

“How Could the Wise Men Have Found Baby Jesus in Nazareth?”

I have one question on [[the Christmas Quiz](#)] that has me completely perplexed. Question 31 asks where the Wise Men found Jesus and his family when they arrived. Your answer says that it was Nazareth. How can this be? Why would Herod have ordered the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem if they were in Nazareth? Also, why would they have travelled all the way to Egypt if they were that much further north from Bethlehem?

Thank you for writing. Dale Taliaferro wrote the Probe Christmas Quiz, but let me try to give you a brief answer to why he answered the question the way that he did.

Many commentators merely have Jesus staying in Bethlehem, but Dale suggests a better interpretation that fits with both the Matthew account and the Luke account.

Matthew 2:11 says the Magi saw Jesus as a “young child” and found him in “the house,” where “they fell down and worshiped him.” At the very least, it eliminates the possibility that this was at his birth at a manger scene in Bethlehem. That would also mean that the typical nativity scene is inaccurate.

Notice that Luke’s account has them leaving Bethlehem for Jerusalem to be presented in the Temple. Then Luke 2:39 says that after Jesus is presented in the Temple, the family returns to Nazareth. That is where Dale believes the Magi found Jesus and his family.

Notice that Matthew 2 gives an impression of a hurried, immediate escape to Egypt. Nothing like that is mentioned in Luke 2:39. Instead we have them returning to Nazareth.

Therefore, it is possible that the family returned to Bethlehem when Jesus was perhaps 1-2 years old. Matthew 2 then appears to be picking up the story where they escape during the night.

I think this interpretation also helps make sense of King Herod's command to kill all male children "two years old and under." Remember earlier asked "the exact time the star had appeared" in Matthew 2:7. That would mean that at the time of the king's order, Jesus was not a newborn, but a toddler, "the young child."

I hope this helps explain Dale Taliaferro's answer.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“ ‘Gender-Neutral’ Bibles?”

There's a controversy brewing over the "gender-neutral" TNIV Bible. What is your position?

You know how gospel means "good news"? Well, the gender-neutral language of newer Bible translations is "bad news"!!! The editors, bowing to pressure of modern philosophies and values, have cast aside what God said in His word in search of something more palatable to today's politically correct mindset.

One of the problems comes from the desire to elevate women by diminishing the masculine characteristics of God and the importance of male leadership. We're always going to get in trouble when we diminish God. He chose to identify Himself as masculine, even though we know spirit transcends gender, I believe because of the deep and ineffable necessity of

relationship to Father—both our heavenly Father and our earthly fathers.

I am also bothered by the unspoken assumption that women are too self-centered and hyper-sensitive not to be able to figure out that when the Bible—the very words of God Himself—uses the word “man” or “mankind” to refer to all humans, we can’t figure that out without getting upset. Just about every language on the face of the planet uses the generic male pronoun to represent all people, but apparently our sensibilities are too finely-tuned to allow for readers of these newer translations to make the mental jump. . .!

This is a great example of the fulfillment of 2 Tim. 4:3: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires. . .”

So our position is, thumbs down to ear-tickling translations!
<smile>

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin

Update: August 2022

We were asked, “You gave gender-neutral Bibles a thumbs down, but what versions DO you recommend?” Here’s our answer:

After talking with some especially knowledgeable and wise people, here’s our list, in this order:

1. New English Translation (NET Bible – Available free at <http://netbible.org>) – Unbelievably rich resource with translators’ notes and study notes, plus access to Bible study tools such as the meanings of words in their original

languages. Click on Menu → Tour the App)

2. New Living Translation (NLT)

3. New International Version (NIV), 2011

4. New American Standard (NASB)

I would say that gender-neutral is bad, but what we need is “gender-accurate.” For example, the Greek word *adelphoi* is often translated “brothers,” but it actually means “brothers and sisters.” So why not use the more inclusive language in English when it’s there in the Greek?

Glad you asked!

Cheerily,

Sue Bohlin

“Where Are the Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus’ Resurrection?”

I was reading [Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation: The Greatest Hoax in the History of Humanity?](#) to learn more about the resurrection of Jesus. When I went to the two Old Testament references he gave (Psalm 34:20, “He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken,” and Zechariah 12:10, “...they will look on Me whom they have pierced...”) as evidence of the prophecy of resurrection, I discovered that these were not prophetic at all but simply words and phrases that were taken out of context. Can you provide me with any Old Testament writing

that does speak directly of the resurrection of the messiah?

