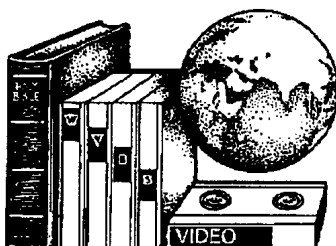


# World Video Bible School®

Established 1986



## History, Archaeology and the Bible



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# **HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE SYLLABUS**

## **I. General Information.**

- A. Instructor: Dr. Gary K. Young
- B. This course consists of 13 lessons on 5 DVDs.
- C. Each class is approximately 38 minutes long.

## **II. Description and Purpose.**

- A. To familiarize the student with the historical and chronological evidence which confirms the historical statements of the Bible.
- B. To show that the Bible is in total harmony with the known facts of secular history.
- C. To build faith in the Bible as the inspired word of God by showing the truth of its historical statements.

## **III. Aims of the Course.**

The aim of this course is to provide the student with a background in the evidence for the biblical text which is contained in ancient primary sources. These primary sources include ancient literary texts, archaeological evidence, epigraphy, papyrology and any other area of ancient evidence which can help illuminate the biblical text.

This course does not claim to be a course in biblical archaeology, nor indeed in ancient history. Rather, it is designed to investigate the historical statements of the Bible in the light of ancient primary sources, with the intention of deciding the truth or otherwise of those historical statements. It is, therefore, to be considered a biblical course rather than an historical or archaeological one. Nonetheless, the student should gain a basic grasp of the use of archaeological and historical evidence in the broader sphere throughout this course.

This investigation can be of great use to the Bible student in defending the truth of God's Word, as he is able to use this evidence to show the historical accuracy of the Bible. This accuracy is an important part of the field of Christian apologetics, which aims to demonstrate the objective truth of the Christian religion. Obviously, the historical accuracy of the Bible is very important to this

purpose, because if the Bible's historical statements were shown to be inaccurate, then this would completely undermine its authority in any other area.

As we study through the different periods with which the Bible deals, we will find that the ancient evidence consistently points to the truth of the Bible, and denies the claims of the infidels who would attempt to destroy faith in God's Word. Armed with this information, the student will be able to defend the truth of the Bible with confidence.

#### **IV. Instructional Materials.**

##### **A. Required.**

1. Bible (ASV, KJV or NKJV).
2. 13 video lessons.
3. Course notes.

##### **B. Optional.**

Garry K. Brantley, *Digging for Answers*, (Montgomery, Alabama, Apologetics Press, 1995). Brother Brantley is a member of the Lord's church.

#### **V. Requirements.**

- A. View all thirteen video lessons in their entirety.
- B. Read the class notes in their entirety.
- C. Submit a term paper (explained below).
- D. Take one written test.
- E. Have a combined grade average of at least 70% to pass the course.

#### **VI. Tests.**

- A. There is one written test at the end of the course.
- B. When you near the end of the video lessons contact us and request the test.
- C. You have permission to look at the test and study for it.

- D. However, when you take the test, you must do so completely from memory, with no help from notes, Bible, textbook, etc.

## **VII. Term Paper.**

- A. Write a paper on one of the following topics:
  - 1. Show from ancient evidence that the Bible's patriarchal narratives are historically accurate.
  - 2. Using the archaeological and historical evidence, detail the case for the biblical account of the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan.
  - 3. Using the archaeological and historical evidence show that the Bible's account of the royal period (1040-586 B.C.) of Israelite history is accurate.
  - 4. Provide the case for the accuracy of the New Testament from the ancient archaeological and literary evidence.
- B. The paper should be a minimum of five pages, typed and double spaced, If handwritten, the paper should be a minimum of seven pages single spaced.
- C. The paper is due when you mail VBI your test and memory work.

## **VIII. Grading.**

- A. Memory work, term paper and test will be graded separately.
- B. Final grade is based on an average of all assigned work, with the test counting twice.
- C. You may request that a grade be explained or reconsidered, but in any review VBI will make the final decision.

## **IX. Credit.**

Credit will be issued, including a certificate, only after all work has been successfully completed, tapes have been returned (if rented) and all fees for materials for this particular course have been paid in full.





## LESSON ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE BIBLE AND ANCIENT EVIDENCE

#### INTRODUCTION.

This course is designed to show the truth of God's Word from ancient documents, by demonstrating the historical accuracy of the Bible in the light of those documents. While not all events in the Bible can be proved from outside sources, many of them can as will be seen in this course. As we build a framework of events in the Bible confirmed by outside sources, we will build a strong case for the acceptance of the Bible as an accurate historical source.

Such ancient documents can take many forms:

Archaeology - excavation of physical remains, including buildings, pottery, artifacts of daily use, etc. Archaeology is useful from all periods from which there are physical remains, but these remains can be subjective or questionable in their interpretation.

Ancient literary works - works of ancient historians (e.g. Flavius Josephus, Tacitus, Herodotus) poets, biographers and others; usually from the Greek and Roman periods, although reference is sometimes made to earlier events.

Epigraphy - the study of ancient inscriptions, especially Egyptian and Roman, often mentioning individuals described in the biblical text. Epigraphy often makes references to specific events mentioned in the Bible.

Papyrology and Palaeography - the study of ancient documents which have been found in archaeological investigations, especially in Egypt due to the dry climate - very valuable in the study of the authenticity of the biblical text itself. These can also be illuminating in the study of New Testament background history in particular.

#### SOME USEFUL SOURCES.

The usefulness of this course will be greatly enhanced by the use of some books to help in your understanding of this material and of the issues which are current in the world of biblical archaeology.

Some of these books are:

Garry K. Brantley, *Digging for Answers* (Montgomery, Alabama 1995).

Alfred J. Huerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids 1998).

John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids 1991).

Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, Oregon 1997).

In addition, the bi-monthly periodical *Biblical Archaeology Review* contains a great deal of very up-to-date information from current digs in Israel and elsewhere in the Bible lands. This periodical is also written from basically a conservative viewpoint, although not from a perspective that necessarily accepts the plenary inspiration of the Bible.

## WHAT IS ARCHAEOLOGY?

Archaeological evidence will comprise a large part of the evidence used in this course, so it will be profitable to study what the science of archaeology is and what it sets out to do.

Archaeology does not set out to “prove” the Bible or indeed anything else - it is concerned with the investigation of ancient cultures by an examination of their physical remains, including remains of buildings, tools, pottery and other housewares, etc. In addition to establishing such things as chronology, it can be used to determine the way in which an ancient people lived, their religious beliefs, dietary practices and other things. Especially in recent years, the investigation of local social structures and life-styles has been a major priority.

However, the Bible student is often able to make use of the archaeological evidence to show the historical accuracy of the Bible - this is what we are doing in this course. When the archaeological evidence is found to be in agreement with the biblical text, this can be very supportive of the Christian’s claim of biblical accuracy. Such accuracy can also be used in arguing for the inspiration of the Bible.

This procedure should not be confused with “biblical archaeology,” the investigation of the Bible lands. Recently this term has begun to be supplanted by “Syro-Palestinian archaeology.” Biblical archaeology strives to discover as much as possible about the ancient societies of the Bible lands, regardless of whether the site is relevant to the biblical text or not.

Archaeological investigation is usually carried out by the systematic investigation of an ancient site (often a “Tell,” or ruin mound) in which trenches are dug in various locations. All items recovered by this means are carefully extracted, photographed and cataloged. This is often (but not always) published in a “preliminary report” soon after the investigation.

Several years later, after investigation of the artefacts, the archaeologist’s conclusions are published in the “final report.” In many cases the final reports are still not complete

on investigations which have been concluded for many years. One example is that of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

During the investigation, the “stratigraphy” of the site will be established - the remains of one culture layered on top of its predecessors. Often the site will show a great many layers, one on top of another. The oldest layers will be at the bottom of the site, while the most recent will be at the surface. Sometimes, when the site has been destroyed, the layers are separated by a “destruction level” of ash and destroyed building material. In other cases, the layers can be differentiated by the type of artifacts found.

Each layer will contain different styles of buildings, pottery etc. This enables a *relative chronology* to be established by comparing these remains with those of other sites with the same styles. Where a particularly noticeable pottery style or something similar can be seen at different sites, there is a strong possibility that the two layers were occupied at the same time.

In addition, *absolute chronology* can sometimes be established by the discovery of a reference to a known event or individual - scarabs of Egyptian Pharaohs, coins of Roman Emperors, inscriptional references to kings whose dates are known, usually from astronomical data. This artefact is then used to place the relative chronology of the site (and other sites) on an absolute timescale.

In this way, an approximate chronology of habitation in the Bible lands has been established and divided into various periods. While the years are still approximate and subject to academic debate, they are nonetheless as close as can be managed given the current state of research.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION IN THE BIBLE LANDS.

Early archaeological investigation in the nineteenth century tended to concentrate on Egypt and Mesopotamia, where the physical evidence is greater. Great monuments of ancient civilizations such as the pyramids were visible and so it was to these places the earliest excavators went.

The earliest excavators used the Bible as a primary source and desired to investigate sites mentioned in the Bible in order to establish the accuracy of the text. Sites such as Ur, Babylon and the royal tombs of Egypt were thus excavated, with the investigators actively looking for points that would confirm the Bible’s accuracy. Unfortunately, this also meant that much information which could have been helpful has been lost or overlooked. Nonetheless, the results of the investigations were highly spectacular and created a sensation in Europe at the time.

In these excavations, the Bible was found to be a reliable source of information - in one example, P.E. Botta discovered the palace of Sargon II (Isa 20: 1) at Khorsabad in

Mesopotamia in 1843, when this king's very existence had been doubted by sceptics because he was not mentioned by any other sources.

In other cases, investigations such as that of Sir Leonard Wooley at Ur in Mesopotamia cast light on the lifestyles of people such as Abraham. However, in many cases, the chronology was not well established and the wrong remains were assigned to the wrong periods of biblical history. In most cases, however, subsequent investigation has cleared up the mistakes of earlier investigators.

Peoples such as the Hittites, previously known only from the biblical text, were discovered also by archaeological investigation during this period. In this way, it appeared for many years that the Bible would become accepted as an accurate guide to the archaeology of the Bible lands.

This century, the discipline of "biblical archaeology" has developed, which is the archaeological investigation of Syria and Palestine. The first recognised archaeologist to excavate the Bible lands was Sir Flinders Petrie, who began excavating in 1890. Since then, a great many sites have been investigated in Palestine, many of which were only previously known in the biblical text.

In this too, the Bible was for a long time regarded as a reliable source by such leading archaeologists as William Albright and Nelson Glueck. These men considered, although they did not in most cases accept the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, that the biblical text was a reliable and useful tool in the investigation of the Bible lands.

However, in recent years a trend has developed in which the Bible is rejected as a reliable source and theories concerning history of the Holy Land are formulated from archaeology alone, without reference to historical texts (such as the Bible). This is mostly based on the rejection of the Bible as a contemporary source. Many modern liberal theories claim that the Bible dates from a much later period than the time with which it deals and therefore many modern archaeologists reject the usefulness of the biblical text. This is especially the case from those archaeologists with a modernistic, anti-biblical bent. Often very strained arguments are accepted as long as they result in the rejection of what the Bible says.

This has resulted in the formation of many theories contradictory to the Bible and a general rejection of the historicity of most of the Old Testament. This is particularly the case with respect to such events as the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan, which are central to the history of Israel as related in the Bible.

Even the term "biblical archaeology" has been rejected in recent years and has been replaced by such terms as "Near Eastern archaeology" or "Syro-Palestinian archaeology" in order to remove the so-called "biblical bias" in the original term. This, in fact, reveals the strong *anti*-biblical bias present in many modern investigations.

However, as will be seen, when the biblical text and archaeological evidence are *both* used in order to arrive at conclusions, the historical reliability of the Bible is upheld. In turn, this reliability of the Bible helps reinforce the conservative viewpoint that the Bible dates near to the time with which it deals.

This method of using both literary texts and archaeological investigations in conjunction with each other to arrive at conclusions is still favored in most areas of archaeology. For example, in classical archaeology, the Latin and Greek literary texts are frequently used in the identification of sites and the interpretation of archaeological remains.

Several scholars are now returning to the more conservative stance, particularly in the light of some recent discoveries which will be studied further in these classes. These tend to confirm the accuracy of the biblical text, especially that of the Old Testament which has been under considerable attack. Archaeologists of the Bible lands are now often divided into the “minimalist” (rejecting the accuracy of the biblical account) camp and their opponents who accept the general historical reliability of the biblical text. Of course, between the two extremes there are many different positions held by various scholars.

In conclusion therefore, we can see that there are numerous fields of investigation which we can follow to establish the historical reliability of the Bible. In the next lesson, we will commence a study of the Bible’s historicity by surveying through biblical history period by period and comparing these accounts with ancient literary and archaeological evidence. We will commence this by looking at the patriarchal period.



## LESSON TWO

### THE PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

#### INTRODUCTION.

Unsurprisingly, the patriarchal period, being the earliest period of Bible history, has little physical evidence remaining. For this reason, none of the individuals named in the Bible account are known from archaeological investigation.

However, some of the accounts given in the Bible are found in comparable ancient Mesopotamian literary texts - creation, the flood, etc. Also some of the practices, names and laws mentioned in the biblical patriarchal narratives have been corroborated by archaeological finds in Mesopotamia and Syria, as will be studied in this lesson.

#### THE ANTEDILUVIAN PERIOD.

Any chance of archaeological evidence dating from before the flood is almost nonexistent, as the flood destroyed “the world that then was” (2 Pet 3:6).

Physical evidence of the antediluvian world, and the extensive physical remains of the flood itself, more properly belong in the field of Christian evidences and apologetics, and are extensively covered in the WVBS “Christian Evidences” course.

However, there is some ancient Mesopotamian literary evidence in the form of clay tablets preserved in Sumerian and Assyrian libraries (mostly excavated last century). These texts are in places strikingly similar to the Bible’s account of the antediluvian world in the book of Genesis.

#### *The Atrahasis Epic.*

This story, named after its chief character, was found on a tablet dating from the seventeenth century B.C. but probably dates from the earliest Babylonian periods. It contains numerous similarities with the Genesis accounts of both the creation and the flood. In it, the Babylonian gods make man from clay mixed with blood (cf. Gen 2:7); man is created to tend the land (Gen 2:15); the gods send a flood to destroy man (Gen 6:13). One man, Atrahasis, is warned to build a boat, which he does. He saves himself, his family, animals and birds, while the rest of mankind dies in the flood (cf. Gen 6:14-22).

#### *Enuma Elish.*

Various fragments of this story have been found in assorted Mesopotamian sites. It is a highly mythological account of the supremacy of Marduk, the chief

god of Babylon. In the course of its account, the Mesopotamian creation story is given, which shows some interesting parallels with the Genesis account of creation. Among these are: the separation of the waters in the initial creation account (Gen 1:1,2); the fact that light pre-existed the sun, moon and stars (Gen 1:3-5, 14-18); and the prominence of the number seven (Gen 2:2,3). Apart from these points, however, the account is very highly mythologised and departs from the biblical creation account in many places.

### *The Epic of Gilgamesh.*

This account, the story of the semi-legendary king Gilgamesh of Uruk (c. 2600 B.C.) and his search for immortality, contains another Mesopotamian flood account which was apparently developed from the Atrahasis epic. It probably dates to the eighteenth century B.C. or even earlier. In the account, Gilgamesh encounters a man named Utnapishtim who recounts the story of a global flood which he avoided by the construction of a boat. When the flood waters abated, the boat grounded on a mountain and Utnapishtim sent out a dove, a swallow and a raven to see if the land was dry (cf. Gen 8:3-11). When the raven did not return, Utnapishtim got out and offered sacrifice to the Babylonian gods (cf. Gen 8:12-22). Despite these parallels, however, the legendary character and gross polytheism contrast strongly with the account given in Genesis.

### *Sumerian King Lists.*

The lists of the kings reigning in Sumeria and Akkad extend to semi-mythological kings in early Sumerian history. These lists also describe a series of kings who reigned “before the flood.” In a parallel to the opening chapters of Genesis, these kings are attributed with very long life spans. However, they are given much longer life spans than the biblical antediluvian patriarchs: eight kings are claimed to have ruled for a total of 241,200 years. Again, we see a parallel with Genesis, although the Mesopotamian accounts are exaggerated and mythologised.

There are three possibilities to explain these documents and their similarities to the book of Genesis:

The Mesopotamian texts are based on the biblical text;

The biblical texts are based on the Mesopotamian texts;

Both texts reflect a common source.



The first possibility is not possible, as the biblical texts were written in the time of Moses, about 1450-1400 B.C., and the Mesopotamian texts were written before that date.

Some have suggested the second possibility and claimed that the Bible is merely derivative of these Mesopotamian texts. However, the highly mythologised nature of these texts shows that the Bible account is superior: history shows that ancient stories become more complicated, not less: the simpler, non-mythologised Bible account cannot have derived from the Mesopotamian texts.

