill writes, “Pekah proclaimed himself king and immediately broke the treaty with Assyria which Menahem had made. He no doubt felt safe in doing so because Tiglath-pileser was still detained elsewhere with matters of imperial



The Assyrians were a terrifying force as they attacked nearby kingdoms. In this Assyrian carving depicting the capture of a walled city, an archer at right shoots arrows while protected by a shield-bearer. In front of them a wheeled battering ram gouges holes in the city walls. Above the ram are three defenders who have been impaled. At left, Assyrian infantry storm the walls using scaling ladders.

responsibility . . . Whatever Pekah’s objective, he was doomed to disappointment for within six years (by 734) Tiglath-pileser returned to the west and quickly began to annex vast areas of Syria and Palestine, especially in Galilee and the Transjordan” (Merrill, p. 396).

Tiglath-pileser’s invasion

The Bible records the story of the invasion of Tiglath-pileser in 2 Kings 15:29-30: “In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon . . . Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. Then Hoshea the son of Elah led a conspiracy against Pekah . . . and killed him; so he reigned in his place . . .”

The biblical account is corroborated in an Assyrian victory stela, or inscribed, commemorative stone (also spelled “stele”), of Pulu (Tiglath-pileser). The Assyrian king boasts, “The House of Omri [Israel] . . . all of its inhabitants and goods, I took to Assyria. They overthrew their king Pekah and I installed Hoshea as their king. I received from them ten talents of gold, a thousand talents of silver as tribute and I deported them to Assyria” (*Archaeological Bible Commentary*, 1984, p. 133).

This began a 15-year period during which the northern Israelites were forcibly deported from their homeland to Assyrian territory. Few would remain in the land when the Assyrians were through.

Amos, one of the prophets of that time, revealed what God would allow to happen

to the northern tribes. “Thus says the LORD: ‘As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out who dwell in Samaria’” (Amos 3:12).

The conquest of Samaria

The Assyrian records again confirm the biblical account, although they show a bias that is absent in Scripture. We see a marked contrast between the boisterous claims of the Assyrian kings—who never admitted to losing any battles—and the biblical narrative, which is frank and honest about their kings’ moral lapses and sins and their resulting defeats.

Writing for *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Erika Bleibtreu observes: “According to the narrative representation on these reliefs, the Assyrians never lost a battle. Indeed, no Assyrian soldier is ever shown wounded or killed. The benevolence of the gods is always bestowed on the Assyrian king and his troops. Like the official written records, the scenes and figures are selected and arranged to record the king’s heroic deeds and to describe him as ‘beloved of the gods’” (January-February 1991, p. 57).

What a stark contrast with the biblical account of the defeat and downfall of Israel, also known as Samaria. “Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of

Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God . . . and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel . . .” (2 Kings 17:5-8).

The Assyrian records also mention the conquest of Samaria by King Shalmaneser V, Tiglath-pileser’s son. But this king died unexpectedly during the siege of Samaria, and his son, Sargon II, completed the job.

In 1843 Paul Emil Botta uncovered the ruins of Sargon’s palace, where a wall relief called “The Display Inscription” records Sargon’s victory over Samaria. In it Sargon boasted: “At the beginning of my rule, in my first year of reign, I besieged and conquered Samaria . . . I led away into captivity 27,290 people who lived there . . . I caused others to take their portion. People of the lands, prisoners my hand had captured, I settled there. My officials I placed over them as governors.”

Reasons for Israel’s downfall

The Bible states some of the reasons for the Israelites’ removal: They “caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil . . . Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone” (2 Kings 17:17-18).

Years later, after Judah likewise fell into

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The sad fate of peoples conquered by Assyria is graphically shown in these carvings. In the panel above, scribes (upper center) record the plunder as livestock are driven away. The town’s surviving inhabitants are carried away in ox-carts to an unknown



land and uncertain future. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser boasted of such onnquests, “All the people and their goods I carried off to Assyria.” In the panel at right, the battle rages around another town as its defeated defenders begin the long walk into exile.

Archaeology

Continued from page 9

captivity, God gave through the prophet Ezekiel additional reasons for the destruction and exile of both nations. "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezekiel 22:26).

