

# Biblical Archaeology (Can You Dig It?)

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## INTRODUCTION:

- A. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,  
That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
1. I believe that with all my heart.
  2. All scripture is God-breathed. It came from God.
  3. Not all believe that.
- B. Evidences of inspiration may be divided into two categories.
1. Internal evidences.
  2. External evidences.
- C. While some evidences are found between the covers of the Bible itself, others are found outside the Book.
- D. Please remember that when God designed the Bible, He designed it to speak for itself. However, it is interesting to consider evidences of an external nature.
1. Although they are not essential, they are supportive and encouraging.
  2. They help give our faith that extra boost as we see these external evidences support the accuracy and authenticity of the Bible.
- E. The general scientific field of study that discovers this external evidence is called archeology in general and Biblical Archaeology in particular.

## BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

- A. Definitions:
1. What is archaeology? “The scientific study of the material remains of past human life and activity.”
  2. What then is Biblical Archaeology? Biblical Archaeology may be defined as a study based on the excavation, decipherment, and critical evaluation of the records of the past as they relate to or affect the Bible.
    - a. While the general field of archaeology is fascinating, much more so is the study of Biblical archaeology since it deals with the Holy Scriptures.
    - b. The attraction lies in the supreme importance of the message and meaning of the Bible.
- B. Statements by renowned Archaeologists.
1. "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical

statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries."

Dr. Nelson Glueck,  
The Renowned Jewish Archeologist.

2. "Archaeology has confirmed countless passages which have been rejected by critics as unhistorical or contradictory to known 'facts'."

Dr. Joseph Free

3. "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."

Dr. William F. Albright,  
Known As One Of The Great Archeologists

4. "The great value of archaeology has been to show, over and over again, that the geography, technology, political and military movements, cultures, religious practices, social institutions, languages, customs, and other aspects of everyday life of Israel and other nations of antiquity were exactly as described in the Bible."

Henry M. Morris,  
Many Infallible Proofs (El Cajon, CA:  
Master Books, 1974), p. 301.

B. Biblical Archaeology spans what we know as the ancient Biblical world . . . any and all countries where Biblical events and Biblical history have occurred.

1. All finds are important.
  - a. Major finds . . . generally making news.
  - b. Lesser known finds.
2. In addition to Israel, other important Biblical sites include:
 

a. Turkey	f. Jordan
b. Greece	g. Iraq
c. Italy	h. Iran
d. Syria	i. Saudi Arabia
e. Lebanon	j. Egypt

3. Many sites in Israel.
  - a. 300 known sites.
  - b. Only 50 of the 300 have been excavated . . . or are in the process of being excavated.
4. Underwater archaeology along the coastline of Israel.
  - a. Harbor at Caesarea.
  - b. Ashkelon

5. Sosthenes name on a stone at Corinth.
6. Pilate stone at Caesarea.

C. The last 150+ years or so have witnessed the birth, growth, and phenomenal development of the science of Biblical Archaeology.

1. This new science has performed many wonders in furnishing background material in illustrating, illuminating and in many cases authenticating the message and meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures.
  2. Great discoveries have been made . . . Others await to be made.
- D. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, very little was known of Biblical times and Biblical backgrounds, except for what appeared on the pages of the Old Testament or what happened to be preserved in the writings of classical antiquity.
- E. In fact, modern archaeology may be said to have its beginning in 1798 when the rich antiquities of the Nile River Valley (Nile Valley) were opened up to scientific study by Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition.
- F. Although the most notable discoveries affecting the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, were not made until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Foundational discoveries made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century prepared the way for the modern era.
- G. I believe God uses Biblical Archeology to show us more evidence, a little at a time. Explain.
- H. Archaeological evidence confirms the accuracy of the Bible.
1. When the Bible says it is up . . . . . It is up.
  2. When the Bible says it is down . . . . . It is down.
  3. When the Bible says it is there . . . . . It is there.
- I. The testimony of the spade.
- J. Not so much from Biblical Archaeology as from history comes one of my favorite stories. Werner Keller . . . The Bible As History . . . translated from German by Dr. William Neil . . . Pages 179-180.

We owe to Major Vivian Gilbert, a British army officer, this description of a truly remarkable occurrence. Writing in his reminiscences he says: “In the First World War a brigade major in Allenby’s army in Palestine was on one occasion searching his Bible with the light of a candle, looking for a certain name. His brigade had received orders to take a village that stood on a rocky prominence on the other side of a deep valley. It was called Michmash and the name seemed somehow familiar. Eventually he found it in **1 Samuel 13** and read there: “And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.” It then went on to tell how Jonathan and his armor-bearer crossed over during the night “**to the Philistines’ garrison**” on the other side, and how they passed two sharp rocks: “There was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of one was Bozez and the name of the other Seneh” (**1 Samuel 14:4**). They climbed up the cliff and overpowered the garrison, “Within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plough.” The main body of the men awakened by the melee thought they were surrounded by Saul’s troops and “melted away and they

went on beating down one another” (1 Samuel 14:16-16).