The third possibility must reflect the truth. They both recall an historical event, but are interpreted through different theological viewpoints. The Hebrew (biblical) account realizes that God was behind the flood and creation, and says so. The Mesopotamian accounts, while remembering actual historical events and personages, interpret and distort them according to the pagan polytheistic Mesopotamian theology.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF THE PATRIARCHAL PERIOD.

In the early period (prior to Abraham), the Bible gives some chronological information, but this is outside the scope of this course. When we come to the period of Abraham, we begin to come to a time where these events can be correlated with known secular history.

Two scriptures are of great importance in establishing a chronology of Abraham's time: first, 1 Kings 6:1 - 480 years between the Exodus and the fourth year of Solomon's reign. We can date this year to 967 B.C. so, therefore, the Exodus can be dated to 1447 B.C.

The second scripture is Exodus 12:40, which states the "time of sojourning" was 430 years. Scholars are divided as to whether this includes the time in Palestine as well in Egypt, or in Egypt only. The literal translation of the verse is "the time that the sons of Israel which dwelt in Egypt sojourned was 430 years," so it does not require that the whole time is in Egypt.

The translators of the Septuagint clearly thought the time should include both Canaan and Egypt, as they added the gloss "and in Canaan" to the verse. This is supported by Galatians 3:16,17 and Egyptian archaeological evidence which will be discussed in the next lesson. This would give the following dates:

Birth of Abram: 1952 B.C.

Entry into Canaan: 1875 B.C.

Descent into Egypt: 1660 B.C.

## THE ACCURACY OF THE PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES.

Many liberal scholars have attempted to claim that the patriarchal narratives are a mythological nationalistic “foundation story” of the Hebrew nation, generated as oral stories in the kingdom period and probably first committed to writing in the period after the Babylonian exile (586 - 536 B.C.).

If this were the case, we would expect that the situation described in the patriarchal narratives would be unrelated to the evidence from that period provided by archaeology, and instead reflect the situation at the time of composition. However, as we will see, there are many parallels between the patriarchal narratives and archaeological and epigraphic evidence from Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt. The narratives are clearly sources of the time of which they speak, not of a later period. These parallels demonstrate that the patriarchal narratives are indeed reliable, accurate accounts of their time and are thus likely to have been written close to the time they describe.

## ABRAHAM IN MESOPOTAMIA.

The Bible records that Abraham began his journeys in the Sumerian city of Ur, from which he traveled to Haran in the Upper Euphrates valley, before leaving to travel to Canaan (Gen 11:31; 12:4). Archaeological investigation of these areas and the epigraphic record left by their inhabitants, provide light on the patriarchal narratives and confirmation of their historical accuracy.

### *Ur in the time of Abraham and Terah.*

Abraham would have been born shortly after the end of the Ur III period, which ended with the destruction of Ur in 2006 B.C. The period after this event was one of confusion and anarchy, in which a migration to a safer area would be unsurprising. Additionally, the Ur III period had been one of great centralization, in which the king and temple owned virtually everything in the city. However, the Isin-Larsa period which followed was characterized by private ownership of property, which is just the situation which we see when we consider the wealth of Abraham and Terah.

### *Haran.*

After Terah and Abraham left Ur, the Bible records they traveled to Haran in Upper Mesopotamia. This city appears to have been an important caravan crossroads during the patriarchal period. Interestingly, the site seems to have been abandoned not long after Abraham would have been there, in about 1800 B.C. Thereafter, it remained abandoned until about 800 B.C. The appearance of Haran in the account of Abraham's life implies that this account is indeed authentic.

### *The Ebla Archives.*

The city of Ebla in northern Syria has yielded a huge archive of cuneiform documents dating from the end of the third millennium B.C. Although the importance of this archive to the Bible has often been greatly overstated, there is still some important information which helps illuminate the patriarchal stories. One is the fact that Ebla was involved in long-distance caravan traffic. Thus, the kind of travel which Abraham underwent was reasonably common in his age, and roads and way-stations existed which would have made his journeys possible. In addition, the Ebla archives record the use of names starting with the I/Y/J element, such as *Yakov* (Jacob), *Yitzakh* (Isaac) and *Yoseph* (Joseph), showing these names were in use at that time.

### PALESTINE IN THE PATRIARCHAL PERIOD.

#### *The Archaeology of Bronze Age Palestine.*

The archaeological investigation of Palestine in the Middle Bronze Age, the time of the patriarchs, reveals a wealthy but insecure society. The cities were very well fortified, with huge gates and massive walls, as can be seen in the recently excavated gate at Tel Dan (Dan, Laish). These cities were, nonetheless, periodically destroyed, showing that life at this time was very insecure. This situation of a wealthy but violent society is just that which is recorded in the patriarchal narratives.

#### *The Story of Sinuhe.*

A similar picture of society is given in the Egyptian story of Sinuhe, an official who was exiled from Egypt for a time and spent this time in Canaan. The story describes Sinuhe's life as a nomadic chieftain dwelling in the midst of the city-dwelling Canaanites. Sinuhe is seen as the autonomous head of his family, its leader in war, peace, diplomacy and all other areas. Thus, this account is very similar to the description of society and family in the patriarchal narratives.

#### *Egyptian Execration Texts.*

These small pottery figurines were inscribed by the Egyptians with the names of kingdoms and cities they considered as enemies and then ritually smashed. These reveal the names of the cities which were important in Palestine at the time, some of which are the same as those mentioned in the Bible's account of Abraham's wanderings. Jerusalem (referred to as Salem in Genesis) and Shechem are two important cities mentioned in both sources, while other sites not mentioned but which become important later in the Bible include Hazor, Ashkelon and other sites.

### *The Nuzi Tablets.*

One of the most striking confirmations of the accuracy of the biblical accounts comes from the Mesopotamian city of Nuzi. Archaeological investigations at this site uncovered thousands of cuneiform tablets from the fifteenth century B.C., many of which were discovered to bear similarities to customs described in the patriarchal accounts of the Bible. This would have been unlikely if the patriarchal accounts derived from a late period, but the similarity of these ancient Mesopotamian laws to the Bible's accounts shows that the Bible does indeed accurately reflect the conditions of this time.

In Genesis 15:2,3, Abraham states that his heir, in the absence of a son, would be his steward, Eliezer of Damascus. Several Nuzi tablets indicate that it was normal practice for parents who had no son to adopt one, who was then obliged to serve the parents as long as they lived, mourn for them when they died and then inherit their wealth. This would seem to be the practice that Abraham was indicating.

Similarly, the practice of barren wives allowing and encouraging their husbands to father children by their handmaids (Gen 16:2; 30:3-4, 9) is reflected in a tablet from Nuzi. In addition, the reluctance of Abraham to send out Hagar and Ishmael until God intervened directly (Gen 21:8-14) is explained by the codicil to this tablet, which requires that the children of the handmaid should not be sent away.

### CONCLUSION

We thus see that the biblical patriarchal narratives can be shown to be an accurate account of the landscape, life and customs of the period to which the claim to belong, which gives us confidence that they are indeed true accounts of the lives of actual men.

The frequent liberal claim that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were fictitious characters invented long afterward can be seen to be groundless and based only upon a desire to undermine people's faith in the truth of the Bible.

## LESSON THREE

### EGYPT AND THE HEBREWS

#### THE LAND AND HISTORY OF EGYPT.

Before dealing with the history of the Hebrews' interaction with the Egyptians, we will briefly survey the history of Egypt and its subdivisions, so we can gain some insight into the country and its history. The important role which Egypt played in the history of the Israelites makes it imperative that we are able to understand the history of the country.

Egypt is a very old civilization and had been in existence a very long time even when Abraham first arrived there. The different periods of Egyptian history are characterized by differing political situations which in many cases can help us understand some of their interactions with the Israelites. The major subdivisions of ancient Egyptian history are as follows:

Predynastic Period (before 3100 B.C.) - Egypt not yet a united kingdom, but is divided into small states and then two kingdoms.

Early Dynastic (3100-2700 B.C.) - Egypt a unified state under the Pharaoh.

Old Kingdom (2700-2200 B.C.) - The Pyramid Age. A highly developed society appears, centralized under the rule of the god-king, Pharaoh.

First Intermediate Period (2200-2050 B.C.) - Society collapses, central power breaks down. Country broken into small princedoms.

Middle Kingdom (2050-1800 B.C.) - Prosperous period, Egypt reunified. Egypt fosters trading links with outsiders and is generally prosperous and secure.

Hyksos Period [Second Intermediate Period] (1800-1570 B.C.) - Egypt conquered by foreign Semitic Hyksos ruling from the Delta.

New Kingdom (1570-1085 B.C.) - Egypt a powerful empire, invading and ruling large areas of Palestine and Syria during this time. Highly xenophobic attitude resulting from the previous Hyksos period.

Late Period (1085-332 B.C.) - Egypt in general decline, but still at times powerful and able to influence affairs in Palestine. Later it is conquered periodically by Assyrians and Persians.

Greco-Roman Period (332 B.C. - A.D. 641) - Egypt is a center of Hellenistic culture, although a strong native element remains. In the Later Roman period,

much of the populace becomes strongly Christian. This continued until the Islamic conquest.

## ABRAHAM IN EGYPT.

Abraham would have come into Egypt sometime before 1850 B.C., during the Middle Kingdom, when Egypt was both powerful and secure, with prosperous trading links with the peoples round about, especially those of Syria and Palestine.

It is possible that the Pharaoh with whom Abraham dealt was Senwosret III, whose reign began in approximately 1883 B.C. (Egyptian chronology is still not fully established during this period). During this Pharaoh's reign, Egypt was interested in trading contacts with Canaan and Nubia, and the Egyptians generally pursued an open, accommodative policy with their neighbors. Groups of Semitic travelers and merchants would not have been uncommon at this time, as the prosperity and openness of Egypt in this period would encourage their activities.

One such group of visitors is depicted in a tomb mural from Beni Hasan in Egypt, which dates from approximately this time. A group of thirty seven Canaanite merchants selling eye-salve is depicted, showing the dress and appearance of Semites at this time and showing that their presence was not uncommon. This mural gives us a fascinating insight into the appearance of Semitic dress and accouterments from the time of the patriarchs and is thus an invaluable record.

Thus, although there is no Egyptian record of Abraham's brief visit, we do have confirmation of the fact it was possible for Asiatic visitors to enter Egypt and move about in relative freedom in the time from which the Bible indicates Abraham was in Egypt. This then, although it cannot specifically confirm Abraham's visit (nor would we expect it to), does argue for the historicity of this portion of the biblical narrative.

Indeed, at this time, the numbers of Asiatics in Egypt was rising and they appear to have gained political significance in the early years of the Second Intermediate period. This would be of great significance in the next contact of the Hebrews with the Egyptians, in the time of Joseph.

## JOSEPH IN EGYPT

During the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1800-1570 B.C.) Egypt passed under the control of a people known as the "Hyksos," who appear to have been Semitic/Asiatic in origin (their personal names are Semitic) and ruled Egypt from their capital, Avaris, located in the delta region of Egypt.

Although these kings were of Semitic origin, they imitated the Egyptians in many respects, retaining Egyptian court ceremonial, titles, administrative system and religion. This is reflected in the biblical account (e.g. Gen 43:32; 46:34), although these

comments may refer to native Egyptian prejudices rather than those of the king himself. We do not know exactly how the native Egyptian and Hyksos elements of the ruling elite interacted at this time, but it is likely that native Egyptian princes and priests retained at least some power and influence.

Nonetheless the Hyksos themselves were probably akin to the Semitic Canaanites and Syrians and were likely to have been more sympathetic to them than the native Egyptians (Gen 45:16-20; 47:5,6). The Egyptians certainly would probably have seen little difference between the Hyksos and the Hebrews.

According to the chronology which we have already established, it would have been under the Hyksos kings when Joseph entered Egypt and raised to high position in the service of the Pharaoh and during which Jacob and the other patriarchs moved into Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen, generally taken to be the eastern delta region. There are several archaeological facts which support this time frame for the entry of the Hebrews into Egypt:

#### *Joseph's high position at Pharaoh's court.*

It is only likely that during the reign of the Semitic Hyksos kings that an Egyptian ruler would even think about giving an Asiatic a high position at court. As the Hyksos were themselves Asiatic, however, it is far more likely that an Asiatic would be given such preferment. Certainly this situation was most unlikely to have happened while a native Egyptian king was on the throne.

#### *Use of chariotry.*

The Bible records that Joseph rode in Pharaoh's second chariot (Gen 41:43). This is in accordance with the situation in the Hyksos period, as it was only late in this time that the chariot was introduced into Egypt, having been developed in Mesopotamia and Syria and introduced into Egypt by the Hyksos. Joseph's arrival in Egypt could thus not have been earlier than about 1800 B.C. because chariotry was basically unknown in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom period.

#### *Settlement of the Hebrews in Goshen.*

As was noted earlier, the Middle Kingdom saw a greater infiltration of Egypt by various Semitic groups. This intensified in the Hyksos period and it is accordingly not surprising to find Jacob and his sons and their families settling in Egypt at this time. They would only have been a few of numerous Asiatic immigrants at this time. These immigrants, including the Hebrews, would have been viewed by the Egyptians as Hyksos, or at least closely related to the Hyksos.

Thus, we can see that initially the Hebrews were welcome in Egypt and Joseph's rise to power is more understandable in view of the Asiatic kings on the throne in Egypt at the

time. However, in time the political situation changed drastically, which had severe ramifications for the Israelites living in Egypt and the peaceful and prosperous situation which they enjoyed at that time.

#### THE PHARAOH WHO “KNEW NOT JOSEPH” (EXODUS 1:8).

The Israelites multiplied greatly while they were in Egypt (Exod 1:7). According to the chronology we have established, they were in Egypt a total of 215 years, from c. 1660-1445 B.C.

Part way through this period, however, their situation changed. The native Egyptian princes of Thebes, Sekenenre and then Kamose, who were tributary to the Hyksos kings, rebelled against them and began to drive them out of their bases in the Nile Delta. Finally Kamose's brother Ahmose succeeded in driving them out in about 1570 B.C., establishing the eighteenth Dynasty and the “New Kingdom” period of Egyptian history.

Having reestablished their dominance, the native Egyptians immediately set about removing all traces of the Hyksos' rule, eradicating their buildings and all record of their kings. This explains why no trace of Joseph's presence has ever been found in Egypt, as he would have been seen as simply another Hyksos by the Egyptians.

Determined to never again be overrun by a foreign power, the Egyptians set about conquering Palestine, restricting immigration and enslaving Asiatics left in Egypt. The Israelites were probably enslaved at this time: Ahmose is probably therefore the Pharaoh who “knew not Joseph” (Exod 1:8-14).

Ahmose's reign thus marks the return of native Egyptian rule after the Hyksos period, in which foreign Semitic kings had ruled Egypt and were likely to have preferred fellow Semites such as Joseph. The situation now changed radically, with Semites now considered dangerous outsiders. The Hebrews of course would be included in the new treatment of Semitic people, and it is probably from this time also that the enslavement and oppression of Israel in Egypt began.

Some Egyptian records of this time mention slaves with Asiatic names, some of which are common Hebrew names such as Menahem and others. While these may not have actually been Hebrews, they do indicate that Semitic slaves were common during this period. This then also established the general historicity of the biblical account of Israelite slavery in the book of Exodus.

Thus, we see at the beginning of the eighteenth Egyptian dynasty a convergence of events which left the Israelites in slavery in Egypt. The stage was now set for the Exodus, perhaps the most dramatic event in the history of God's people.



## HISTORICITY OF THE EXODUS

Perhaps more than any other event described in the Old Testament historical narratives, the story of the Exodus has been doubted by liberal scholars who state that it was an invention of later Jewish writers who wished to develop a legendary account of their nation's birth. Many indeed state that the whole story is a fabrication of the post-exilic period, while others say that it only contains a "folk-memory" of some unrecoverable event in the nation's distant past. They claim that it did not occur because there is no contemporary Egyptian account of the Exodus, as well as no archaeological evidence of a substantial encampment in the Sinai peninsula from this time.

However, it should be pointed out that an absence of evidence is not "evidence of absence." The Egyptians are not likely to have recorded a defeat at the hands of former slaves, while the route of the Exodus is unknown except in general terms, so we cannot expect to have found evidence of the Israelites' passing. In any case, temporary encampments would have left very little in the way of physical evidence. Thus, the fact that there is no immediate physical evidence of the Exodus certainly cannot be taken as evidence that the Exodus did not happen.

The story of a sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus is such a pervasive one in Israelite history it is very difficult to believe that it has no historical antecedent. One would think that someone trying to make up a history for his nation would develop a more glorious origin than having been enslaved in Egypt. We might, for example, consider the heroic accounts of the "foundations" of the Greek and Roman powers as recounted in the epic poems of Homer and Virgil, which certainly have nothing which can be compared with hundreds of years of slavery.

Thus, we have seen that the situation which has been uncovered in the archaeological excavation of Egypt broadly supports the historicity of the biblical account of the patriarchal period. The Exodus, the next major event described in the Bible, also fits into the known framework of Egyptian history as will be seen in the next lesson.