The prophecy compares the priests to wild beasts: "Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD had not spoken" (verse 28).

"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD" (verses 29-31).

Epilogue: Where did Israel go?

What happened to the Israelites after they were deported into Assyria? Most people think the 10 northern tribes of Israel have disappeared forever. They are often referred to as "the lost 10 tribes." The scholarly consensus is that these people were either assimilated by gentile nations or simply died out altogether.

But what does God's Word have to say about their fate? Through the prophets, God depicts them as wandering until His will and plan could be brought to completion. The prophet Amos said: "Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the LORD. For surely I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground" (Amos 9:8-9, emphasis added throughout).

According to Amos's prophecy, the

descendants of these Israelites were fated to wander among the nations until they fulfilled their destiny. God would know exactly where they would be found, for they would not disappear as a people, and He promised not to forget them.

God also prophesied: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.' Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land. For great will be the day of Jezreel [at the time of Christ's coming]!" (Hosea 1:10-11).

God's plans include the "lost 10 tribes" of Israel as well as Judah, the descendants of the southern kingdom of Judah who include modern-day Jews. After Christ returns to earth, say many biblical prophecies, He will gather their descendants and bring them back to their ancestral homeland.

Isaiah prophesied of a second exodus of these peoples from the house of Israel and the house of Judah: "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse [Jesus Christ], who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious. It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people . . . and will assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather together the dispersed of Judah . . . There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt" (Isaiah 11:10-16).

Many other Bible prophecies describe God's plan for these 10 tribes of Israel. The United Church of God, an International Association, is preparing a booklet on the modern-day identity of their descendants. If you would like to be placed on a mailing list to receive this booklet when it is completed, be sure to write to the office in your country (or the country nearest you) on page 2 of this issue. Also, be sure to request the booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *How to Understand the Bible*.

In the next installment, we will examine what archaeology tells us about the nation of Judah, which outlived the kingdom of Israel by more than a century. **GN**

The Early Kings of Judah: Miraculous Deliverance

by Mario Seiglie

The last two editions of *The Good News* covered the history of the kings of Israel after the northern 10 tribes broke ties with the kingdom of Judah, comprised of two tribes in the south. We now turn to see what archaeology has revealed about the kings of Judah during this time.



“Belonging to Ahaz [son of] Yehotam [Jotham], king of Judah,” reads the inscription pressed into this lump of clay, called a bulla. The clay originally sealed a papyrus scroll that is long since decayed. Ahaz ruled the kingdom of Judah ca. 734-715 B.C. A fingerprint, possibly that of the king himself, is visible on the left edge in this magnified photograph.

Around 720 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the northern tribes of Israel and expelled them from their land. But Judah, Israel’s sister nation in the south, miraculously survived the Assyrian invasion and continued for another 130 years. Although the people of Judah, too, would later succumb to invasion—from the Babylonians—they managed to survive their ordeal with their national identity intact, unlike their kinsmen in the kingdom of Israel. After 70 years of exile in Babylon, a remnant of Judah returned to its former land. There descendants of this remnant would remain for another 600 years until the Romans finally expelled them. For nearly 2,000 years the Jews would be dispersed around the world. Finally, in this century, some of their descendants returned to the ancient land of Judah. They named their nation Israel, although “Judah” would have been more historically accurate.

What has archaeology revealed about these resilient people from the southern kingdom? We pick up the fascinating story from the time of Ahaz, who began ruling in Judah some 200 years after the two Israelite kingdoms went their separate ways.

King Ahaz’s clay seal

“In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done” (2 Kings 16:1-2).

Ancient Near Eastern kings and other officials

stamped their documents with special seals. As a result archaeologists have been able to identify the clay seals of two of the kings of Judah: Hezekiah and Ahaz. The two seals belonging to Hezekiah are not well preserved, but the one of King Ahaz of Judah is in beautiful condition. In 1996 archaeologists confirmed its authenticity. Just as people today use signatures to validate documents such as checks and contracts, in ancient times authorities stamped their official documents with seals that were typically carved from semiprecious stones. Sometimes the seals were mounted on a ring, called a signet.