Thereupon Saul attacked with his whole force and beat the enemy. “So the Lord saved Israel that day.”

The brigade major reflected that there must still be this narrow passage through the rocks, between the two spurs, and at the end of it the “half acre of land.” He woke the commander and they read the passage through together once more. Patrols were sent out. They found the pass, which was thinly held by the Turks, and which led past two jagged rocks—obviously Bozez and Seneh. Up on top, beside Michmash, they could see by the light of the moon a small flat field. The brigadier altered his plan of attack. Instead of deploying the whole brigade he sent one company through the pass under cover of darkness. The few Turks whom they met were overpowered without a sound, the cliffs were scaled, and shortly before daybreak the company had taken up a position on “the half care of land.”

The Turks woke up and took to their heels in disorder since they thought that they were being surrounded by Allenby’s army. They were all killed or taken prisoner.”

“And so, concluded Major Gilbert, “after thousands of years British troops successfully copied the tactics of Saul and Jonathan.”

**Personal Note:** The Bible is so accurate . . . accurate to every detail God wanted revealed.

- K. A second story from Werner Keller’s book, this one appearing on page 163. With these victories and the promised occupation of Canaan, Joshua’s great assignment had been fulfilled. At a ripe old age he dies and is buried, “in Timnath-Serah which is mount Ephraim on the north side of the hill of Gaash” (Joshua 24:30). The Greek text adds a very significant remark: “There they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Gilgal.” In Gilgal, on the way from the Jordan to Jericho, the rite of circumcision was carried out on the men of Israel according to tradition “with stone knives.” “Now all the people that came out were circumcised: But all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised” (Joshua 5:5). Ten miles north-west of Bethel lies Kefr Ishu’a, the “Village of Joshua”. In the neighboring hillside are some rock tombs. In 1870 in one of these sepulchers a number of stone knives were found...”

## **GREAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE BIBLE**

### **A. THE ROSETTA STONE**

1. Discovered in 1799 at Rosetta (Rashid) near the westernmost mouth of the Nile River, by an officer in Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt. Found while the French soldiers digging in order to build a fort.
2. A slab of black basalt.
3. Three languages inscribed thereon.
  - a. Greek of 200 B.C.
  - b. Two forms of Egyptian hieroglyphics.
    1. The older was a more complicated script.
    2. The later was more simplified and was the more popular writing which was demotic, the common writing of the people.
4. Three language accounts of the same thing.
  - a. The Greek could at once be read and provided the clue to the decipherment of the other two ancient Egyptian languages.
  - b. Once the Egyptian code was broken, the great field of Egyptology was born.
  - c. This was the key that unlocked the door of knowledge of the language and literature of ancient Egypt.
5. All of this has had a tremendous bearing on the background of the Bible.

### **THE MOABITE STONE**

- A. Found in 1868.
- B. Description dates from 850 B.C.
- C. It was erected by Mesha, king of Moab. It is also called the Mesha Stone.
- D. It tells of the wars of Mesha of Moab with:
  - a. Omri, king of Israel, and Omri’s successors. **1 Kings 16:16** – “Now the people who were encamped heard it said, “Zimri has conspired and also has killed the king.” So all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp.
  2. The Edomites.
- E. Parallels Biblical history recorded in Second Kings, chapters one and three.
- F. Numerous places (at least 10) mentioned in the Old Testament are mentioned on the monument.
- G. The Moabite Stone measures:
  - a. 3 feet 8 inches in height.
  - b. 2 feet 3 inches in width.
  - c. 1 foot 11 inches in thickness.

- H. Its 34 lines constitute the longest single literary inscription yet recovered extra-biblically dealing with Palestine in the period 900-600 B.C.
- I. It records that Moab had been conquered by Omri and his son Ahab, but was set free from the Israelites yoke by Mesha’s god, Chemosh.

### THE BLACK OBELISK

- A. The Black Obelisk was discovered in the palace at Nimrud in 1846 and shows the biblical Jehu, King of Israel, kneeling down and bringing tribute to the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser.
- B. A stone of black marble cut during the reign of Shalmaneser III, King of Assyria from 860 – 825 B.C.
  - a. Four-sided pillar.
  - b. 6 feet and 5 inches in height, tapering to the top.
  - c. Found in the palace of king Shalmaneser.
- C. Records the campaigns of Shalmaneser III and pictures the conquered kings bringing their tribute to him. Among these in the second row, is Jehu, son of Omir. **2 Kings 10:36** – “And the period that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.”
- D. One writer said: **“Reading the black obelisk is almost like reading from the books of the Kings and the Chronicles.”**

### BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW AND STUBBLE

- A. Three passages of Scripture:
  1. **Exodus 1:10-14** – “Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.”
    - 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses.
    - 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel.
    - 13 So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor.
    - 14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage — in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.”
  2. **Exodus 5:7** – “You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.”
  3. **Exodus 5:12** – “So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw.”
- B. Fluids in the **straw** release humic acid and harden the **bricks**.
- C. It is logical to conclude that if a change was made in the making of brick, such a change would also have been reflected in the brick used to construct storehouses.