## LESSON FOUR

### THE EXODUS

#### THE PHARAOH OF THE EXODUS.

There have been many attempts to discover which Egyptian ruler was the Pharaoh mentioned in the Exodus and numerous candidates have been put forward.

The most common have been the eighteenth dynasty rulers Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, and the nineteenth dynasty kings Rameses II or Merneptah.

As has been noted earlier, we can learn something of the chronology of the patriarchal period from the Bible and thus it is possible to cross-reference this with the information known from Egyptian history. 1 Kings 6:1 allows us to date the Exodus at 1447 B.C. (see lesson 2). When the Bible chronology of Moses' life is compared, the following dates become apparent:

Moses' birth (Pharaoh's edict against Israelite children) - 1527 B.C.

Moses' flight to Midian - 1487 B.C.

Exodus - 1447 B.C.

Entry into Canaan - 1407 B.C.

The dates for the Pharaohs of Egypt are not completely secure, but the following dates have received some acceptance and are accurate to within 20 years or so:

|              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| Ahmose       | 1570-1546 B.C. |
| Amenhotep I  | 1546-1526 B.C. |
| Thutmose I   | 1526-1512 B.C. |
| Thutmose II  | 1512-1504 B.C. |
| Hatshepsut   | 1503-1482 B.C. |
| Thutmose III | 1504-1450 B.C. |
| Amenhotep II | 1450-1425 B.C. |

Thus, in this scheme, the Pharaoh who ordered the slaughter of the Israelite children was Amenhotep I, the Pharaoh of the oppression was Thutmose III and his mother Hatshepsut, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Amenhotep II. However, as has been noted, there is some debate about the Egyptian dates and some of the Bible's numbers may be rounded rather than exact, so this cannot be certain.

It is also noteworthy that it is known that the successor of Amenhotep II, Thutmose IV, was *not* the firstborn son of Amenhotep II, and had not expected to become Pharaoh. This would accord with the Bible's account of the death of the firstborn, in which it is explicitly stated that the firstborn son of Pharaoh died (Ex 12:29).

## EIGHTEENTH DYNASTY OR NINETEENTH?

Despite the biblical chronology, there has always been a strong scholarly opinion that the Exodus took place in the reign of Rameses II, a Pharaoh of the nineteenth dynasty who reigned from 1304-1237 B.C. As we have seen, the biblical chronology does not allow this, but many think the archaeological evidence supports a thirteenth century date.

Some have claimed that the name of the city "Raamses" (Ex 1:11) indicates the Exodus must have taken place in the reign of Rameses II, as the city was named after that king and was built by him.

However, it is likely that this description of the city is applied retrospectively, as certainly must be the case in Genesis 47:11. It is possible that the original text read "Avaris" (the Hyksos capital), which is possibly the early name of the city and a later scribe "updated" the text to use the current Egyptian name for the city in his time.

Archaeological investigation of the site of Raamses has revealed that there was construction activity there both in the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties, showing that the Hebrew slaves could have been working there in the time that the Bible indicates, around 1450 B.C.

## WHAT ABOUT THE SANTORINI ERUPTION?

It has often been suggested that the biblical descriptions of the plagues in Egypt are related to the violent destruction of Santorini, an island in the Aegean Sea, by a volcanic eruption at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, which devastated the Minoan civilization on Crete.

This explanation has been attractive to those who are trying to find naturalistic explanations for miraculous events described in the Bible, equating such things as the Nile turning to blood and the thick darkness to the effects of volcanic ash and debris.

However, two mutually incompatible dates have been put forward as the time of this eruption, neither of which is in concord with the biblical chronology of the Exodus.

Scientists working from Radiocarbon (Carbon 14) dates calibrated by tree-ring counts (dendrochronology) claim that the eruption of Santorini took place in 1628 B.C. Furthermore, some have similarly dated remains of grains from the Middle Bronze Age destruction of Jericho at 1583 B.C. (see lesson 7), which places it c. 40 years after the eruption. This, they claim, is evidence of the validity of the Exodus account and its linkage with the Santorini eruption.

Archaeologists working from historical bases, however, have located pumice (volcanic fallout) at Tel e-Dab'a in Egypt in a layer securely dated to about 1525 B.C., a date which conflicts with that given by dendrochronology/C14. In addition, the MB destruction of Jericho is ordinarily assigned to c. 1550 B.C., although this too is subject to revision.

Thus, these two fields of study have put forward two incompatible dates. We should note, however, that the biblical chronology does not allow either of these dates. Accordingly, from the biblical perspective it is unlikely that the eruption of Santorini had anything to do with the Exodus.

## PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF THE EXODUS.

It has often been suggested that the Exodus was not an historical event due to the lack of any physical evidence of the Israelite presence in the Sinai peninsula.

However, we should bear in mind that a lack of evidence does not necessarily indicate that something did not exist - it may only indicate that the evidence has not yet been found, or has been effaced in the intervening time.

We should note that the actual route of the Exodus is only known in general terms from the biblical account and many places mentioned in the biblical account have not certainly been identified. Therefore, the archaeologists may simply have been looking in the wrong place and the actual area of the Exodus has not yet been investigated.

Another possibility is that the nature of the Israelite presence was such that there is no remaining physical evidence. The Bible records that the Israelites were only dwelling in temporary encampments for relatively short periods of time. Accordingly, it would not be surprising if time had completely erased all evidence of the simple Israelite encampments, leaving literally nothing to be found.

Although nothing has been found of the Israelite encampments, the presence of others mentioned in the Bible accounts has been discovered. Exodus 13:17 refers to God not allowing the Israelites to pass through the direct route to Canaan, along the coast. Evidence of a considerable Egyptian outpost at Dier el-Balah has been found in this

area (mostly dating from the thirteenth century, but it is quite likely that an outpost was there in the previous dynasty also). This is probably the opposition God referred to and the reason the more indirect route via Sinai and Transjordan was chosen.

#### ANCIENT MIDDLE EASTERN LAW CODES.

Another strong piece of evidence for the historicity of the Exodus account is derived from the nature of the Mosaic Law codes. The Bible states that these were given from Mt. Horeb at the time of the Exodus, that is about 1440 B.C. (Deut 5:2-6). Many modern scholars, however, claim that the Mosaic Law was an invention of the priesthood dating from the post-exilic period, i.e. about 500 B.C. Accordingly, it is instructive to compare the layout of the Mosaic Law with known treaties, agreements and law codes from these two periods to determine which era the Mosaic Law most closely resembles.

The covenant between God and Israel preserved in Exodus and Deuteronomy conforms to a type of treaty known from many examples referred to as a "suzerain-vassal" treaty. Those made in the late second millennium B.C. show a consistent pattern: a title, an historical prologue outlining the benefits the suzerain has given to the vassal in the past, the law itself, then provisions for the preservation of the law, usually in a temple, followed by provision for regular reading of the law. Witnesses are then called, blessings and cursings for those who keep and break the law are given and then the treaty concludes with the taking of an oath. After about 1200 B.C., however, this arrangement disappears and is replaced by a much simpler arrangement. First millennium treaties had only four elements: title, the law itself, curses against infringers, then a series of witnesses.

The three examples of the swearing of the covenant between Israel and God (at Mt. Sinai in Exodus; in Moab in Deuteronomy; and at Shechem in Joshua 24) conform to the second millennium type of suzerain-vassal treaty, not the first millennium type. This demonstrates that the books describing the Exodus and conquest date from the second millennium (the time they claim to have been written) and not from the post-exilic period in the first millennium, as modern liberal scholars claim.

#### THE CONQUEST OF TRANSJORDAN.

After the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Bible records that the Israelites arrived in the Transjordan area prior to crossing into Canaan. The Bible describes a series of kings and established kingdoms in the area, including those of Sihon the Amorite, Og, the Moabites and the Edomites.

The biblical account describes the attempted cursing of Israel by Balaam, a diviner hired by Balak the king of Moab (Num 22-24). The name of Balaam has been found in an inscription dated to between the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. at Deir Alla in Jordan (perhaps the biblical Succoth), which speaks of "Balaam the son of Beor" and

describes a previously unknown event in his life and mentions that “the gods came to him at night and [spoke to] him.” This inscription shows that Balaam was known to the non-Israelite peoples of the land and was remembered as a great magician and someone to whom “the gods” spoke. This demonstrates clearly that Balaam was not a fictitious character invented by the Israelite writers, and makes it much more likely that he was an historical individual, just as the Bible states he was.

Another area which needs to be considered is the archaeological evidence from the region east of the Jordan. As has been noted, the Bible records that this area was populated and inhabited by numerous kingdoms and peoples at the time of the Exodus.

However, many scholars have claimed that the archaeological evidence shows no record of extensive habitation in the Middle to Late Bronze Ages, the time of the Exodus. This has been put forward as evidence that the Exodus was not a historical event, or at least that only the ‘low’ date for the Exodus can be allowed, which as we have seen conflicts with the biblical chronology.

In the 1930s archaeologist Nelson Glueck conducted a pottery survey of the Trans-jordan area and concluded that the area was uninhabited except perhaps by nomads from c. 1900 - 1300 B.C., which in his view meant that only the ‘low’ (c. 1250 B.C.) date for the Exodus was possible, or else the biblical account was wrong altogether. Initially, some argued that the peoples described in the Bible might have been nomadic, and thus not left any traces. However, the Bible does appear to describe cities and settled populations (e.g. Num 21:25-32), not exclusively nomadic tribes.

Glueck’s findings have come under challenge more recently, however, and his interpretation of the pottery evidence has been reviewed. Current opinion is that there was no break in occupation as Glueck contended and therefore the archaeological evidence from the Transjordan area could allow either the low or high date for the Exodus.

## CONCLUSION.

Despite the poor state of the archaeological evidence for the wilderness wanderings in general, we can see that what evidence there is does not contradict the biblical account of the Exodus and indeed generally supports the case for the historicity of the Bible.

After the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 3), the Israelites embarked upon the conquest of Canaan. This is one of the most contested areas of all in the study of biblical archaeology and will form the subject of the next lesson.





## LESSON FIVE

### THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN I

#### VIEWS OF THE CONQUEST.

As noted in the previous lesson, the conquest of Canaan is one of the most disputed areas in the whole field of biblical archaeology. Several disputes exist concerning this event, centering on its date, nature or even whether it existed at all.

One of the disputes has already been touched upon, namely as to whether the Exodus and conquest occurred in the fifteenth or thirteenth centuries B.C. As we have seen, the biblical evidence points to the earlier date and the archaeological evidence does not conflict with that. However, some of the evidence specifically refers to the situation in Canaan and will be discussed here.

Other more radical interpretations have even questioned whether the Exodus and conquest happened at all. These tend to put forward other interpretations based solely upon the archaeological evidence without any regard to literary sources (i.e. the Bible). As has been discussed, this is based on false assumptions about the late date of the biblical evidence. There are two main “alternative” explanations to the biblical account of a military conquest:

#### *The “Peaceful Infiltration” Theory.*

This theory, advanced by the German archaeologist A. Alt, envisages the “proto-Israelites” as nomads gradually infiltrating the settled Canaanite territories and then fighting the Canaanites for the territory. However, this theory fails to account for the fact that in this period and before, there was *no* significant population living in the desert and therefore no place from which the “proto-Israelites” could have come.

#### *The Marxist “Social Revolution” Theory.*

This theory postulates the origin of the Israelites in Canaan itself, stating that they represented the rural population of Late Bronze Age Canaan, which rebelled against the oppressive rule of the cities and established a new more egalitarian society in the highlands of Palestine. However, recent surveys have shown that the rural highland population of Canaan in the Late Bronze was in fact very small, so again the alleged origin for the Israelite population turns out not to exist.

We can thus see that neither of these explanations is in accord with the evidence, or properly account for the appearance of the Israelite population in Iron Age I (as will be

discussed). In addition, they do not account for the pervasiveness of the Exodus story in Israelite narrative - it is always presented as central to the Israelites' existence and self-identification. These theories must insist that these accounts are merely fictions. Often indeed, there would seem to be a pervasive anti-biblical bias in all these theories.

Thus, it is altogether reasonable, from both the biblical and archaeological perspectives, to turn back to the biblical account to see if it squares with the archaeological evidence from Canaan.

## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM BRONZE AND IRON AGE CANAAN.

The archaeology of this period in Canaan has been extensively investigated, but numerous different interpretations have been put forward, several of which suggest differing views than that given in the Bible. Some of these suggest the "late date" for the Exodus, while others claim that the archaeological evidence indicates that the conquest of Canaan did not happen at all.

The most common statements heard claim that the archaeological evidence shows no habitation at many of the places mentioned in the book of Joshua from the date required by the biblical text, or indeed at many places by the late date as well. The following are the most common points raised:

### *The Evidence from Jericho.*

The site of Jericho has been extensively investigated. When it was first excavated, it was stated that the site was unoccupied in the Late Bronze Age. Then, John Garstang in the 1930's declared he had found the remains of a collapsed double wall and a city destroyed by fire from about 1400 B.C., which would appear to vindicate the biblical account. Then, however, Dame Kathleen Kenyon excavated the site from 1952 - 1958 and concluded that Garstang had been mistaken, as the wall actually dated from the Early Bronze Age and the city was destroyed at about 1550 B.C., at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. This then denied at least the early date for the Exodus and for a long time it was accepted amongst the majority of scholars that there was no walled city present in either 1400 or indeed 1200 for Joshua to conquer. Since then, however, Bryant Wood has reassessed the evidence, which will be dealt with later.

### *The Problem of Ai.*

Another problem with the archaeological evidence surrounds the second city conquered by the Israelites, Ai. Ai is usually identified as the site of et-Tell, which is a direct translation into Arabic of the Hebrew name. Archaeological investigation of the site, however, has revealed that the site was unoccupied between 2200 and 1200 B.C., which again is in direct contrast to the biblical data. The most obvious solution is that the site has (despite the name) been

wrongly identified and Ai is in fact to be sought elsewhere. Several alternatives have been identified, some of which were destroyed in 1550 B.C.

#### *The Evidence from Late Bronze Age Hazor.*

Considerable excavations have also been undertaken at Hazor in northern Canaan, which the Bible describes as having been destroyed by Joshua (Josh 11:1-13). The excavator, Yigael Yadin, identified a major conflagration dating from the end of the Late Bronze Age (about 1200 B.C.). He identified this as the destruction mentioned in the Bible, which would appear to confirm the late date for the Exodus and conquest. He also, however, identified a destruction dating from the end of the Middle Bronze (c. 1550 B.C.) and another city (although the manner of its fall is not apparent) which ceased to be occupied in c. 1400 B.C. One of these, in fact, could be the city destroyed in Joshua's time.

#### *The Stratigraphy of Bronze Age Canaan.*

In the ongoing investigations throughout Canaan, it has been claimed that there is consistently little or no archaeological evidence for the destruction of sites from either the early or late dates for the Exodus. In each case, there is usually a destruction conventionally dated to about 1550 B.C., followed in many cases by a prolonged abandonment or uninterrupted habitation without sign of violent destruction. Some, but by no means all, of the sites mentioned in the biblical account of the conquest were destroyed again in about 1200 B.C. These data have been used to support the late date of the Exodus, or in some cases to deny the historicity of the conquest altogether.

#### *Iron Age Villages in the Palestinian Hill Country.*

Finally, many pastoral and agricultural villages appear in the Hill country of Palestine from about 1200 B.C. on, at the beginning of the Iron Age. These have, almost certainly correctly, been ascribed to the Israelites, but their appearance at the end of the Late Bronze Age has often been used to demonstrate the late date for the Exodus. It is possible, however, that they represent not the original settlement of the Israelites but rather their sedentarisation many years later. This issue will be discussed in the next lesson.

Thus we can see that there are certainly problems with regard to the archaeological evidence, especially when it is being compared with the biblical account of the Exodus and conquest. As we will see, however, those who claim that this proves the Bible to be in error are speaking very prematurely.

## BIMSON'S AND LIVINGSTONE'S THEORY.

One theory has been put forward by Professors Bimson and Livingstone, which successfully correlates the archaeological evidence for the conquest with the biblical account.

As was noted in the previous lesson, a widespread series of destructions occurred at the end of the Middle Bronze. Almost all of the sites in Canaan were destroyed at this time and many of them were abandoned while others were reoccupied, but normally with less or no fortifications. These destructions have generally been ascribed to the Egyptians, who in about 1550 B.C. were engaged in driving out the Hyksos and attacking their fortresses in Southern Palestine (but see below).

Bimson and Livingstone suggest moving the end of the Middle Bronze Age from 1550 down to c.1410-1400, which, as we have seen, is the biblical date for the conquest. If this revision is accepted, the biblical and archaeological data can be seen to coincide. Most of the cities that the Bible describes as being attacked by the Israelites are numbered among those destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age and so it is possible that the Israelites were indeed responsible for these destructions.

One problem is that of Ai, mentioned earlier. Bimson and Livingstone, however, propose that Ai has been misidentified and instead should be located at Khirbet Nisya, a site close to the modern town of Ramallah. Although Khirbet Nisya has not been excavated, surface surveys revealed that it follows the occupation pattern of other cities in Canaan. It is therefore possible that Nisya is in fact Ai, which would conform to Bimson and Livingstone's theory and the biblical account.