The most common material used for documents at that time was papyrus. “Papyrus documents were closed by rolling them and tying them with a string,” explains Tsvi Scheider, assistant librarian at Hebrew University’s Institute of Archaeology. “A lump of wet clay was then placed on the knot and stamped with the seal . . . After the clay dried, the papyrus was stored in an archive (see Jeremiah 32:10-14)” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August 1991, p. 27).

The resulting clay imprint, or bulla, bore the seal’s impression. Although the papyrus, of organic matter, would eventually disintegrate, the clay bulla often survived. Since Israel lay at the intersection of three great empires—Egypt, Assyria and Babylon—it experienced frequent wars. Conquering armies often burned enemy cities to the ground. Almost everything would perish—except for some of the clay seals, which, when baked in such fires, turned hard as pottery.

Thousands of years later, as they have conducted excavations in such cities, archaeologists have sometimes discovered the remains of royal archives. Occasionally they even stumble onto a cache of clay seals that reveal the exact spot where such official documents were originally stored for safekeeping.

Robert Deutsch writes about Ahaz’s seal: “The king whose seal is impressed in this well-preserved piece of reddish-brown clay is King Ahaz of Judah, who ruled from 732 to 716 [B.C.] . . . This lump of clay, called a bulla, was used to seal a papyrus document. We know this because the back of the bulla still bears the imprint of the texture of the papyrus

... On the left edge of the front of the bulla is a fingerprint that may well be that of King Ahaz himself! ...

"The seal contains not only the name of the king, but the name of his father, King Yehotam [Jotham]. In addition, Ahaz is specifically identified as 'king of Judah' ... The Hebrew inscription, which is set on three lines ... , translates, 'Belonging to Ahaz (son of) Yehotam, King of Judah' ... The Ahaz bulla has been examined by a number of preeminent scholars ... All agree that the bulla is genuine" (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, May-June 1998, pp. 54, 56).

Thus the existence of another biblical king is verified through archaeology.

Sennacherib captures Lachish

Shortly after the fall of the northern Israelite kingdom, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, descended on Judah. His assault came around 700 B.C., during the reign of Ahaz's successor, Hezekiah.

The Bible summarizes this invasion and Hezekiah's reaction. "And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king in Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong;

turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay'" (2 Kings 18:13-14). However, even though Hezekiah promised to pay Sennacherib handsomely if he would spare Jerusalem, the Assyrian king decided to conquer the city.

We not only have the biblical account of events, but also Assyrian records that closely parallel the Bible version.

A century and a half ago archaeologist Henry Austen Layard discovered the ancient city of Nineveh and Sennacherib's palace. There he found a graphic depiction of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah carved in a series of stone panels adorning the palatial walls.

Moshe Pearlman describes the find: "The gems of Sennacherib's palace for biblical scholars were a series of thirteen slabs of wall reliefs depicting Sennacherib seated upon a throne on a hill-slope before a besieged city amidst the landscape of what was evidently meant to be the land of Judah. The reliefs (which may be seen in the British Museum) are clearly recognizable as a dramatic thirteen-part story in pictures of Sennacherib's campaign in this southern Israelite kingdom ... In a panel facing the

king is a cuneiform caption: 'Sennacherib, king of the Universe, king of Assyria, sat upon a throne and passed in review the booty taken from the city of Lachish'" (*Digging Up the Bible*, 1980, p. 96).

In effect, the biblical narrative is frozen in frames in Sennacherib's wall depicting the conquest of the city of Lachish. The Bible enlarges our view by adding an account of the letter sent at that time to Sennacherib from a desperate King Hezekiah. Judah's king pleaded for forgiveness and offered any payment to avoid Jerusalem's destruction.

A careful study of the panels depicting the taking of Lachish includes grisly details. "There sits the Assyrian monarch," writes Pearlman, "richly attired, observing his army attacking a fortified city which is stoutly defended. His battering rams are being pushed up towards the walls over ramps, and are covered by archers, sling-throwers and spearmen to keep the defenders at bay. In one panel prisoners are being impaled by Assyrian soldiers; in another they are being flayed. Moving out of the city under guard is a long procession of captives, and carts laden with booty" (p. 96).