1. In 1883, Professor E. Neville, excavating for the Egypt Exploration Fund, identified the site of Pithon, the great treasure city.
2. The actual storehouses built by the Hebrews were found.
  - a. Some portions were made of brick with straw . . . and some of the brick without straw.
  - b. This is in perfect harmony with the Book of Exodus account of these events.

### **ALTAR TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**

- A. **Acts 17:23** - “For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.”
- B. As evidence that such altars existed in the New Testament world, in 1909, an altar was discovered at Pergamos in Asia Minor, (one of the Seven Churches of Asia), which bore the mutilated inscription which read, when restored, “To the unknown Gods.”

### **THE TEL-EL-AMARNA TABLETS**

- A. A large group of tablets (letters) found in 1887 in the village of Tel El-Amarna, some 200 miles south of Cairo on the east bank of the Nile River.
- B. Written some 3,500 years ago.
- C. Involve many Biblical nations and make many references to events recorded in the Bible.

### **THE EBLA TABLETS**

- A. Found on a 140 acre mound in the northwest corner of Syria called Tel-Mardikh during the 1970s.
- B. Some 7,000 well-preserved clay tablets and about 13,000 fragments of other tablets. Nearly 20,000 cuneiform tablets were discovered (1975) in the palace archives
- C. Since Haran was only 150 miles from Ebla, this promoted the posture that the Ebla text preceded Abram (Abraham) by 300 years.
- D. About 10,000 names of people are found on the tablets. Among them are Biblical names such as:
  1. Adam
  2. Eve
  3. Noah
  4. Jubal
  5. Abram
  6. Ishmael
  7. Hagar



8. Keturah
  9. Bilhah
  10. Israel
  11. Micah
  12. Michael
  13. Saul
  14. David
  15. Jehorum
  16. Jonah
- E. Although these names do not refer to the Biblical personages, they establish that the names in Scripture are authentic names.

### THE LACHISH OSTRACA . . . THE LACHISH LETTERS

- A. Located some 30 miles southeast of Jerusalem and 20 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea.
- B. These 21 letters (potsherds) give an independent view of conditions in Judah in the last days before the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.
- C. **Jeremiah 34:7** – “When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for only these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah.”
- D. Uses some expressions similar to those of Jeremiah was alive at that time.
- E. At least three names mentioned in the Bible are mentioned in the Lachish Letters . . . people were living during that time frame.
  1. The first name listed is Gemariah. There are two Gemariahs listed in the Bible during this time frame.
    - a. The first is Gemariah, son of Hilkiah. Mentioned Jeremiah 29:3
    - b. Gemariah, son of Shaphan. Mentioned in Jeremiah 36:10
  2. Jaazaniah, one of Judea's military officers. Mentioned in 2 Kings 25:23
  3. The third name found in the Lachish letter is **Neria**, the father of Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, mentioned in Jeremiah 36:4, as well as Seriah who is mentioned in Jeremiah 51:59:
- F. Numerous places named in the Bible are found in the letters as well.
- G. Hoshinah mentioned in the Lachish letters as not being able to see the signals of Azekah inferring that it must have fallen to the Babylonians.
  1. The famous Lachish Letter #4 describes how the writer was looking for the signal-fires of Lachish for the signal-fires of Azekah could no longer be seen. Possibly the writer of this ostrakon was viewing the destruction of the cities of the Shephelah from the nearby hill country to the west. Jer. 34:7 corroborates the fact that the last two cities remaining were Azekah and Lachish.
  2. Azekah is also mentioned at least seven times in the Old Testament.



3. These letters put there during the final onslaught by Nebuchadnezzar.
4. One of these has a moving message; it was sent from a Judean outpost to the city of Lachish, in warning of the impending Babylonian destruction. It reads: "Let my lord know that we are watching over the beacon of Lachish, according to the signals which my lord gave, for Azekah is not seen." Lachish and Azekah were the last two Judean cities before the conquest of Jerusalem in the same year, says the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 34:7).
5. When the signal fire could no longer be seen, the city had fallen.
5. Don't let your light go out . . . don't fall in our battle against the evil one.

## CONCLUSION:

- A. All the Biblical finds of the past combine to speak as one voice from the distant past, testifying to the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible as we have always believed it.
- B. Through all the years the science of Archaeology has existed, all their findings which impinge on the Bible record point to the accuracy and inspiration of the Bible. As the inspired Word
  1. Those who believe in the Bible as the inspired Word of God welcome the findings of archeologists, past . . . present . . . or future.
  2. More archeological discoveries will serve only to confirm the Bible as God's inspired Word.
  3. **Romans 10:17** – “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
- C. Rest assured, the thrilling story of Biblical Archaeology is not yet completed. Great discoveries yet remain all in God's good time. We must only wait to see what the next archaeologist's spade will turn up next.
- D. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**