Another point worthy of mention is the city of Gibeon, which avoided destruction by means of a trick in the biblical account (Josh 9). Gibeon, according to the archaeological evidence, was occupied in the Middle Bronze Age but deserted in the Late Bronze. Thus, the occupation pattern of the city conforms with Bimson's and Livingstone's theory. Interestingly, it appears that the city was peacefully abandoned rather than destroyed, which would agree with the biblical account wherein the Gibeonites were forced to become bondmen by the Israelites (Josh 9:19-27).

Thus, Bimson's and Livingstone's theory gives us one possible harmonization of the archaeological evidence and the biblical text.

## THE "MINIMAL CONQUEST" THEORY.

This idea has been put forward by several commentators and focuses on the fact that the Bible does not actually specify the *destruction* of all cities mentioned in the account of the conquest. In fact, while the Bible states that the populations of several cities were destroyed, the actual burning of the city itself is mentioned in only three cases: Jericho (Josh 6:34); Ai (Josh 8:28; 10:1) and Hazor (Josh 11:12-14). The account of the

destruction of Hazor is especially informative: the Bible specifically states that Hazor was the *only* city of Northern Canaan which was burnt (Josh 11:13).

Thus, it is in fact only necessary to find destruction levels at these three sites in order to find a correlation between the archaeological evidence and the book of Joshua. We will accordingly be looking for destruction levels at about 1400 B.C., or in archaeological terms at the transition from Late Bronze I and Late Bronze II.

#### *Jericho.*

As stated earlier, Kenyon decided that Jericho had been destroyed and abandoned c. 1550 B.C. She decided this on the absence of Cypriot Bichrome pottery, a feature of Late Bronze sites. However, Bryant Wood has pointed out that this pottery is a feature of wealthy cities located on important trade routes, which Jericho was not. The local pottery, however, according to Wood shows that Jericho was in fact inhabited in the Late Bronze Age and the destruction which Kenyon attributed to 1550 B.C. could thus instead be assigned to 1400 B.C. - the biblical date for the conquest. Kenyon discovered collapsed brickwork walls and evidence of a fierce fire, which would also be in accord with the Bible's account of the destruction of the city.

#### *Ai.*

As we have already seen, the site traditionally associated with Ai, et-Tell, was not inhabited at all in either the Middle or Late Bronze ages. However, other nearby sites, such as Khirbet Nisya, have been suggested. This site has yielded remains from Middle Bronze and Late Bronze I periods, and so agrees with the biblical description of Ai. The excavations are not yet far advanced so we do not yet know if there is evidence of a violent destruction.

#### *Hazor.*

This site was a large and important city throughout the Middle and Late Bronze periods. As has been noted, it was destroyed violently at the ends of both these periods. The excavator, Yadin, believed that the Late Bronze II destruction (about 1220 B.C.) was the one described in the Bible. However, it is also possible that Hazor was destroyed in about 1400 B.C., which would confirm the biblical chronology. It is possible that the MB destruction has been misdated (for which see the next lesson), or that the city which was occupied in Late Bronze I was destroyed and excavations have not yet uncovered the remains of this destruction. In either case, we cannot rule out that Hazor was destroyed just as the Bible says it was in about 1400 B.C.

Thus, we can see that if either of these two systems of interpretation are followed, we can also account for the apparent discrepancy between the archaeological record and the accounts of the conquest found in the book of Joshua.

## LESSON SIX

### THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN II

#### RECENT VIEWS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CANAAN.

The views which we have been examining all accept the generally accepted chronology of Bronze Age Canaan, which postulates a general destruction in about 1550 B.C. and is often attributed to the Egyptians pursuing the fleeing Hyksos and their allies. However, in recent years this analysis has come under increasing criticism.

Recent analyses of the archaeological evidence from the end of Middle Bronze Age Canaan has tended to view the destructions as a longer process and stemming more from social upheaval of some sort or other rather than campaigning by the Egyptians.

These views tend to see the destructions as having taken place over a period of time, perhaps 150 years or more, and to have been caused by a variety of factors:

#### *Economic Factors:*

It is held that the urban and rural societies of the Middle Bronze were reaching a high point of population and prosperity by c. 1550, but their ability to feed their non-productive elites and all their population was severely limited. This increased unrest and caused rural and nomadic populations to attack the cities.

#### *Collapse of the Hyksos Regime:*

It seems that the city states of MB Canaan were involved in extensive trade with the Hyksos capital of Avaris and when the Egyptians destroyed the Hyksos regime this would have had a catastrophic effect on the economy of Canaan. The loss of trade and of a powerful ally would have had an adverse effect on the positions of the Canaanite kings.

#### *Egyptian Military Incursions:*

Despite the fact that the only incursion into Canaan we know of from this time is the Egyptian siege of the Hyksos center of Sharuhen in Southern Canaan, it is possible that there were more campaigns than we know of. Nonetheless, the Egyptians are not likely to have been responsible for *all* the destructions of the Middle Bronze Age Canaanite city-states.

The widening of the time of these destructions to as late as 1400 B.C. or so would thus allow some of these destructions to be attributable to the invading Israelites who, according to the biblical chronology, were entering Canaan at about this time. Although

we cannot be sure about the dates of these destructions, it is therefore possible that some of them relate to the Israelite conquest.

Thus, it would seem that the Israelites invaded Canaan at a time of great social upheaval and military activity. The Egyptians had been campaigning in the territory, economic factors had caused social upheaval and rural and nomadic attacks, and the Israelites were attacking from the east. In such a situation, it is not surprising if the Canaanite kings had regarded the Israelites as just another group of nomads threatening them. Indeed, an archive of letters from Egypt indicate that this is just what they thought.

## THE AMARNA LETTERS.

After its initial military incursions against the Hyksos in Southern Canaan, Egypt launched a major invasion in a series of campaigns under Pharaoh Thutmose III beginning in 1482 B.C. After this, the lowland cities of Late Bronze Age Canaan recognized the Pharaoh as their overlord, although the local kings continued to have jurisdiction in their own territories.

By the time of the Israelites' arrival and campaigning in Canaan, the Egyptian throne was occupied by the opulent Amenhotep III (1417 - 1379 B.C.) and his religious fanatic son Akhenaten (1379 - 1362 B.C.). These kings were far less involved in affairs in Canaan and we find many appeals from Canaanite kings for help to these Pharaohs, which seem to have been largely ignored.

A diplomatic archive from this period has been excavated from Tell el-Amarna, Akhenaten's capital in Egypt, which contains nearly four hundred clay tablets from kings in Canaan, as well as from Hittite, Mittannian and Babylonian monarchs. These tablets are written in Akkadian cuneiform, which was the diplomatic language of the time. Those from Canaan reveal the situation in that country at this time.

The general impression given by the texts is that Canaan was in turmoil at the time, with civil war between the Canaanite kings compounded by external invasion from nomadic groups. Many letters appeal (in vain) for help from the Pharaoh.

Several of these texts refer to a group called the *Apiru*, which is also spelled *Habiru* in other Near Eastern texts. These people are referred to as "plundering the lands of the king," and are related as seizing cities and lands. Several scholars have equated these people with the Hebrews and it has been noted that the words *Habiru* and "Hebrew" could be etymologically related.

However, the term *Habiru* is found in many other texts from the Near East spanning several centuries and most of them cannot be equated with the activities of the Hebrews as related in the Bible. We cannot therefore claim that the Hebrews and the *Habiru* / *Apiru* are the same peoples.



It is, however, quite possible that *some* of the references do describe the activities of the Israelites. The term *Apiru* in the Amarna archive seems to be used generically of any unsettled and/or nomadic peoples active in the area of Canaan at the time. It is certain that the Israelites would have been viewed in this way by the settled inhabitants of Canaan. Thus, some of the references to the *Apiru* in the Amarna archive could well be referring to the invasion of the Israelites.

## THE SETTLEMENT OF ISRAEL IN THE HIGHLANDS OF CANAAN.

Despite the success of the military conquest of Canaan, the books of Joshua and Judges reveal that there was still a large area of the promised land that the Israelites did not successfully occupy.

According to Joshua 13:1-6 and Judges 1:27-36, the Israelites did not drive out the inhabitants of the lowlands, which continued to be occupied by the Canaanites and, later, the Philistines. Nonetheless, they did successfully conquer and occupy the highlands of Judah and Ephraim, and the area of Gilead east of the Jordan. These, then, became the heartland of the Israelite nation.

This is reflected in the archaeological record, which shows a distinct change in occupation in the rural areas of highland Canaan. Especially in the Iron Age, a large number of rural villages appear in the highlands, while Canaanite urban occupation continues in the lowlands of the country, in the areas described in the Bible. While the significance of these Iron Age villages will be discussed in the next lesson, they do show that the description of the areas of initial Israelite occupation given in the Bible is accurate.

The cycles of religious decline, conquest and liberation as recorded in the book of Judges have not left any specific archaeological remains (except possibly at Hazor, which is discussed below). However, some remains from the period do show the general patterns of Israelite settlement during this time.

As far as specific events described in the book of Judges is concerned, the only possible parallel from archaeology in this period is the destruction of Hazor. The excavators of Hazor identified a major destruction of Hazor at the end of the Late Bronze Age (c. 1200 B.C.), which they identified with the conquest of Joshua. However, as discussed in previous lessons, this dating is not in agreement with the biblical data. Nonetheless, this destruction *may* accord with the defeat of Jabin and Sisera of Hazor by Deborah and Barak in the period of Judges (Jdgs 4). This dating would then be in accord with the early date for the Exodus, which is the one supported by the biblical text.

As already noted, however, the presence of the Israelites in the highlands of Canaan begins to be archaeologically attested at the beginning of the Iron Age I, about 1200 B.C. Numerous small villages have been discovered from this period in the highlands,

which show evidence of small pastoral communities. Iron tools are very rare, which is in accordance with the biblical account of a Philistine iron monopoly (1 Sam 13:19-22).

Another feature of these villages was the absence of pork bones, in contrast with surrounding Philistine and Canaanite sites where they were common. This shows that the Israelites were already observing the Law of Moses' dietary restrictions, contrary to many modern scholars who claim that these were very late.

Some have used the presence of these villages to argue for a late date for the Exodus (as has been noted), because they only appear in about 1200 B.C. However, it is just as likely that this fact reflects the *sedentarisation* of the Israelites rather than their initial settlement. In this view, then, the Israelites would have remained largely nomadic until the beginning of the Iron Age and then begun to settle into their villages.

This process is possibly reflected in the *Merneptah stele*, the first document from the ancient world to mention the name "Israel." In this document, dated at approximately 1237-1227 B.C., the Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah claimed to have defeated Israel in the course of a campaign in Palestine. In this stele, the name "Israel" is not accompanied by the determinative for a settled people, indicating that they might have still led a nomadic existence at the time.

The event described in the Merneptah stele does not correspond with any known event from the book of Judges. It is possible, however, that Merneptah may have been allied to one of Israel's oppressors, or else invaded at a time when Israel was already under oppression and was thus not mentioned separately in the book of Judges.

## THE ARRIVAL OF THE PHILISTINES.

The books of Judges and Samuel relate in detail the exploits of the Philistines, people who lived on the seacoast plain of Canaan and who were frequently enemies of the Israelites. Considerable archaeological evidence has come to light which illuminates the Bible's account of this time.

The archaeological investigation of the coastline of Canaan has revealed remains of very large cities dating from c.1200 B.C. onward. The remains are of a non-Canaanite origin, pointing to the generally accepted conclusion that these cities are those of the Philistines.

The Bible states that the Philistines came from Caphtor, which is today called Crete (Amos 9:7). This is reflected in the archaeological evidence of pottery found at the Philistine sites, which show a Aegean origin for the pottery designs.

Egyptian evidence indicates that there were a series of major invasions by the "Sea Peoples," culminating in a major invasion of Egypt in 1190 B.C., repelled by Pharaoh Rameses III. After this, various peoples identified as the Pereset (or Peleset), Sherden

and Tjekker (sometimes spelled Sikil) settled on the Canaanite coast, ending Egyptian supremacy in this area. It is generally thought that the Pereset/Peleset are the Philistines.

The Bible reveals that the Philistines achieved a military supremacy over the Israelites in the later Judges and early Kingdom period. This is reflected in Philistine remains from many other sites in the region well away from normal areas of Philistine occupation. The most notable of these is Beth-Shan, a Philistine fortress on which the Bible records the bodies of Saul and his sons were displayed (1 Sam 31:10-13).

This Philistine dominance is also probably reflected in evidence from the Israelite hill-country. The Bible records a Philistine victory over Israel in which the ark was taken (1 Sam 4:1-11). This event has been dated to sometime after 1100 B.C. The archaeological record indicates that Shiloh, the site of the tabernacle at this time (1 Sam 1:3), was destroyed at about this time. It would thus appear that the Philistines followed up their victory with the destruction of Israel's major religious center. This destruction is not mentioned in the Bible, but it is possibly alluded to (Jer 7:12-14; 26:6, 9). This is probably the reason that the ark was not returned to Shiloh after it was regained by the Israelites.

In this way we can see that the archaeological evidence confirms the biblical account of the Philistine occupation of the coastline of Palestine.

#### THE KINGDOM OF SAUL.

The pressure from the Philistines eventually caused the Israelites to desire a "king like the nations" (1 Sam 8). There is no direct archaeological evidence for the Kingdom of Saul, but it would appear that Saul's kingdom was more in the line of a "tribal chiefdom" rather than a kingdom like that of David and Solomon.

However, evidence of a small stronghold from the late Iron I period (c. 1050 B.C.) has been found at Gibeah, which the Bible describes as Saul's residence. This would appear to be the remains of Saul's "palace" - really a small fort.

In the Iron Age II, however, we see a significant change, and impressive new monumental works begin to appear in about 1000 B.C. This would appear to reflect the beginnings of the kingdom of David.



## LESSON SEVEN

### THE ISRAELITE MONARCHY I

#### CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM.

There is currently much dispute over the nature or indeed the very existence of the Davidic kingdom in the scholarly world today. There are many who put forward the idea that the whole Bible account of the Davidic kingdom is a mythical “golden age” invented in the post-exilic period, and David and Solomon are entirely mythical figures.

Others, while not going this far, say that the Bible’s account of David is grossly exaggerated and that David was nothing more than a local chieftain or tribal leader, and that there was no “kingdom” of Israel in any meaningful sense of the word at this time.

This attitude has also affected views of Israel’s religion during this period. The Bible describes the use of the tabernacle followed by the temple of Solomon and a religion based upon written revelation from the time of Moses, supplemented by prophetic utterances which were also committed to writing. However, many scholars today believe that this was all an invention of the exilic or post-exilic periods and that there was no temple in Jerusalem. They believe that Jerusalem was only one of several cult-centers of Yahweh and the stories of the centrality of Jerusalem were only invented by the priests in the post-exilic period to increase their influence.

However, as we will see, the archaeological evidence in fact shows the accuracy of the biblical text quite remarkably, proving the existence of the house of David, the kingdom of Israel and the temple of Solomon.

#### THE HOUSE OF DAVID.

Until recently, there was no contemporary or near-contemporary archaeological evidence to support the existence of a “house of David” or of David as an historical figure. Recently, however, an archaeological find has revealed a reading which supports the biblical account of the existence of David and his dynasty.

A stele was discovered at the site of the northern city of Dan in 1993 and further fragments were found there in 1994. The stele contains an inscription in Aramaic, part of which reads as follows:

“This inscription is notable as it mentions two kings by name, Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah. It is noteworthy that Ahaziah is described as king of ‘the House of David,’ which implies that a dynasty of that name was ruling Judah at that time (in the later half of the ninth century B.C.), and more particularly, that David, the founder

(presumably) of that dynasty, was an historical character.” Thus, this inscription comprehensively refutes the notion that David was an invention of the Exilic period.

The inscription has been attributed to Hazael, king of Damascus. Although the Bible states it was actually Jehu who killed these two kings (2 Kgs 9), it is likely that Hazael claimed their deaths as a propaganda ploy. It is also possible that Jehu was acting in collusion with Hazael or as his vassal. In any case, this difficulty in no way detracts from the value of the text.

There is possibly also another inscriptional reference to David, which is even older. The Egyptian Pharaoh Sheshonq (Shishak in the Bible) attacked Judah during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:25-26). The exploits of this Pharaoh are recorded in hieroglyphic inscriptions in the temple of Karnak in Egypt.

In one section of this inscription, carved in 924 B.C., Sheshonq lists places he conquered in his raid on Judah and Israel the previous year. One place listed is *h(y)dbt dwt*, and the eminent Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen has recently suggested that this should be read as “The Heights of David,” the name of an unidentified geographic feature in southern Judah. This then would be another mention of the name of David, this time dating only 50 years or so from his death. This, too, would be clear proof that David was an historical figure from the time the Bible states, not a post-exilic fiction.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM.

In addition to this inscriptional evidence for the existence of the house of David, there is also archaeological evidence that a strong centrally administered kingdom emerged in Israel in this period, which is also consistent with the biblical account of the emergence of the empire of David and Solomon at this time.