John 19:36-37

“For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture,
“NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.” And again another
Scripture says, “THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.”

may cite both of these OT passages. However, the one in v. 36
may actually be citing Exodus 12:46–

“It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring
forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to
break any bone of it.”

or Numbers 9:12–

“They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone
of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they
shall observe it.”

Thus, it is not clear whether John viewed Psalm 34:20 as
having Messianic implications. And certainly it does not refer
to Jesus’ resurrection. (But then, we would note, the author
never indicated these verses refer to the resurrection. The
article is about the crucifixion as well, which these verses
do prophesy.)

The passage in Zechariah 12:10 is Messianic and would at least
be consistent with the resurrection of Christ (as it probably
refers to His Second Coming). Isaiah 53:10-12 would also seem
to be consistent with Jesus’ resurrection:

But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.
As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;

By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

However, in neither of these passages is Jesus' resurrection specifically predicted.

The only OT texts which specifically teach the doctrine of resurrection are Isaiah 26:19-21;

Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise.
You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.
Come, my people, enter into your rooms
And close your doors behind you;
Hide for a little while
Until indignation runs its course.
For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
And the earth will reveal her bloodshed
And will no longer cover her slain.

Ezekiel 37:12-14;

"Therefore prophesy and say to them,
'Thus says the Lord GOD,
"Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people;
and I will bring you into the land of Israel.
Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and

caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.
I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life,
and I will place you on your own land.
Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done
it," declares the LORD.'"

and Daniel 12:1-3:

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard
over the sons of your people, will arise.
And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred
since there was a nation until that time;
and at that time your people, everyone who is found written
in the book, will be rescued.
Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will
awake, these to everlasting life,
but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.
Those who have insight will shine brightly like the
brightness of the expanse of heaven,
and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars
forever and ever.

Job 19:25-27 is another possibility:

"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.
Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall
see God;
Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes will see and not another.
My heart faints within me!

None of these texts are specifically Messianic. I do not think
there are any specific predictions of Jesus' resurrection in
the OT. This, I think, is partly why Jesus' disciples had such
a difficult time understanding His own predictions of His
resurrection. They did not have a category for a dying and
rising Messiah (i.e. raised to glory, never to die again)

within world history. They only knew of a general resurrection at the end of time.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Addendum: April 7, 2021 by Sue Bohlin

I would respectfully suggest that we can also turn to the powerful words of Peter in Acts 2:24-32, where He unfolds the realization that David had prophesied about the Lord's resurrection in Psalm 16—

“But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. For David says about him,

‘I saw the Lord always in front of me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced;
my body also will live in hope,

because you will not leave my soul in Hades,
nor permit your Holy One to experience decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of joy with your presence.’

“Brothers, I can speak confidently to you about our forefather David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. So then, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, David by foreseeing this spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his body experience decay. This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it.”

“Where Do Demons Come From?”

My friends and I are doing a Bible project on demons. I read your website and it had a lot of helpful information. But we are having trouble finding information on the origin of demons. We can't find very many references to when Satan rebelled against God, or where demons came from. Can you help us?

The problem is that the Bible doesn't give much information about the origin of demons, and that is the ONLY reliable source of truth.

In fact, we're only given the faintest hint of what happened, in Revelation 12. The writer, the apostle John, uses poetic, symbolic language, and the events are not in chronological order. Here's what it says:

“. . . a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”
(Revelation 12:3-4)

Shortly after these verses, the same event is described again:

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”
(Revelation 12:7-9)

We are not told exactly when this happened. Sometime between

the time God created the earth, and Satan's temptation of Eve, he and his demons (apparently, a third of the angels) rebelled and were thrown out of heaven. But we don't know when that was. In Job, when God is doing His wonderful work of creation, we are told that "the morning stars sang together, and ALL the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). That would indicate to me that the angels (also called "the sons of God") were all still holy at that point.

This is where we run out of information, so I have given you all I have. I hope it helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Did I Encounter a Demon?"

Dear Miss Bohlin,

I am a 17 year old aspiring writer who has just recently gotten back into the Church after a hiatus of several years after getting caught up in some odd religious fever and being baptized. I've often wondered why that off sensation came over me, but I'm starting to piece together the way my life has panned out and how things are indeed serving a purpose.

I am writing you because of the article on the web you wrote entitled, ["Angels: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly."](#) I was reading because I am trying to do research for a comic book project about a Christian "super hero" in the future, and I would like to feature an angel or two as supporting characters to my heroic lead character.