In the 20th century, archaeologists have excavated Lachish and corroborated the precision of the biblical and the Assyrian accounts of the conquest. "The magnitude of Layard's discovery was given an added dimension some eighty years later when excavations unearthed the very stratum of ancient Lachish that was stormed by Sennacherib's forces. Arrow-heads and sling-shots used by the Assyrians in that battle were among the finds, and from the remains of the shattered city it was possible to reconstruct the plan of its defensive fortifications. They virtually matched those depicted in the reliefs on Sennacherib's palace walls. Thus, Lachish is a superb example of archaeological discovery joining ancient records in word and picture to enrich the background of an episode in the Bible" (p. 97).

These exquisitely detailed contemporary finds from Assyria, along with the excavations of Lachish, dramatically corroborate each other and confirm the accuracy of the biblical account.

The Prism of Sennacherib

The archaeological evidence of the



Sennacherib's assault on Lachish is graphically shown in these carvings, discovered in the ruins of Sennacherib's palace. It shows Assyrian troops advancing on ramps leading to the city walls, from which the desperate defenders shoot arrows and hurl stones and firebrands. At lower right, prisoners leave the city, passing impaled captives. To the left of the prisoners, an Assyrian siege engine pounds away at a heavily defended tower. The Assyrian records and carvings and the Bible combine to tell a remarkable story.

invasion does not end there. Another discovery sheds light on Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. In 1919 the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago purchased a 15-inch clay cylinder, called the Prism of Sennacherib or the Taylor Prism. The artifact testifies of eight of Sennacherib's military campaigns. Regarding the third, the narrator describes Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and the subsequent siege of Jerusalem.

The account reads: "As to [Judah's king] Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to forty-six of his strong cities, walled forts and to countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps, and battering-rams brought thus near to the walls, combined with attack by foot soldiers . . . [Hezekiah] himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage" (James Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, 1958, pp. 199-201).

Sennacherib boastfully begins his description of the siege. His language leads the reader to expect that the Assyrian monarch captured Jerusalem, just as he had taken 46 other strongholds during his campaign. But the account turns curiously quiet. Sennacherib ends the account bragging about the tribute money paid by Hezekiah, a poor consolation prize. Sennacherib concludes: "Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed, . . . did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with talents of gold, . . . talents of silver . . . and all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters . . . In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his messenger" (p. 201).

What really happened? Although the Assyrian records are awkwardly silent, the Bible completes the story: "And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh" (2 Kings 19:35-36).

"The one city he sought to subdue, but failed," says Pearlman, "was Jerusalem, the

capital of Judah, where Hezekiah's spirit of resistance was much strengthened by the tough advice of the prophet Isaiah [see Isaiah 36-37]. Doubtless he would have wished the centerpiece of his wall decora-



The Taylor Prism describes Sennacherib's military campaigns, including an invasion of Judah. In its own curious way, this boastful account of the monarch's exploits supports the biblical account of an astounding miracle.

tions to have depicted the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, judging by the prominence given to Lachish, this must have been the scene of the fiercest fighting, and he evidently regarded its capture against stubborn defense as his most outstanding victory in this land"—instead of Jerusalem, which escaped (Pritchard, p. 97).

The Assyrian report describes only the siege of Jerusalem. Something incredible must have occurred for the mighty Assyrians, who had conquered many powerful

empires, to prevent the fall of Jerusalem.

A possible explanation

Sennacherib's defeat is not only recorded in the Bible; the Greek historian Herodotus gives an account of Sennacherib's humiliation in his *History*. He attributes the miraculous defeat to mice overrunning the camp and wreaking great havoc. "An army of field-mice swarmed over their opponents in the night . . . [and] gnawed through their quivers and their bows, and the handles of their shields, so that on the following day they fled minus their arms and a great number fell" (Book 2:141).