Although the capital of the kingdom (Jerusalem) yields little conclusive evidence from this period, due to its destructions in 586 B.C. and A.D. 70, and the continuing occupation of the site, other cities of the kingdom have yielded rich evidence from this period.

However, one structure which has been excavated in Jerusalem, the so-called “stepped stone structure,” may possibly be the “Millo,” or “mound” mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:9; 1 Kings 9:15.

Several important sites in diverse areas of the kingdom appear suddenly in about 1000 B.C. (Iron Age IIA) with relatively uniform features, such as casemate walls, palace complexes, multi-chambered gateways and stable complexes. These are chiefly noted at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer, but some have been noted at other sites as well. The construction of these centers would have required a considerable central administration, as well as a high level of wealth, for several reasons:

### *Uniformity of Design.*

The sites all demonstrate a uniformity of design which indicates a central designing and building authority spanning a wide area of Palestine. Different groups would not have created closely similar designs. This then accords with the biblical account of the central administration and strength of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms.

### *Use of Imported (Phoenician) Artisans and Materials.*

One of the features of these sites is their discontinuity with the preceding culture of their areas. The stonework, pottery assemblages and design of walls, gateways and palaces indicate strong Phoenician and Syro-Hittite influence and contribution. This is in complete accord with the Bible's description of contact with the court of Hiram of Tyre during this time and Phoenician help in major works projects such as the temple and Solomon's palace complex in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5-7).

### *Use of Chariotry.*

Evidence of chariot stables has been uncovered at Tel Masos and Megiddo, showing the accuracy of biblical statements of Solomon's creation of a chariot force (1 Kgs 10:26). Chariotry was very expensive for ancient states and would not have been possible except in the kind of centralized state described in the Bible.

### *Evidence of Considerable Prosperity and Wealth.*

All the foregoing would not have been possible without great wealth, and indeed the Bible comments extensively upon the wealth and prosperity of the Kingdom of Solomon. Archaeologist John S. Holladay suggests that the siting of these cities reflects the source of this wealth, as they dominate and control trade routes through the kingdom. This would control the lucrative trade routes between Southern Arabia and Phoenicia and bring prosperity and wealth to the kingdom. Indeed, such contact with South Arabia is probably reflected in the account of Solomon and the queen of Sheba.

Thus, we can conclude that the picture of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms given in the Bible is in accord with the archaeological evidence from Palestine in the Iron Age IIA, showing the accuracy of the biblical books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

### THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON.

In addition to claims about the nature or existence of the United Kingdom and the house of David, liberal scholars have also attacked the Bible's description of the temple

of Solomon, claiming that the temple worship and the centrality of Jerusalem in Israelite worship are only inventions of a later period. If the temple existed at all, they claim, it was not built by Solomon and it was only an unimportant cult site.

However, a recent discovery has shown the fallaciousness of these claims. In 1984 a small ivory pomegranate, only one and a half inches high, was discovered. It has been dated to approximately 700 B.C. and bears the inscription "Belonging to the temple of the Lord, holy to the priests." This artifact therefore demonstrates the existence of both the temple of Solomon and the Aaronic priesthood in the kingdom period.

Similarly, an ostrakon (inscribed piece of pottery) has surfaced on the antiquities market which dates from about the same time, mentioning a king of Judah and the gift of three shekels of silver to "the temple of Yahweh."

These discoveries, and the ones detailed earlier in the lesson, demonstrate clearly the accuracy and reliability of the Bible's account of the United Kingdom in the reigns of David and Solomon. There is now more than ever no reason at all to accept the liberals' attacks on the fidelity of the Bible's account of this period.

#### THE SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS ON THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

The Bible relates the account of how the empire of David and Solomon was destroyed by outside pressures and internal conflict at the end of Solomon's reign. As a result, two competing kingdoms emerged, known as Israel and Judah.

As will be seen in this lesson, there exists a considerable quantity of information provided by archaeology on the northern of the two Hebrew kingdoms, Israel. As a result, most scholars accept the biblical accounts of the books of Kings and Chronicles as generally historically reliable, even though there are a few who attempt to minimize the reliability of these accounts.

The minimalist position is even more untenable than usual in the case of the northern kingdom due to the profusion of evidence. Two areas are particularly notable: the epigraphic evidence, which relates to us the names of several individuals in the northern kingdom, and the archaeological evidence, which furnished insight into the lifestyle of the area and also confirms biblical statements concerning the organization of the northern kingdom.

#### EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE FOR THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

##### *The Moabite Stone.*

Sometimes referred to as the Mesha stele, this stone records the rebellion of the kingdom of Moab from Israel as recorded in 2 Kings 3. It is carved in proto-Hebraic characters and was inscribed by the Moabite king Mesha to commemo-



rate his victory over Israel. It was discovered at Dibon in Jordan in 1868. The text mentions two kings of the northern kingdom by name (Omri and Ahab), confirming the biblical account of these kings, as well as the account of the Israelite kingdom's domination of Moab in this period. In addition, it supplies the information that it was Omri who conquered Moab, which supplements the biblical account.

#### *The Kurkh Obelisk.*

This is an inscription of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. In it, he describes a battle which he had with a Syrian coalition at Qarqar on the Orontes River in northern Syria in 853 B.C. Listing the participants in the coalition, he mentions "Ahab, the Israelite" as contributing a large force - the second largest contingent of foot-soldiers and the largest contingent of chariotry. Despite the fact that the battle is not mentioned in the Bible, it provides further evidence of the Bible's historicity in that it mentions Ahab by name and confirms the biblical view of Ahab's military might.

#### *The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III.*

Another inscription of Shalmaneser is inscribed on a black stone more than six feet high found at Nimrud in Assyria. It is dated at 841 B.C. and records "Jehu, son of Omri" ("son" is here meant as successor rather than physical descendant) as paying tribute to Shalmaneser. As with the Kurkh inscription, this incident is not mentioned in the Bible, but it shows the historicity of the biblical account by proving the existence of Jehu. It is also interesting because it actually depicts Jehu kneeling before Shalmaneser - the earliest contemporary portrait of an Israelite king.

#### *The Samaria Ostraka.*

The excavations at the Israelite royal city of Samaria revealed numerous small pieces of pottery used as writing tablets (ostraka). These record shipments of wine and oil being sent by towns in the territory of Manasseh to individuals at the court in Samaria, probably during the reign of Jeroboam II. They reflect the peace and prosperity (especially among the upper classes) during that king's reign, but also provide confirmation of some of the clans of the tribe of Manasseh as revealed in the Bible (Num 26:28-34; 27:1-4; 36:10-12; Josh 17:1-6; 1 Chron 7:9-19).

#### *Seal Stones.*

Seal stones were small carved gems which were used to stamp the owner's seal into clay or wax, like the later signet rings. Some of these have been discovered from the northern kingdom, which may provide confirmation of the existence of

biblical characters. One well known seal is marked "Shema, servant of Jeroboam," dating from the reign of Jeroboam II. A signet was found in a private collection in 1993 marked "Abdi, servant of Hoshea," which would date it to the last king of Israel. In addition, recent excavations at Dor have uncovered a seal marked "Yezebel" (Jezebel), although this may not necessarily be Ahab's wife but another woman of that name.

#### *Later Assyrian Records.*

The records of the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II reveal the dying days of the Israelite kingdom. These records confirm the biblical accounts of the book of 2 Kings, which describe the payment of tribute by King Menahem, the usurpation of Hoshea and finally the siege and destruction of Samaria in 722/1 B.C. In each case, the historicity of the biblical account has been vindicated by these contemporary records.

## LESSON EIGHT

### THE ISRAELITE MONARCHY II

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

In addition to the epigraphic evidence noted in the previous lesson, there is also archaeological evidence in existence which confirms the Bible accounts of the northern kingdom. Although this evidence does not confirm specific instances mentioned in the Bible, it does provide a more general confirmation of the biblical account. This is chiefly due to the difficulty of dating non-inscriptional archaeological evidence.

One notable site which has confirmed parts of the Bible is the royal site of Samaria. A great deal of building activity has been uncovered there, which has been dated to the reigns of Omri and Ahab. The site is strong and very well fortified, which is reflected in its ability to withstand several sieges by the Syrians as described in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. These fortifications are built in Phoenician style and probably by Phoenician workmen. This attests to the biblical statements of strong links between Phoenicia (Sidon and Tyre) and Israel at this time (1 Kgs 16:31).

A palace was also uncovered in the city which was richly decorated in Phoenician carved ivories. The use of ivory decoration and furnishings is also mentioned in the Bible (Amos 6:4) and the book of Kings mentions Ahab's "house of ivory" specifically (1 Kgs 22:39). As before, this also demonstrates the accuracy of the biblical account of the strong links with Phoenicia at this time.

Remains of significant military constructions have also been uncovered at Hazor and Megiddo which have been attributed to the reign of Ahab. These support the view of the military strength of the kingdom during this time, as shown in the Bible and in the Kurkh monolith described in the previous lesson. Such construction and importation of craftsmen would only have been possible at a time of great wealth and prosperity, which is exactly the way the Bible describes this period in the northern kingdom.

The remains of the religious site at Tel Dan (Dan) have been uncovered, confirming the Bible's account of the use of this site as a religious center (1 Kgs 12:26-33). In fact, excavations revealed that Dan had been used as a cult center even in the pre-Israelite period, which may explain why Jeroboam selected this site for one of his golden calves.

Thus we can see clearly that there is considerable evidence for the historicity of the biblical account of the northern kingdom. The evidence for the southern kingdom, Judah, is however much more problematical and has come in for considerable attention from those who would decry the biblical account. Next, therefore, we will examine the evidence for the biblical account of the kingdom of Judah.

## THE SCHOLARLY DEBATE ON THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM.

As has already been noted, there is considerable dispute in scholarly circles about the kingdom of Judah and the house of David, specifically about the nature of the kingdom and of Judahite religion in this period.

The “minimalist” school of archaeologists rejects the biblical account altogether as a late and religiously-motivated account and relies exclusively upon their own reinterpretation of the archaeological evidence. Due to the complete destruction of Jerusalem on two occasions (586 B.C. and A.D. 70) and the continuous occupation of the site, remains of the Old Testament temple and palace complex there have never been found. In the absence of concrete archaeological evidence, the minimalists say that we should ignore the biblical account and just concentrate on what we have, which, they say, is very little indeed.

Their opinion is that Judah was little more than a tribal chiefdom and Jerusalem was only a relatively unimportant cult site, competing with the northern sites of Dan and Bethel. Others, however, reject these views and accept at least the general historicity of the books of Kings and Chronicles.

However, as we have already seen with respect to the “house of David,” recently discovered evidence (the Tel Dan inscription) has confirmed the existence of this dynasty and of its rule over the southern kingdom. As we will see, there is both epigraphic and archaeological evidence to support the account given in the Bible, and to reject the views of the minimalists.

## EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE FOR THE KINGS OF JUDAH.

Several pieces of evidence have been uncovered which attest to the existence of the royal house of Judah and individual kings of the dynasty. The appearance of these individuals in the historic record, and the use of the title “king” in several of them, attest to the accuracy of the Bible’s account. These artifacts have, in many cases, come to light relatively recently and are important evidence in refuting the claims of the minimalist school.

One particular piece of evidence attests to the truth of the Bible’s account of the divided kingdom period, whereas most of the evidence for the southern kingdom refers to the later period after the destruction of the northern kingdom in 721 B.C. This is the Tel Dan inscription, which has already been described. This refers to “Ahazyahu son of Yehoram, king of the House of David.” Thus, this inscription refers by name to Ahaziah of Judah, the son of Jehoram (Joram), whose reign is described in 2 Kings 8:25-28; 9:14-29; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9. It also refers to the fact that he was of the “house of David,” attesting to the existence of this dynasty and of David as an historical figure.

An ostrakon has also recently surfaced on the antiquities market, upon which is inscribed a gift of three silver shekels to the "Temple of Yahweh," in the reign of "Ashyahu," king of Judah. "Ashyahu" is probably an alternate spelling of Joash, by a reversal of the position of the "theophoric" (name of God) element, as is seen in 2 Chronicles 21:17, cf. 2 Chronicles 22:1, where "Jehoahaz" and "Ahaziah" are the same person. Thus, this ostrakon not only attests to the existence of Joash as a king of Judah, it also shows that there was a temple of Yahweh in his kingdom - of course, this is exactly what the Bible describes. We thus see confirmed not only the existence of Kings of Judah, but also of the temple cult in their capital city.

Other than these two items, however, the bulk of the evidence which attests to the kingdom of Judah comes from the later period in which the northern kingdom was in its decline or already destroyed. The reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah are especially well attested. However, the existence of evidence from this time strongly argues for the acceptance of the biblical account from the earlier periods also. One of the major reasons why earlier evidence is less prevalent is that it was only in the later years that Judah came into contact with Assyria, a power which kept copious records and which accounts for a considerable portion of our epigraphic evidence.

Another artifact which has recently surfaced on the antiquities market is a bulla, a clay impression of a seal which would have been used to seal a document. The inscription on the bulla reads "Belonging to Ahaz (son of) Yehotam, king of Judah." Thus, this bulla attests to the existence of two kings of Judah, Ahaz and his father Jotham (the biblical spelling). The reverse side of the bulla bears the impression of a fingerprint: it is quite possible that this is the fingerprint of King Ahaz himself.

Ahaz is also mentioned in the annals of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.), who stated that he received tribute from Ahaz of Judah. This is probably the incident referred to in 2 Kings 16:7,8 and Isaiah 7:1-9, in which Ahaz appealed to Assyria to relieve pressure from an attack by Damascus and Israel. The Assyrian records, therefore, attest both to the historicity of Ahaz, as well as the specific incident described in the Bible in which Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser.

The reign of Hezekiah is also represented in Assyrian annals. The annals of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, dating to 701 B.C., record the payment of tribute by Hezekiah and the destruction of the Jewish fortress of Lachish by the Assyrian army. The siege and fall of Lachish is particularly well displayed in the Assyrian annals, being lavishly illustrated by inscriptions and relief carvings. This siege is recorded in the Bible in 2 Kings 18. The annals record that Hezekiah was 'shut up like a bird' in Jerusalem, but it never mentions Jerusalem's fall. The Bible explains why, as the Assyrian army had been destroyed by God.

Shortly after the aforementioned bulla of Ahaz was published, another bulla from the same collection came to light. This bulla shows a winged beetle and sun disc, two popular iconic features from these times, and is inscribed "belonging to Hezekiah, (son

of) Ahaz, king of Judah.” This seal would have been the personal seal of King Hezekiah and is strong evidence of his historicity, despite the lack of an archaeological provenance for the artifact itself.

Also from the time of Hezekiah are the so-called “Lamelek” seals. These are the remains of pottery wine-jars, into which the seal was stamped while the clay was still wet. The majority of them were found at Jerusalem and at Lachish. The inscription, from which the name of the seals comes, reads “belonging to the king,” and is accompanied by a place name. The scholarly consensus is that these seals were brought from royal wineries and represent the collection of supplies ahead of the expected Assyrian attacks at Lachish and Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. These therefore add weight to the already substantial confirmation of the biblical record of these times.

The resurgence of the kingdom of Judah under King Josiah is also reflected by an ostrakon found at Mesad Hashavyahu, a strong point on the Mediterranean coast. This is in Hebrew and uses Jewish names and refers to the Sabbath. It has been dated by stratigraphy and palaeography to the reign of Josiah and its existence at this place shows that Josiah ruled over a greatly expanded territory compared to his immediate predecessors. The fort also has a great deal of Aegean pottery, perhaps indicating that Josiah staffed this fort with Greek mercenary soldiers. The mention of the Sabbath also confirms the existence and the use of the Mosaic Law at this time, which has been questioned by many recent scholars.

Other mentions of the Kingdom of Judah, specifically dating to the time of its destruction, are also in existence but these will be dealt with in the next lesson, dealing with the conquest, exile and restoration periods.

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

Archaeological remains of the southern kingdom are comparatively scarce, as the city of Jerusalem was totally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and the site has been reoccupied and destroyed again many times since then. Nonetheless, some items do remain, some from Jerusalem, but most from the outer areas of the kingdom. These confirm the Bible’s detailed accounts of these times.

One of the most famous finds from the kingdom period in Jerusalem is the water tunnel of Hezekiah. 2 Chronicles 32:3-5, 30 records the construction of this tunnel. The tunnel can now be seen in Jerusalem and it meanders more than 500m from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam. An inscription describing the cutting was found in 1881 by Arab boys bathing and playing in the water just inside the Siloam entrance and now can be seen in the Istanbul museum. Although there have been recent attempts to claim that the inscription (and therefore the tunnel) are in fact Hasmonaean, these attempts have been thoroughly discredited and shown to be ideologically driven.

