

OUR TRUSTWORTHY BIBLE

Part Three: Biblical Archaeology.

"Biblical archaeology has all the fascination of the science of archaeology, which seeks to unravel the story of past ages by digging up their material remains. But it has the added interest that through this study we are better able to understand and interpret the textbook of our faith. Not the least fascinating part of these modern studies is that they go far towards authenticating the history of the written records which are the basis of our faith. Of course, it is impossible to authenticate archaeologically all that is in the Bible. Many of the statements lie beyond the sphere of archaeological investigation. No excavator can comment, in terms of his science, on the simple statement: 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.' But in its own sphere this science does much for the student of the sacred record." (Thompson, p. 3,4) Archaeology provides the general background of the history of the Bible. The men of Bible history lived in a world that had its own peculiar customs. It helps us to know of those customs. The Bible is not a history of all that went on. There is now a vast amount of non-Biblical material available to supplement our Bible study. Archaeology helps in the translation and explanation of many passages in the Bible that are hard to understand. Biblical archaeology has done a great deal to correct the impression that Bible history is of doubtful trustworthiness. "In this connection the words of W. F. Albright may be quoted: 'There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.'" (Thompson, p. 5)

Archaeologists obtain information from material objects left behind by the people of long ago. They are found in ruined cities, graves, and inscriptions. There are numerous structures that are still open such as the pyramids and temples of Egypt, statues in Athens and Ur, as well as Roman temples, aqueducts, and roads. Some buildings are partially covered and need to be cleaned up. The completely covered remains are the ones that require the skill of the trained excavator. Some of the covered remains are tombs and graves. The most important type of covered ruin is that in which we find the remains of several towns one on top of the other. Among the most significant finds in an excavation are written records, letters, receipts, census lists, contracts, and literary pieces. Also significant are weapons, tools, utensils, coins, and jewelry.

Two important discoveries show the extreme value of archaeology. The Rosetta Stone was found by Napoleon's soldiers in 1799. It had inscriptions in three languages. One was Greek which was known, and

one was Egyptian hieroglyphics which was not known. By using the Greek men were able to read the hieroglyphics and many ancient Egyptian writings. The Behistun Rock, a monument to Darius I, in Iran, provided the key to deciphering Babylonian cuneiform writing.

Archaeology is a resurrection of forgotten people. An outstanding example is that of the Hittites. "Beyond the notices in the Old Testament the Hittites were a forgotten people till the middle of the nineteenth century, insomuch that scholars denied the existence of any such people." (Peloubet, p. 259) "But since then Egyptian and Assyrian monuments have been found describing them as a great people of the north (See I Kings 10:29; II Kings 7:6), whose armies were feared for their valor and numbers, able to cope with Egypt or any world power." (p. 259). An example of a city being recovered is Hazor. In a book published early in the twentieth century is this statement. "The most probable site of Hazor is Tell Khuraibeh." (Peloubet, p. 243). Excavations were made at Hazor (1955-1958, 1968) by Professor Yadin. He discovered evidence that Hazor had been destroyed twice in the age of the Israelites, one in the 15th century B.C. and another in the 13th century B.C. (Josh. 11:1,11; Judges 4:17,24). (Jackson)

Archaeology reveals customs and practices that throw light on the Bible record. "An analysis of the beasts of burden of Abraham and the other patriarchs shows that there were camels and asses...It has been argued that camels were not used in the East at this time. This cannot be maintained any longer." (Thompson, p. 23). "There are numbers of other parallels that can be drawn between the customs of the patriarchs and those of the citizens of northern Mesopotamia during these early centuries of the second millennium B.C. If there was even any doubt that a society similar to that portrayed in the patriarchal records did actually exist at the time, the reasons for the doubt are now largely removed. The narratives of Genesis in the stories of Abraham and his immediate successors now find a well-authenticated background in contemporary non-Biblical sources." (Thompson)

"Another point of interest on which modern discovery has shed light is the reference to Israel's success over some of the foes they met on the way. The Bible states that the people of Israel smote the enemy 'with the edge of the sword' (Exod. 17:13; Deut. 13:15, 20:13, Num. 21:24). In Hebrew this phrase is literally 'to the mouth of the sword.' This now turns out to be a most precise description. Archaeological work

has brought to light a great variety of swords, daggers, battle axes, and the like. Many of these have a representation of an animal mouth at the top of the blade, so that the blade appears to issue from the jaws of a wild beast. The phrase 'to devour to the mouth of the sword' is a very vivid one indeed." (Thompson, p. 70)

"When Saul died after the tragic battle at Mount Gilboa, the Philistines desecrated his body, which they found lying where he fell. His head was cut off and placed in the temple of Dagon,' and his armor taken to 'the house of Ashtaroth' in Bethshan, and his body was fastened to the wall of the same city (I Sam. 31:9,10; I Chron. 10: 9,10). We can be fairly certain that one of the two temples excavated at Bethshan during the years 1921 to 1933 ..was this actual temple. Here were typical temples of the day where the cult of the gods of Canaan was carried out. Numerous items of religious significance were found in these temples. Which of the two temples was the one referred to in the study is, of course, impossible to say. It is now quite clear, however, that there was a temple in Bethshan at the time." (Thompson, pp. 94,95)

Archaeology also throws light on New Testament times. One of the most fascinating discoveries in the area was a unique inscription bearing the name of Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. It bears the words...]S TIBERIEUM [PON]TIUS PILATUS [PRAEF]ECTUS IUDA[EA]E. The inscription is very fragmentary so the the grammar of this section is not clear. But it seems evident that Pontius Pilate had been dedicating some structure to Tiberius Caesar with some such formula as 'I dedicate this forum in the name of Tiberius...'...This inscription is now on display in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem." (Thompson, p. 286)

Our Next Study will be: **TEXTUAL INTEGRITY**

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"One of the most important of these is a Greek inscription found...in 1871 and now housed in the Istanbul Museum. It contains seven lines written in Greek capitals and was evidently once placed in the precincts of the Temple to warn Gentiles to keep away from those areas which were reserved for Jews only. One translation...reads:

'No Gentile may enter inside the enclosing screen around the temple. Whoever is caught is alone responsible for the death which follows.'

The inscription was found some fifty meters from the Temple area, but it is agreed that it is ancient and must have come from the temple. It is of special interest in the light of the statement in Acts 21:28 where Paul was accused by the Jews of bringing Greeks into the 'holy place'." (Thompson, p. 316).

Another value in archaeology is in showing that not all modern tourist show places are valid. "Thus, Nazareth is a town that is full of traditional churches and other sites. The visitor is shown the Church of the Annunciation, the workshop of Joseph, the table of Christ, and so on. There is no solid evidence for any of these... the simple fact is that Nazareth has little of a reliable nature to offer to us today." (Thompson, p. 361)

CONCLUSION: This is a vast subject with many areas of study. Our lesson is of necessity exceedingly brief. Archaeology shows the reliability of the Bible in its depiction of the times, customs, and history it relates.

(B. G. Echols)

J. A. Thompson, [The Bible and Archaeology](#)

F.N. Peloubet and Alice D. Adams, [Peloubet's Bible Dictionary](#)

Wayne Jackson, "Hazor - Was the Bible Wrong?"