The story about the mice might appear as fanciful myth. However, it might bear a kernel of truth. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, also mentions Sennacherib's defeat, explaining that it was caused by a plague. He cites an earlier historian who had written: "Now when Sennacherib was returning from his Egyptian war to Jerusalem, he found his army . . . in danger [by a plague], for God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army; and on the very first night of the siege, a hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter I, Section 5).

Some speculate the mice may have been carriers of the plague. If so, this would not be the only such historical example. Mice contributed to the spread of the black plague in the Middle Ages and just as easily could have transported this deadly malady into the Assyrian camp. The Bible states simply that the destruction came from God and does not mention specifics.

Even the biblical description of the death of Sennacherib is confirmed by discoveries in ancient Assyrian archives. "Now it came to pass, as he [Sennacherib] was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place" (2 Kings 19:37).

The Assyrian account of Sennacherib's death is the same. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains: "According to Esarhaddon's records, his father Sennacherib had named him over his brothers as successor. 'To gain the kingship they

slew Sennacherib their father;” forcing Esarhaddon to hasten back from a military campaign to claim the throne (1988, Vol. 4, p. 396, “Sennacherib”). A parallel Babylonian account also mentions this assassination.

Thus we see confirmed even a tiny detail from the biblical account.

Hezekiah’s Siloam inscription

Another aspect of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem is well worth noting. Assyrian tactics called for surrounding the targeted city, shutting the inhabitants off from any outside source of food and water to starve them into submission before a final and decisive direct attack. While Sennacherib was busy plundering Judah’s other cities, Hezekiah began a desperate building project to provide the city a secure water source before the Assyrians could lay siege to the capital.

“And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem, he consulted with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city; and they helped him” (2 Chronicles 32:2-3). “. . . Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David” (verse 30).

Long after the Assyrian menace, this tunnel lay forgotten and undisturbed for centuries. Then, in 1880, two Arab boys were playing near the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem when one fell in. Swimming to the other side of the small body of water, he came under a

rock overhang. There in the darkness he noticed a small passageway. After further investigation by the authorities, the biblical tunnel of Hezekiah’s time was discovered anew. In the tunnel they even discovered an inscription in Hebrew made by the workers commemorating their amazing engineering feat during Hezekiah’s time.

It reads: “And this is the account of the breakthrough. While the laborers were still working with their picks, each toward the other, and while there were still three cubits to be broken through, the voice of each was heard calling to the other, because there was a [split, crack or overlap] in the rock to the south and to the north. And at the moment of the breakthrough, the laborers struck each toward the other, pick against pick. Then the water flowed from the spring to the pool for 1,200 cubits. And the height of the rock above the heads of the laborers was 100 cubits” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August 1994, p. 37).

The “Siloam Inscription,” as it came to be called, resides in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, taken there by Turkish authorities who ruled Jerusalem at the time. Israeli authorities claim it as a national monument and desire its return to Jerusalem.

The Bible vs. fables

All these accounts lead us to several important conclusions.

- They call into question claims of critics that the Bible is merely a collection of myths, fables and other fiction. Extrabiblical

records, like those from Assyria, consistently confirm the biblical accounts.

- These biblical narratives could not have been written centuries after the fact as many critics claim. The incidental details preserved in the Bible could have been known only by the people living during the events described.

- Finally, a spiritual guiding force must be inspiring the biblical accounts, for they always seem to match what independent sources describe.

- The Bible narrative rings true. Unlike secular accounts, which exaggerate their heroes’ accomplishments, the Bible stands as a believable report. It describes both the strengths and weaknesses of its leading characters. Its truths are not exaggerated or distorted as is the obvious case with records left by scribes and narrators with transparent national interests or personal agendas.

Even if archaeology is an imperfect science incapable of providing all the answers, it continues to independently verify the truthfulness of the biblical record.

In the next installment, we will continue our examination of archaeology and the kingdom of Judah. **GN**



King Hezekiah’s engineers performed a remarkable engineering feat, carving a long tunnel (right) through the limestone underneath Jerusalem to provide the city a secure water source in the face of an Assyrian invasion. This inscription records how workers tunneling from both ends met in the middle, completing the monumental task.