In other parts of the kingdom, archaeological evidence of the biblical account can be found. 2 Chronicles 26 records a substantial expansion under King Uzziah, who attacked the Philistines and Arabs and built “towers in the wilderness” in the far south. Several fortifications have been discovered in the area of the Negev, to the south of Judah, which date from the Iron Age IIC, the time of Uzziah’s rule. Some were new foundations, while others were refurbishments of older sites. In both cases, they provide proof of the Bible’s account of the resurgence of Judah under Uzziah and of the military expansion which took place in his reign.

In other sites, pagan religious altars have been found which had been deliberately desecrated. These correspond to the accounts of religious revivals under the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah and show the truth of the Bible’s account of the state of Israelite religion at this time.

Thus, we can see that there is indeed abundant evidence to show that the biblical account of the Kingdom of Judah is reliable and historically accurate. There is absolutely no need to accept the destructive theories of the “minimalists”: we can be assured that the biblical picture of society and history in the kingdom of Judah at this time is supportable and confirmed from the archaeological and epigraphic evidence.





## LESSON NINE

### DEFEAT AND EXILE

#### THE EVIDENCE FOR THE END OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM.

Despite their obviously negative effects on the people involved, the destruction of a city or culture almost invariably leaves significant remains. Indeed, “destruction levels” are of great assistance in determining relative chronologies in archaeological investigations.

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and the extensive military campaigns which preceded it, have left considerable archaeological evidence, both in physical remains of the destruction as well as epigraphic and archaeological remains which illustrate the dying days of the kingdom of Judah.

In all these areas the confirmation of the biblical account is striking in the extreme, to the point that very few of even the most radical liberal scholars try to deny the historicity of the Bible in this area.

#### THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

There are several records which attest to the truth of the Bible’s accounts of the reign of Jehoiakim and the brief reign of his son Jehoiachin. These vary from physical remains to Babylonian chronicles, but are united in their confirmation and illustration of the biblical account of the reign.

In Jeremiah 22:13-19 we have Jeremiah’s condemnation of the excesses of Jehoiakim’s reign, especially the construction of an expensive palace with cedar paneling and red paintwork. Archaeological remains of a fortress-palace have been uncovered at Ramat Rahel, just south of Jerusalem, which have been dated to the reign of Jehoiakim. The remains are very highly decorated and feature balustrades from decorated windows (cf. Jer 22:14). Indeed, just as Jeremiah had stated, red paint was still visible on the remains when they were found, making it probable that this was the exact building Jeremiah described in his book.

Jeremiah’s opposition to the ungodly practices of Jehoiakim’s reign are documented throughout his book. Another man who was involved in Jeremiah’s work was the scribe Baruch, son of Neriah (Jer 36:4). A bulla has been uncovered in Jerusalem which reads “belonging to Berekhyahu son of Neriyaahu the scribe” (“Baruch” is simply a shortened form of Berekhyahu, or Berechiah). Thus, we have a confirmation of the existence of this biblical character, which points to the accuracy of the accounts found both in the books of Kings and Chronicles but also to that of Jeremiah.

In the campaign which Nebuchadnezzar waged against Judah after Jehoiakim rebelled, the Bible stated that Judah was attacked not only by the Chaldeans (Babylonians), but also by the Moabites, Ammonites and others (2 Kgs 24:2). Thus, Judah was attacked on all sides. This is reflected in the archaeological record by the destruction of the fortress at Arad in the Negev, which had been among those fortified by Uzziah and refortified in the reign of Josiah. This and the other remote outposts of the Judaeen kingdom would have been overrun at this time, as the neighboring kingdoms of Moab, Ammon and Edom took advantage of Judah's weakness.

The campaign of Nebuchadnezzar is recorded in the Babylonian chronicle, an accurate record kept by the Babylonian court of all the events which took place in the Babylonian kingdom. This record states "on the second day of Addar in his (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar's) seventh year (16 March 597 B.C.) he captured the city of Judah . . . He seized its king and appointed there a king of his own choice." Thus we have confirmation of Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem in 597 and his dethronement of Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim's son) and his replacement by Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:8-17).

The Bible records that Jehoiachin was exiled to Babylon, but at a later date he was provided with a daily allowance from the King of Babylon's table (2 Kgs 25:27-30). These allowances, and the presence of Jehoiachin at court in Babylon, is recorded in cuneiform clay tablets which are Babylonian administrative records. These tablets record an allowance for "Jehoiachin king of the land of Judah, for the five sons of the king of Judah and for eight Judaeans." Thus the Bible's account of Jehoiachin's exile and his presence at the Babylonian court is confirmed by contemporary Babylonian records.

#### THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

The fall and destruction of Jerusalem in the reign of its last king, Zedekiah, is vividly illustrated by the archaeological record. Several ostraka have been found at Lachish and Arad which illustrate the final campaigns and confirm the biblical account of the fall of the Jewish monarchy and the campaigns of 587/6 B.C.

The fort at Arad was rebuilt in Zedekiah's reign. The excavations of this site have revealed letters from this period. These reflect the attacks coming from the surrounding nations at this time. One letter speaks of the garrison commander's concern "lest Edom should come." This attitude of Edom and its rejoicing over Jerusalem's fall is reflected in the book of Obadiah and in Psalm 137:7. It is probable that, given this attitude, the garrison commander was expecting an attack from Edom at this time.

One of the most exciting finds from this period is the "Lachish letters," a collection of twenty-one ostraka which are a correspondence archive between various members of the garrison of Lachish and Jerusalem. They give a vivid picture of the situation in the final stages of Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Judah in 587/6 and of the tensions developing in the Jewish army at that time.

One of the letters (no. 4) refers to a system of fire-signals by which the besieged garrisons communicated. Signals from Azekah and Lachish are mentioned, which confirms the statement of Jeremiah 34:7 that only Lachish and Azekah were holding out in Judah, besides Jerusalem itself. Indeed, the letter states that the writer could no longer see the signals of Azekah, perhaps indicating that the city had already fallen at that time.

Other ostraka refer to the activities of the Jewish army and especially the hope that help would come from Egypt which is often mentioned in the books of Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah. They vividly illustrate the accounts that the Bible gives of these times and strongly support the historicity of its account.

As the Bible records, eventually Jerusalem fell, the walls and the temple were destroyed and Zedekiah was imprisoned. The people, except the very poorest, were sent away into exile and a governor was appointed to rule the land for the King of Babylon. These calamitous events are visible in the archaeological record and show the accuracy of the biblical account. In the city of Jerusalem itself, there are many remains which demonstrate the completeness and intensity of the city's destruction. The "Israelite tower," part of the city's fortification system, may be viewed in the city today. Layers of ash and destruction and the presence of arrowheads, sling stones and spears attest to the violence of the final battle and the total destruction of Jerusalem.

The archaeological and epigraphic evidence provides a vivid confirmation of the biblical account of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. We can see clearly how all but the most radical of liberal scholars are forced to admit that the biblical account of the fall of Judah is accurate in every detail.

After this, the wealthier classes of the Jewish people were carried away into captivity in Babylon, while the poorer classes were allowed to remain in the land under the supervision of a governor. The period of the exile had begun.

#### THE PEOPLE LEFT IN THE LAND.

The Bible states that only the poorest of the people were left in the land after 586 B.C. (2 Kgs 25:12) and this has been confirmed by archaeology, which has shown continued occupation in the exile period, although on a much smaller and more impoverished scale than the population in the later royal period. This, of course, is in close accord with what we would expect from the biblical account.

Gedaliah the son of Ahikam was appointed as governor of the people left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar. However, not long afterward Gedaliah was murdered by Ishmael son of Nethaniah, a member of the royal family, at the instigation of Ba'alish king of Ammon (Jer 40-41).

Bullae and a seal have been uncovered which attest to the historicity of three of the most significant people in this account of the Bible: Gedaliah, Ishmael and Ba'alis. This shows once again that the biblical account is a reliable one.

A seal impression has been discovered which reads "Gedaliah, who is over the house." This is probably referring to the biblical Gedaliah and indicates that prior to his appointment as governor he had been the steward of the king's palace in Jerusalem. This confirms the existence of this individual and helps to strengthen the case for the accuracy of Jeremiah's account.

A clay bulla was also found in a collection which surfaced at an East Jerusalem antiquities dealer in 1975. This bulla refers to Ishmael, the assassin of Gedaliah, and refers also to his royal status. Although the provenance of these artifacts is often unknown, as they appear on the antiquities market, they have been rigorously checked and found to be genuine. However, their value is diminished because they have been removed from their archaeological context, which could have been very informative. Nonetheless they do provide us with a confirmation of the existence of these individuals and therefore of the biblical accounts of them.

A seal which has recently come to light in a private collection confirms the existence of another person in the story of Gedaliah. This seal belongs to Ba'alis, the Ammonite king who was behind the plot to kill Gedaliah (Jer 40:14). The inscription reads "[belonging to] Ba'alis King of the Sons of Ammon" (exactly the same phrase used to describe him in Jeremiah's account). Ba'alis is also known from a seal impression excavated at Tel el-'Umeiri in Jordan, which reads "[belonging to] Milcom, servant of Ba'-alis." Thus, this Ammonite king mentioned briefly in the Bible is well known from the archaeological record.

Thus, we see that the major players in the story of Gedaliah are all known from archaeological investigation. Clearly, the historicity of Jeremiah's account cannot be seriously called into question and indeed even the most liberal and radical scholars attempt to decry the biblical account of this era.

## THE PEOPLE IN EXILE.

While the poorest of the people were left in the land under the supervision of Gedaliah, the wealthier members of society were taken into exile in Babylon, a common practice in ancient times. Others, who had fled from the Babylonians, went into Egypt. While we cannot reasonably expect that much physical evidence of the exiles will have survived, there is considerable evidence of the presence of Jews in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, which most probably originated at this time.

Although the evidence does not date from the actual time of the exile, there is evidence which shows the presence of an active Jewish community in Mesopotamia in the Persian period (539-330 B.C.). This community most probably originated in the

deportation of the Jews to this area by the Babylonians. The mercantile center of Nippur flourished in the fifth century, in the Persian period, and numerous business documents have been uncovered from this site. Many of these documents contain Jewish names such as Benjamin, Gedaliah and Hananiah, showing that there was an active community of Jewish merchants there at this time.

The Jews who moved to Egypt also seem to have established a thriving community there. At Elephantine (modern Aswan) in southern Egypt a community built their own temple before the arrival of the Persians in 525 B.C. Their existence is known from a large collection of papyri which deal with their dealings among themselves and with the local Egyptians. In addition, after the restoration they communicated with the Jews who had returned to Judah and with other Persian officials. The temple was eventually destroyed by the local Egyptians in 407 B.C., but the correspondence shows the existence of a substantial Jewish community at this time in Egypt. This community very possibly originated in the Jews who fled to Egypt in the time of Jeremiah (Jer 42-44).



## LESSON TEN

### THE SECOND COMMONWEALTH

#### THE CAREER OF DANIEL.

The Bible deals at some length with the career of Daniel, a Jewish exile who had been taken to Babylon in 606 B.C. and who remained active throughout the Babylonian period and into the later Persian period. Many individuals and events described in the book of Daniel have been questioned by liberal scholars, who claim that the book originates in the intertestamental period and is not historically reliable.

However, on investigation many of the things which have been called into question turn out to be confirmed by Babylonian and Persian historical accounts. This strengthens the argument that the book of Daniel dates from a considerably earlier period than the liberal scholars claim.

One account in the book which has been doubted is Daniel's description of Nebuchadnezzar's madness for 7 years (Dan 4), because this is not mentioned in any contemporary Babylonian account. However, there are no records in the Babylonian archives for the last two-thirds of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. While this does not prove the biblical account, it at least allows a time-frame in which it might have occurred. Indeed, the absence of records might well reflect an interim government during the indisposition of the king, which is something that the interim government would have been anxious to downplay.

Similarly, the mention of Belshazzar as Babylon's last king has been doubted due to the Greek historians' description of Nabonidus as the last king of Babylon. In the nineteenth century Belshazzar was seen as a fiction by liberal scholars for this very reason. However, this century important Persian and Babylonian records have been uncovered, the "Nabonidus Chronicle," the "Nabonidus Verse Chronicle" and the "Cyrus Cylinder," all of which contain descriptions of the fall of Babylon. These accounts state that Nabonidus' eldest son was named Bel-shar-usur (i.e. Belshazzar), and that Nabonidus entrusted the army and the kingship to him and retired to Teima in Arabia for religious reasons in 553 B.C. This is presumably why Belshazzar made Daniel "third ruler" in the kingdom (Dan 5:7) - this was the highest position which Belshazzar could offer, as Nabonidus still technically outranked Belshazzar. The liberal attacks on the historicity of Belshazzar have thus been utterly discredited.

The existence of the character of Darius the Mede too has been doubted, due to the fact that no such individual is mentioned by any of our sources for this period other than the book of Daniel. However, the same sources as mentioned above state that the city of Babylon fell in 539 B.C. to Gobyras, the Median governor of Gutium. This Gobyras was a subordinate of Cyrus, the king of Persia (Dan 1:21; 6:28; 10:1). It has been

suggested that Darius is in fact to be equated with Gobyras. While this cannot be proven, it is still a reasonable hypothesis and one which does no violence to the biblical account.

Thus we see that the characters described in the book of Daniel can be shown to have been historical figures, or at least that none of them can be described as unhistorical. The attacks of liberal scholars on the book of Daniel do not need to be heeded, as the dilemmas they pose are all able to be explained in a way that does not require the rejection of the biblical account.

The Nabonidus Chronicle and the Cyrus Cylinder both describe how Babylon fell to the forces of Cyrus, the king of Persia. As will be seen, Cyrus ruled in a very different way to the autocratic rule of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. This rule resulted in the commencement of the next period of Jewish history - the second commonwealth, or the restoration period.

## THE RETURN TO JUDAH.

The Bible records that, after the fall of the Babylonian empire to the Persians, the Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland (2 Chron 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1-4), which they did in three groups, under Zerubbabel (536 B.C.), Ezra (456 B.C.) and Nehemiah (445 B.C.). Initially, the city and the temple were restored and only later were the walls of the city restored and Jerusalem made once again a powerful and prosperous regional center.

This decree is also recorded on the "Cyrus Cylinder," a clay cylinder inscribed with cuneiform writing. This inscription shows that Cyrus made many similar decrees to that recorded in the Bible and allowed many different national groups whom the Babylonians had deported to return to their homes. Thus, Cyrus appears to have allowed this as a policy applied to all deported races, not just the Jews. Religious self-determination and allowing the existence of national groups in their traditional homelands was a Persian policy in sharp contrast to that of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Nonetheless, the Cyrus Cylinder inscription shows the accuracy of the Bible's account of this decree and the historicity of the biblical account of the Jews' return.

Acting on this decree, the Bible records that a group of exiles under the supervision of Sheshbazzar (probably to be equated with Zerubbabel) began the journey home in 536 B.C. Eventually they arrived and began to restore the city and the temple, although the city walls were not refortified. After many false starts, due to the opposition of surrounding governors who were not anxious to see Judah restored, the temple was finally completed in 516 B.C.

Unfortunately there are very few archaeological remains from this period and none at all of the temple. This is because of the Romans' later total destruction of the site in A.D. 70 and the intervening construction in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Nonetheless,



we are able to learn from the data available that Jerusalem certainly was reoccupied at this time and that parts of the rural areas of Judah were also repopulated.

## THE RECONSTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM'S WALLS.

After the reinhabitation of the city and the reconstruction of the temple, Judah was still basically defenseless without its system of fortifications. Under the supervision of Nehemiah, however, the wall of the city was rebuilt and Judah was raised once again to the level of other surrounding Persian provinces, such as Ammon and Samaria. Naturally, however, the rulers of those areas were reluctant to see Judah returned to a position of power and so opposed the reconstructions, as the Bible records.

Archaeological investigation has confirmed the reconstruction of the city in this period, confirming the Bible's account of Nehemiah's activities. These investigations have revealed that the walls were set up substantially on the existing foundations, which would account for the speed of their reconstruction as recorded in the Bible (Neh 6:15). For the most part, the construction work would have involved the repair of gates and doors and the restorations of the crennelations and fortification towers on the wall. Part of the wall reconstructed has been identified in the modern city of Jerusalem – the so-called "broad wall" which is mentioned in Nehemiah 3:8 and 12:38.

They have also showed that the area of the city was somewhat reduced from the size it had been at the end of the royal period, which is what we would have expected given that the city was now inhabited by returned exiles and a large number of people had remained in Babylon and Persia instead of returning to Judah. Indeed, the Bible records the paucity of people within the city itself at this time and of attempts to repopulate it (Neh 11:1).

In addition, the existence of individuals mentioned in the account of Nehemiah in the Bible has been confirmed, once again confirming the historicity of the biblical account.

One of the foremost of Nehemiah's enemies was Sanballat the Horonite. Sanballat in the Bible seems to be involved with the Samaritan army (Neh 4:2) and in a position of some authority. This is confirmed and explained by one of the Elephantine papyri from Egypt referred to in the previous lesson. When seeking permission to rebuild their destroyed temple, the Jewish community at Elephantine wrote to the high priest in Jerusalem, as well as other important Persian officials. Two of these were "the sons of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria." As this papyrus was written in 407 B.C., long after the events of the book of Nehemiah, it would indicate that Sanballat was now too old to fulfil his functions as governor. Nonetheless, this papyrus tells us that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria and confirms his existence as an historical individual. In addition, another later Sanballat descended from this one (possibly his grandson) is known from the Samaritan ed-Daliyeh papyri, dating from the end of the Persian period. They relate a Samaritan revolt against Alexander the Great, who had just conquered the area.

Another of Nehemiah's enemies was Tobiah the Ammonite. Although no evidence of this specific Tobiah has been found, there is considerable evidence of the existence of the powerful Tobiad family in the Transjordan area. In particular, the impressive palace complex of Araq al-Amir in modern Jordan belonged to this family. Although most of the evidence for the Tobiads, and the palace itself, dates from the Hellenistic period (i.e. the intertestamental period), it would seem likely that the Tobiah mentioned in the Bible was an early member of this powerful Jewish-Ammonite family. Thus, the existence of the Tobiad family in Transjordan (the area of Ammon) helps to confirm the historicity of the Tobiah the Ammonite mentioned in the Bible.

The existence of this volume of evidence has meant that few but the most radical and liberal scholars have seriously questioned the historicity of the Bible's account of the early second commonwealth period (i.e the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). The city as reconstituted in this period was substantially the same as the one which Christ knew more than 400 years later.

## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD.

The period between the Old Testament and the New Testament (c. 400 - 6 B.C.) is known as the intertestamental period. No biblical narratives cover this time and so the major objective of this course, the confirmation of the biblical text from historical and archaeological evidence, does not apply. However, the history of this time is known from the works of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and the apocryphal books of the Maccabees, as well as the works of Greek and Latin historians and geographers.

In this period, many of the conditions which pertained at the time of Christ came about and by understanding these we can see that the situation portrayed in the New Testament accounts is historically accurate in every respect. These developments are very important in our understanding of the political, social and religious landscape in the time of Jesus, which had undergone a number of important changes since the conclusion of the writing of the Old Testament. In particular, the arrival of the Jewish religious sects, the synagogues, and the rise in the importance of Greek culture and political institutions (Hellenism) came to be of great significance in New Testament times.

Numerous historical accounts, confirmed by archaeological investigations, detail the history of the Jews in this time. The Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great in 336 B.C., whereupon the Jews passed under the domination of first the Ptolemies and then the Seleucids, the successors of Alexander. In the second century B.C., the repressive religious measures of the Seleucids caused the Jews to revolt, establishing the independent Hasmonean (Maccabean) dynasty. Finally, in 63 B.C., the Roman general Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus brought the Jews under the domination of Rome, although until A.D. 6 they remained nominally independent under first the Hasmoneans and then (after 37 B.C.) the Herodians. This was the political situation (that of a so-called "Roman client kingdom") which existed in the time of Christ.

Another situation which is important to the New Testament account and which began in the intertestamental period is the establishment of the religious sects of Judaism. Josephus records four major sects in the New Testament period: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. Of these, the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes originated in the Hasmonean period, while the Zealots originated in the early Roman period after A.D. 6. In many cases, they began as religious and social reactions to the introduction of Hellenistic and Roman political and religious institutions. The Jews always showed a strong reaction to the imposition of foreign ways and these religious sects were an important manifestation of this tendency.

Another feature which originated in this time was the synagogue, which originated among the Jews of the dispersion. These synagogues have been found in many of the cities of the Roman Empire and the Near East and were of great significance during the spread of Christianity during the first century A.D. Paul, for example, habitually started his evangelistic work in the synagogue and it is likely that other missionaries of Jewish background taught in the same way.

During this time, then, many of the situations arose which would come to be of great significance during the New Testament period. An understanding of the intertestamental period is of great help in appreciating many of the background details in the study of the New Testament period. This study, then, will commence with our next lesson.



## LESSON ELEVEN

### JESUS' LIFE AND TIMES

#### INTRODUCTION.

Having left the Old Testament period, the Bible narrative now jumps forward some 400 years to the birth narrative of Christ, found in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2, set in around 6 B.C., or no later than 4 B.C.

In the New Testament period we are dealing with a different set of problems than with the Old Testament. In this period, covering only about 100 years, all the major people and places mentioned in the biblical account, such as Roman emperors, Jewish kings and major cities are known from a vast storehouse of inscriptions and literary references, so that no one seriously doubts their existence. The basic historical background of the New Testament can be assumed as correct, and is generally acknowledged as such.

In this part of the course, then, we will be looking specifically at problematic texts and historical confirmation of incidental detail, which will confirm the detailed historicity of the New Testament text.

#### THE BIRTH NARRATIVES.

The first area that warrants attention is the account of the birth of Christ. Several have called this account into question, as the Bible requires that the birth of Jesus take place when King Herod was still living (Mt 2:1, i.e. before 4 B.C.). It also associates this event with a general census taken by the governor of Syria, Quirinius (Cyrenius KJV) (Lk 2:2). Josephus records such a census as taking place in A.D. 6. Many, therefore, have claimed that this is a contradiction in the text.

Quirinius' career can be constructed from references in Latin writers. He held a command against the Homonaedenses, a Cilician tribe, sometime before 6 B.C., then became the proconsul of Asia in 3 B.C. and the governor of Syria in A.D. 6. In this later post he ordered the census of A.D. 6.

However, it is likely that Quirinius would have held some sort of extraordinary command against the Homonaedenses and this may be the "governorship" to which Luke refers. He could have thus ordered a census then, and again in A.D. 6 when legate of Syria. This is perhaps confirmed by a statement of Tertullian, who said that Christ was born after a census ordered by Sentius Saturninus, who governed Syria from 9-6 B.C. Quirinius would then have been associated with Saturninus in the giving of this order.

Another confirmation could come from inscriptions in Rome (*CIL* III. 6687 and XIV. 3613) which refer to Quirinius ordering a census in Apamea in Syria, possibly in 10-6 B.C. and to an unnamed person (probably Quirinius) who commanded against the Homonadenses and was rewarded by being given the command of Syria “again,” implying that Quirinius governed Syria twice. There is thus no reason to suppose that Luke’s account is in error.

In Egypt there is evidence of a census every 14 years, which may parallel the one at the time of Christ’s birth. Such a census would have taken place in 8 B.C. Such papyri also refer to the enrolment requiring all those being enrolled to return to their native towns (*BM* 904; *P.Oxy* 255), which parallels the statement of Luke 2:3,4.

#### CHRIST’S GALILEAN MINISTRY.

Little is recorded concerning Christ’s early years, apart from the fact that he lived in Nazareth, a provincial town in Galilee. When his ministry began approximately A.D. 30 (Lk 3:1,2,23), however, we begin to notice some interesting correlations between the biblical account and the picture we derive from archaeological investigations of life in Roman Galilee.

Galilee was a provincial area, with little by way of major events or personalities. As a result, there are no inscriptions and such information which helps us to illuminate the Bible account. However, several aspects of life in the territory as described in the Gospel accounts are confirmed by archaeological discoveries in the area.

One notable area is in the biblical description of the fishing industry in Galilee. This is not present in earlier times, nor has it been since up until this century, yet the Gospels describe Galilee as a busy and vital area with a strong fishing industry. The vitality of society in this area at this time is illustrated by investigations of towns described in the Gospels such as Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. These towns show a busy industry in this area, with considerable populations. This shows the truth of the biblical description of Galilean society in the first century A.D.

One especially interesting artifact which has been discovered by the Sea of Galilee is the remains of a first century A.D. fishing boat. This ship, the so-called “Jesus Boat” is now on display in a specially constructed facility near to Tiberias in Israel. It is probably very similar to the types of small fishing vessels described in the Gospel accounts and provides further confirmation of the accuracy of these accounts in their description of Galilee in the time of Christ.

Further along the shore of the Sea of Galilee lie the remains of Capernaum, a town which is mentioned frequently in the accounts of Jesus’ Galilean ministry. In this town are the remains of a fourth century A.D. synagogue, one of the earliest synagogues which has been found. This building is built upon the foundations of an earlier struc-

ture, which has been dated from the first century A.D. It is thus most probably the synagogue in which Jesus taught when he was in Capernaum.

Not far from this site are the remains of a small house of the first century A.D. This has been traditionally venerated as the "House of Peter." While there is no evidence that this is in fact the case, we do know that Peter lived in Capernaum. In addition, the house is of the right date and shows evidence of having been converted into a shrine form a very early period, which might indicate it was considered as the residence of someone especially significant at an early date. Even if it is not Peter's house, it shows us what his house would have been like.

Many other locations mentioned in the Gospel accounts can be located today and are mentioned in contemporary accounts, such as Nazareth, Cana, Magdala and others. While none of these show evidence to corroborate the biblical account, the very fact that they can be located and shown to have existed show that the Bible's description of Jesus' Galilean ministry is reliable and historically accurate.

In addition to these, the modern visitor to the Bible lands will be shown numerous sites with alleged associations with the life of Christ. These, however, are almost all spurious and most date from Crusader times (A.D. 1096-1291). The presence of these spurious sites should nonetheless not deflect our attention from the fact that many of the sites associated with the life of Christ *can* in fact be corroborated.

## JERUSALEM IN THE TIME OF CHRIST.

Perhaps more than any other site, the city of Jerusalem is replete with sites and settings which are mentioned in the New Testament accounts of Christ's life. Although, as with many other areas, a lot of these sites are spurious, there are nonetheless numerous authentic places to be seen in Jerusalem which are found in the Gospels. Other discoveries in the region confirm or illuminate statements made in the Gospel accounts.

There are numerous places in and around Jerusalem which can be identified today which are mentioned in the Gospels, showing that these accounts were clearly written by eyewitnesses or those very close to the events they describe.

### *The Pool of Bethesda.*

John 5:1-15 describes a miracle performed by Christ at a pool called Bethesda, near the "Sheep Gate" in Jerusalem. The "Copper Scroll" found at Qumran with the Dead Sea Scrolls, and written between A.D. 25-68, describes many areas in Jerusalem and speaks of a reservoir at "Beth Eshdathayin." Archaeologists have excavated the remains of twin pools from this period near the North wall of the temple mount. These are notable for the presence of many column drums and

pedestals, which probably correspond to the five porches (porticoes) mentioned by John (Jn 5:2).

#### *The Pool of Siloam.*

John 9:7 describes another miracle which took place at the pool of Siloam. This site is well known and was built by King Hezekiah as an outlet for his water tunnel (2 Kgs 20:20). The pool, although reduced in size, can still be viewed in the city today.

#### *Pilate's Judgement Pavement.*

When Jesus was being tried, the Bible records that he was brought to a pavement at Pilate's residence (Jn 19:13). Pilate would have resided in the palace of Herod when he was in Jerusalem and in the excavations of this site a large elevated pavement was found. This must have been the pavement upon which Christ was tried. The pavement is overlooked by a raised platform, called a *bema*, upon which the Prefect would have sat. This platform is also mentioned in the Bible (Mt 27:19). Thus, it would seem that the very site of Christ's trial and condemnation has been identified.

Many other sites other than these are claimed in Jerusalem, but in many cases there is no archaeological evidence that these sites are authentic. However, these few show that the accounts of the Gospels are dealing with real places and events, not with fictitious stories.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONFIRMATION OF THE CRUCIFIXION AND BURIAL.

Archaeological evidence has also come to light in the area around Jerusalem which confirms the accuracy of the biblical description of the crucifixion and burial of Christ. These demonstrate the accuracy of the Gospel accounts, raising the probability that they are accounts close in time and place to the events they describe.

In 1968 an ossuary (bone container) was discovered near Jerusalem which contained the bones of a man named "Yehohanan" (John). When the bones were examined, it was found that Yehohanan had been crucified, as his ankle was transfixated by an iron spike, to which a fragment of wood was still attached. This gives a clear confirmation of the manner of execution used by the Romans and confirms the biblical account of Christ's crucifixion.

In addition, the proper burial which Yehohanan received indicates the accuracy of the Bible's statement concerning the claiming of Jesus' body by Joseph of Arimathea (Mt 27:58). Previously, it had been thought that the Romans always left the bodies on the cross to rot, and so the proper burial of Jesus was seen as an exception, or even as an anomaly. Clearly, however, this is not the case.



Tombs of the type described as the burial place of Jesus have been found in the area around Jerusalem. Sixty-one tombs of the rolling-door type described in the Gospels have been identified in Israel and Jordan from the Roman period.

Thus, we can see that the Gospel accounts present a picture of the crucifixion and burial of Christ which is in accordance with archaeological evidence of first century practices.

#### INSCRIPTIONAL EVIDENCE FOR THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS.

In addition to these evidences, there is also some inscriptional evidence which helps confirm the accuracy of the Gospel accounts. These inscriptions confirm accounts of individuals, and in one case, of one of Christ's teachings.

##### *The Corban Vow.*

Jesus described an amount of money dedicated to God as "corban" (Mk 7:11). Two inscriptions have been found in the Jerusalem area which use this expression, one of which was on an ossuary and the other on the leg of a stone vessel. In both cases, the word was used in a context which indicates it means something set apart or dedicated to God. This is the sense in which Christ used the word and these discoveries provide evidence of Mark's account.

##### *The Caiaphas Ossuary.*

In 1990 on the Mount of Olives, a first century burial cave was discovered which contained a number of limestone ossuaries. One of them, a particularly ornate one, was marked "Caiaphas" and "Joseph, son of Caiaphas," and contained the bones of several individuals, including a man of about 60 years of age. These then in all probability are the bones of the high priest Caiaphas (Jn 11:49-53; 18:14; Mt 26:57-68). Thus, we have a clear confirmation of the existence of this individual, who is also mentioned by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

##### *The Pontius Pilate Inscription.*

Another important individual mentioned in the accounts of Jesus' trial and crucifixion is the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate has long been known from the historians Josephus and the Roman Cornelius Tacitus. However, an inscription was discovered in 1961 at Caesarea which mentions Pilate and identifies him as "Pontius Pilatus, prefect of the Jews."

We can thus see clearly that the Gospel accounts are an accurate record of the people, places and events with which they deal. It is clear that they are dependable records and we can therefore rely upon them in their account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.



## LESSON TWELVE

### THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY - I

#### THE EARLY SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY.

The earliest part of the book of Acts, describing the activities of Peter, Jon and Philip and the conversion of Saul, has little or no archaeological confirmation, as these events describe people in the lower orders of Roman society, who leave little record of themselves in the form of inscriptions or literary records.

However, there are some instances which allow us to gain a greater insight into statements of Scripture which have been doubted or misinterpreted. In all these instances, the account given by Scripture is shown to be correct, or at least defensible from the existing archaeological evidence.

The temple of God in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. However, visitors to Jerusalem today can appreciate the view over the site, just as is described in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. The great blocks from which the temple was made can still be seen in the Herodian retaining walls surrounding the mount, such as the Western Wall. In addition, in excavations on the southern side of the mount stone steps have been uncovered which were one of the main approaches to the temple in the time of Christ and are also very possibly the scene of the events described in Acts 2. These steps would probably have been used by worshipers approaching the temple.

Those who claim that baptism is by sprinkling or pouring rather than by immersion have often claimed that on the Day of Pentecost, when 3000 were baptized in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41), there would not have been enough water present in the area to immerse such a number of people and thus the baptism on that day must have been by sprinkling or pouring.

However, recent discoveries south of the temple mount have shown that ritual immersion was a common Jewish practice and the temple was surrounded by small ritual baths (*miqveh*, pl. *miqva'ot*). This is confirmed by discoveries at Masada and literary evidence from Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls) and the Talmud. These *miqva'ot* would have been more than sufficient to baptize such a number of people by immersion.

The description of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch also accords with other evidence in our possession. The account mentions that he was a servant of Queen Candace (Acts 8:27). Roman records speak of a Queen Candace living at Meroe in the modern Sudan. The Romans campaigned against her in c. 25 B.C., as is recorded by the geographer Strabo and by other contemporary records. The Queen Candace of the Bible could be this same woman, or (as is perhaps more likely) a descendant of hers.

In either case, the Roman records confirm that this was a Nubian/Ethiopian royal name from this period and that the Acts account is speaking of a real person.

The account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus also has parallels with the available evidence, especially concerning the layout of the city of Damascus. The Bible records that he was in a house on the “street called Straight” (Acts 9:11). This street, the *Cardo Maximus* (main road) of Damascus, can still be seen in the city today. Thus, we can see that the biblical account can be relied upon right down to street addresses! It is clear from this kind of accuracy that the book of Acts is not a fictitious account, but a factual record of actual events and people.

## THE JOURNEYS OF PAUL.

During his missionary journeys, Paul was often in contact with Roman governors and various other dignitaries. These people are often recorded in inscriptions from the period and in the works of Roman historians. In many cases the individuals are only mentioned in passing in the biblical text, which again shows the extraordinary accuracy and reliability of the biblical account. These references then provide clear confirmation of the historicity of the book of Acts.

Major characters such as Herod Agrippa I and II, Gamaliel and the Roman Emperors Claudius and Nero are well known from numerous literary and epigraphic remains. Not even the most destructive of critics would attempt to deny the Bible’s accuracy in these areas. In all cases, the account of these events given in the New Testament is shown to be accurate. Other references to more obscure characters will be given later in this study.

Despite the lack of literary references to them, the locations of many of the cities visited by Paul have been found by means of inscriptions. While the locations of important cities such as Athens and Corinth have always been known, both by physical remains and by literary references, smaller locations unknown in the literary record have been uncovered by epigraphical evidence. Sites such as Lystra and Derbe have now been located by this means and have been shown to have existed in the same areas Luke described. This shows clearly that Luke is entirely accurate in his geographical knowledge of Asia Minor and other territories he describes.

The accuracy of Luke’s description of the various Roman officials encountered by Paul has often been remarked upon. For example, in Acts 17:8 Luke describes the rulers of Thessalonica as *politarchs*, a technical term for a governor of a Roman colony in the Greek-speaking East. Although this term is not found in the literary sources describing Thessalonica, it has been found in an inscription discovered in Thessalonica itself. Thus, this inscription shows that Luke has correctly recorded the political title of the rulers of Thessalonica.

When Paul came to Athens, he based his sermon there on an altar he had seen there inscribed “to the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). Classical authors make reference to just such altars at Athens (Pausanias V. 14. 8; Philostratus *De Vit. Ap.* IV. 3), confirming Luke’s statement. In addition, the excavators of Pergamos in modern Turkey discovered an altar upon which was an inscriptions translated (with reconstructions) as “to the unknown gods.” Thus we see that a very incidental remark in Luke’s account is shown to be accurate and that altars of this type are well attested in the Roman world.

The Areopagus, or Mars’ Hill, where Paul appeared before the Athenians, has been known since antiquity. The visitor today may thus see where Paul delivered his famous sermon. There is, however, some dispute as to whether Paul would have delivered his sermon on the *hill* of the Areopagus, or before the *council* of the Areopagus, which in Paul’s day met in one of the stoas in the Agora. In either case, however, the site of the sermon is known.

The excavations of Corinth, Paul’s next stop after Athens, have also revealed many confirmations of Paul’s activity there. The *bema*, or judgement tribunal before which Paul appeared to the Roman governor Gallio has been excavated and positively identified (Acts 18:12). The structure was built in A.D. 50, so would only have been a few years old when Paul appeared there. Again, we can see the close detail and accuracy of the geographical descriptions given by Luke.

The Roman governor Gallio is also well known both from literary references and from inscriptions. The historian Dio Cassius states that he was a brother of the Stoic philosopher Seneca (LXI. 35), while an inscription mentions that he was a friend of the Emperor Claudius and that he was proconsul of Achaia in A.D. 52. This date has been extremely valuable in reconstructing a chronology of the book of Acts and shows that Luke was describing the acts of real individuals, not fictitious characters.

While in Corinth, the Bible states that Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, Jews who had been expelled from Rome by Claudius (Acts 18:2). This expulsion is known from the account of the Roman biographer Suetonius, who states that the emperor expelled the Jews because they were making constant insurrection at the instigation of one Chrestus (Suetonius *Div. Claud.* 25. 4). It is possible that this is a garbled reference to the Jewish resistance to the introduction of Christianity at Rome, with Chrestus actually being a reference to Christ (*Christus* in Latin). The disruption and the contention between Jew and Gentile is certainly readily discernible from the book of Romans and this may reflect the same atmosphere as caused Claudius to expel the Jews from Rome. Indeed, it is likely that the Jewish Christians were expelled at the same time, which would account for the tensions and the strong Gentile presence in the church at Rome, as reflected in the book of Romans.

Writing from Corinth, Paul also sent greetings from “Erastus the chamberlain of the city” (Rom 16:23). This Erastus seems to have been a high official of the city who had been converted to Christianity. The very same man appears to be commemorated in an

inscription from Corinth. This text reads ERASTVS PRO AED. S. P. STRAVIT, which translates as “Erastus, for the office of Aedile, laid (this pavement) at his own expense.”

The Roman office of Aedile is very likely the equivalent of our term “treasurer,” translated in the KJV as “Chamberlain” (Greek *oikonomos*). This then provides a clear and startling confirmation of the existence of an individual only mentioned in passing in one of Paul’s letters.

In Ephesus, Luke refers to the *Asiarchs* as important rulers of the city and surrounding area (Acts 19:31). This office is referred to by the Greek geographer Strabo and is also known from inscriptions at more than forty different sites throughout the Roman province of Asia. Thus we have a confirmation that Luke used the correct terms to describe these officials, which strengthens the argument for the historical reliability of the book of Acts.

After returning from Greece and Asia to Jerusalem, the Bible records that Paul was arrested and sent to Caesarea and then Rome. Both the governors referred to in this account, Felix and Festus, are known from the accounts of Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus. In Rome, although there is no specific archaeological evidence of Paul’s presence, Paul would have seen the residence of the Caesars as well as many of the other sites of the imperial city. Indeed, the Bible tells us that there were Christians in the household of Caesar itself (Phil 4:22).

While in Rome, Paul met and converted the runaway slave Onesimus and sent him home to Colosse and his master Philemon (Phile 1-25). An inscription dedicated by a freed slave at Laodicea (close to Colosse) mentions his former master, Marcus Sestius Philemon. Although we have no proof that this is the Philemon of the Bible, the coincidence of the name from this area and pertaining to the freeing of a slave is a fascinating one.

Thus, we can see that Luke’s description of the missionary journeys of Paul are replete with historical facts that have been confirmed in detail by literary and epigraphical sources. This demonstrates to us the accuracy of Luke’s account and strengthens our trust in the New Testament. We can be sure that these accounts are not stories made up many years after the event, but real, historically verifiable accounts written close in time to the events by near witnesses.

## THE END OF THE JEWISH SYSTEM.

Although the actual events are not described in the biblical text, Jesus referred to the coming destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem by the Romans (Mt 23:36; 24:1-35). In addition, the book of Hebrews is set against the rising tension immediately before the destruction of A.D. 70.

The Jewish War of A.D. 66-74, including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, is well known from the account given by Josephus in his *Bellum Iudaicum* (Jewish War). In

Addition, other historians such as Tacitus and Suetonius, as well as Christian writers such as Eusebius, preserve accounts of the war which have allowed historians to reconstruct the course of events in some detail.

Graphic physical evidence of these events is also readily at hand in Jerusalem and Masada, as well as other sites in Judaea, Samaria and Galilee. Evidence of the Roman destruction is visible everywhere, especially in the area around the temple mount. Areas such as the “Burnt House” in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem preserve graphic evidence of the battle and devastation it caused. In addition, Masada, the site of the final Jewish resistance, has been excavated and preserved. In all this, the destruction of the Jewish system spoken of in the Bible is confirmed and graphically illustrated.

In many respects, then, we see that the New Testament accounts of the spread of Christianity have been confirmed by the study of archaeology and epigraphy in the Bible lands and in the Mediterranean basin generally. In the next lesson, we will further study the evidence for the spread of Christianity from the Late Apostolic period, as well as the archaeological evidence which helps in our reconstruction of the biblical text.





## LESSON THIRTEEN

### THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY - II

#### CHRISTIANITY AT THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

The book of Revelation describes the situation late in the first century in the Roman province of Asia. Although many have argued for an earlier date based on internal and interpretational criteria, these at best are dangerous methods of dating. On the whole, the preponderance of external evidence points to a date in the 90s A.D.

The cities mentioned in the text - the "Seven churches of Asia" - are all well known from archaeological investigations. All of the sites of the seven churches have been located and are known with certainty, although not all of them have been fully investigated and excavated. Although there are no *specific* confirmations of persons etc. described in the book of revelation, this should come as no surprise seeing there are no major political figures or events described in the book. Nonetheless, the accuracy of the names of the cities and communities shows that the writer of the book was familiar with the region and that the book was written close in time to the situation it describes.

Although the book is written in extremely symbolic language, we should recognize that it is intended to deal with the situation in Asia Minor at the end of the first century A.D. (Rev 1:1). In many of the symbols and signs described in the book, we can discern events and descriptions of the Roman state at the end of the first century A.D.

The beasts of Revelation 13 probably reflect the beginnings of emperor worship. In this account, we see that anyone who did not worship the beast did not receive the 'mark', and would not be able to buy or sell (Rev 13:17). From later persecutions of Roman Emperors, we know that it was customary to give those who worshiped the Emperor a *pinakion*, or ticket. These have been found from the reign of the third century Emperor Decius, but it is likely that the situation in Revelation 13 reflects the same practice in an earlier time.

The fact that the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) *did* require such worship is stated by the third century church historian Eusebius (*HE* III. 17-20). It is also strongly implied by the dictatorial and megalomaniacal behavior recorded by the Roman biographer Suetonius (*Domitian* 13), which refers to his desire to be addressed as "Lord and God." It is thus quite probable that the account of Revelation 13 directly refers to a policy of Domitian to require worship and to persecute those Christians who refused to offer it.

Thus we can see that the description of John in the book of Revelation accurately records the political and religious situation in the Roman province of Asia at the end of the first century A.D. Although the text of the book is extremely symbolic, we can still see it fits clearly into a real context and is historically accurate.

## PAGAN LITERARY REFERENCES TO CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

There are also several literary references to Christianity in the first and early second century A.D. These come from pagan authors and give us an insight into the world of Christians at this time, from a non-Christian standpoint.

These references come from the historian Tacitus and the Roman official Pliny the Younger. In addition, there are important references by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Generally, these statements tell us of Roman imperial policy toward the Christians, but they also give us some information about the church at this time.

### *Flavius Josephus.*

Josephus was a Jew who became a protege of the Emperor Vespasian. He wrote an account of Jewish History (the *Antiquities of the Jews*) and an account of the Jewish-Roman war of A.D. 66-74 (the *Wars of the Jews*). In the famous *testimonium Flavianum* (AJ XVIII. 3. 3), Josephus refers to Christ, His miracles and His Messiahship. He also states that “the tribe of Christians, so named from him, is not extinct at this day.” Thus, he attests both to the life of Christ and to the early existence of the Christian community in the first century A.D. Although there is evidence that this passage has been tampered with in some way by later “Christian” sources, there is little doubt that there was originally a passage here which at least made some reference to the existence of Jesus Christ and the Christian church at this time.

### *Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus.*

As already noted, the Roman biographer Suetonius referred to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome at the instigation of one “Chrestus” (*Div. Claud.* 25. 4). It is quite possible that this is a garbled reference to Christ and the insurrections were the Jewish-Christian controversies frequently alluded to in the book of Romans. Although this cannot be proved, it is likely that this too is an early literary reference to the existence of an early Christian community in Rome.

### *Publius Cornelius Tacitus.*

The existence of a strong Christian community at Rome by the time of Nero (A.D. 54-68) is certainly attested in the works of the historian Tacitus. In his *Annales*, Tacitus refers to the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Nero (*Ann.* XV. 44). Thus, he also describes some of the Christians’ practices (or at least Roman perceptions of them) and Nero’s persecution. Interestingly, he also seems to indicate that the persecution of Nero was confined to the city of Rome itself.

### *Gaius Plinius Secundus.*

Pliny the Younger was a Roman writer who was involved in Roman provincial administration. He wrote many letters, which were preserved. While governor of Bithynia in A.D. 111-12, Pliny encountered Christians who refused to burn incense to the Emperor. He asked advice of the Emperor Trajan in a famous letter (*Ep. X. 96*). In this letter he describes the early Christian worship, noting especially their adoration of Christ as God. By his testimony, then, Pliny gives important evidence of the existence of the Christian church at this time, as well as the Roman attitude to it in the early second century.

Thus we can see that these early literary references provide us with an independent witness to the existence of the Christian church in the first century A.D. and the period immediately following. Although there is little by way of direct archaeological evidence in this area, we nonetheless can see that the account of the Bible is entirely trustworthy when it comes to its description of the growth of Christianity.

### THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY THROUGH THE WRITTEN WORD.

Another use of archaeology to the Bible student is the study of the text of the Bible. Until this century, medieval manuscripts were the best and oldest witnesses to the authenticity of the biblical text. These witnesses can be studied in the WVBS course "The Bible: from God to Man."

In the case of the Old Testament text, for many years the earliest manuscripts dated from medieval times and the accuracy of the Old Testament text was largely dependent upon the Masoretic textual tradition which had handed the text down with great precision and care.

In 1947, however, all this changed. In that year a Bedouin boy discovered manuscripts in a cave at Qumran, on the western shore of the Dead Sea. In succeeding years, numerous manuscripts were found in the caves near the site, while the remains of a Jewish religious community were excavated there. This community dated to the time of Christ and had been abandoned in the face of the Roman advance in c. A.D. 70. They had hidden their precious manuscripts in the caves of the area, where they remained until 1947.

Among these manuscripts were copies and fragments of books of the Bible, as well as documents pertaining to the community at Qumran. This community has been identified with the Essenes described by Josephus, so the scrolls give important information about this group. Other scrolls give information about the temple in Jerusalem, including a detailed description of the building and its ritual. All these scrolls date from the second century B.C. up until the first century A.D. and are therefore historical documents of the first order. The biblical scrolls in particular provide us with a very comprehensive and very ancient witness to the Old Testament text.

One area in particular that the DSS help is in confirming the authenticity of the Old Testament text. Fragments of all the canonical Hebrew Scriptures have been found there with the exception of Esther. The text in these fragments has been found to be substantially identical to the Masoretic text. For example, the scroll of Isaiah was identical to the wording of the MT in 95% of cases, with the errors easily ascribable to scribal errors etc. Thus, the DSS help us to establish clearly the authenticity of the Old Testament text.

Another area in which they help is in New Testament studies. Examination of the wording of many of the Qumran documents has shown that the wording used is very similar to those of the Gospels, indicating that the Gospels originated in a similar milieu as did the DSS - a Hebrew one, not a Greek or Roman one. This is in accord with what the Gospels claim about themselves. This is especially the case concerning the book of John, which many have claimed has Greek philosophical concepts from the second century. However, many of the terms alleged to have been Greek in origin were found in the Qumran documents, showing that the Gospel of John too could have come from a Hebrew first-century background.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are not, however, the oldest Old Testament manuscripts which we now possess. Two silver amulets were found in a tomb near Jerusalem in 1979. They were unrolled and found to consist of strips of inscribed silver which was then rolled up and worn as an amulet. These texts were found to be an abbreviated version of the priestly benediction from Numbers 6:24-26. They date from the late kingdom or early exile period. They show clearly that the Law of Moses was not a product of the exilic period, as many scholars suggest, but was in existence in Palestine in the royal period. Thus, they are a very important witness to the authenticity and the antiquity of the Old Testament text.

As with the Old Testament, New Testament studies have benefitted greatly by the contribution made by archaeology. In this case, the major benefit comes from the study of papyrology. Egypt is a very dry country and the climatic conditions there have encouraged the preservation of papyrus, a writing material found in Egypt.

Excavations in Egypt over this century and the last have uncovered huge quantities of papyrus from many sources and time periods. There is a huge quantity of material from the Roman period, including administrative documents and private letters. Among the documents from the Roman period are included many papyri from Christian and Jewish sources which help establish the veracity of the biblical text.

Several papyri have been found which are fragments of New Testament books. Many of these date from the second and third centuries A.D. and are thus considerably older than the oldest full manuscript, the Codex Vaticanus of the early fourth century. Although they are not large, these papyri provide important witnesses to the text and show that the New Testament documents are very early.

These papyrus witnesses to the New Testament text are dealt with in detail in the WVBS course “The Bible - From God to Man.” In many cases they date from the second century A.D., and in one case (the John Rylands fragment), from A.D. 117 - 135. As this fragment is a piece of the book of John, written probably at the end of the first century A.D., this papyrus was probably copied within one generation of the autographs.

Recently, however, at least one papyrus has been claimed to date from the first century. A fragment of Matthew 24 found in Magdalen College at Oxford University was originally dated to the late second century. In recent years, however, the respected papyrologist Carsten P. Theide has states that the fragment should be dated on palaeographical grounds to the latter part of the first century. In fact, by the writing style it would even be possible to date the fragment as early as A.D. 50 or a little later, although Theide does not go this far. If Theide is correct, this fragment provides the earliest witness to the New Testament text in our possession. Indeed, it could have been copied only a few years after the initial compilation of Matthew’s Gospel account.

These papyri therefore strengthen our reliance upon the reliability of the New Testament by showing that it was committed to writing only a short time after the events it describes. We can turn to the Bible and know that it is a document of the times it describes, not a collection of unreliable tales and myths collected long after the event.

## CONCLUSION.

Thus, in these lessons we have seen that in all respects, from the appearance of incidental individuals to the confirmation of major events, down to the preservation of the biblical text itself, the science of archaeology and the study of history through literary and epigraphic sources assists in the confirmation of the Bible’s accounts.

We may thus in all confidence turn to the text of the Bible, knowing that the facts of archaeology and history show that the biblical text is historically accurate. The Bible is a reliable record of the events and individuals it describes, and thus we can take this fact as further evidence concerning the inspiration of the biblical text.