As I read the article, I came upon the part speaking of the falseness of those preaching the practice of channeling angels

and praying to angels, and how these so called angels providing the information were more than likely actually demons. The part that hit me hardest, though, was the part speaking of the promise that those who seek out these “angels” will be visited by a “Shining” angel that is more than likely a personal encounter with an actual demon.

This hit me because of something that happened several years ago. If I remember correctly, I had just entered my teenage career, and had already been baptized sometime before. By this point, though, I had drifted away from religion, and had stopped attending church almost altogether. Lord forgive me if this isn't entirely accurate, I have horrible memory about some things. Anyways, I had become interested in ghosts and psychic phenomenon, and had decided to call a psychic 900-number. The man I spoke with was more than happy to assist when I asked if he could help me strengthen any abilities I may have had. He went with me through the motions for several days of meditating and “filling myself with a light” in my mind's eye. Finally, I actually saw the outline of a being's face, a being that looked like a perfect representation of what I have tended to see Angels as, like some kind of a Greek statue or something.

As I came back to the church, I have been at war with myself internally over what to believe in this world we live in, and in some ways I've been frustrated because I haven't felt a level of religious belonging like the one I experienced in the few weeks leading up to my baptism since the baptism itself. I had been using this “vision” of my “angelic guide” as proof of faith for so long, and now I realize I was trying to use an encounter with a demon as justification of believing in God.

Do you think this could be what has been holding me back from experiencing the joy I felt during the time surrounding my Baptism? If so, now that I have realized it, how should I deal with it? My first impulse at this discovery that I likely encountered a demon and have probably been under some sort of

influence since then has been to be horrified and afraid. But as I talked about it with a friend, I began to see it as a backfire in the plans for whatever this being was. If there is a demon, then there must be angels. And if there are Angels, then there must be a God to follow, and obey and have faith in. Is this a good interpretation? Is this a personal victory for me? I've heard it said that nearly anything used for evil can be turned back and used for good. Should I be using my encounter with evil as reinforcement for a belief that there must, undoubtedly, be a good, and I have every reason to seek that good?

Your thoughts on this strangeness are greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Dear _____, I wish you could see the smile on my face as I read this particular section of your letter:

If there is a demon, then there must be angels. And if there are Angels, then there must be a God to follow, and obey and have faith in. Is this a good interpretation? Is this a personal victory for me? I've heard it said that nearly anything used for evil can be turned back and used for good. Should I be using my encounter with evil as reinforcement for a belief that there must, undoubtedly, be a good, and I have every reason to seek that good?

Yes, yes, yes!! It's an excellent interpretation!

To answer your question, "how should I deal with it?" the best answer I can suggest is that you get Neil Anderson's book *The Bondage Breaker*. He explains the power and authority we have in Jesus Christ and how to completely renounce any hold Satan and demons have over you in an orderly, step-by-step manner.

Many, many people have experienced freedom as a result of Neil's book.

Welcome back to the family of God! I am sure that you will experience the joy that is part of knowing Christ when you disengage yourself from the demonic oppression that is holding you back. . . but only until you find out how the Lord will free you.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“The Archaeological Evidence for the Bible is Non-Existent!”

The archaeological evidence of the Bible is scarce. In fact, it is non-existent. After 200 years of Christian archaeologists digging up the whole Middle East, they haven't found any proof of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, Hebrew Slaves or the Ten Plagues. NONE!!! And this from a nation of people who wrote EVERYTHING down in stone!! And Sinai has no proof of any large group of people travelling through it EVER!!! The first evidence correlating to the biblical story doesn't appear in Canaan archaeology until around 100 years before the Babylonian Captivity (around 600 BC).

This lack of evidence includes persons such as David and Solomon who should be recorded in other nations and supposedly lived relatively close to those who wrote the Bible in the

Babylonian Captivity around 500 B.C.

In the words of Shakespeare, "Methinks thou dost protest too much." It is true that we would like to have more archaeological evidence than we now have. But of course, from an archaeologist's perspective, this is always the case. Further, your assertion that *no* evidence exists, is an overstatement which cannot be substantiated. And it is not accepted by the majority of those scholars who are active in the Levant. I would suspect that you are reading a narrow spectrum of archaeologists who support your desired conclusions. And there are many European and Israeli archaeologists along with Christian ones who do not share your opinion nor that of those you apparently are reading. Let me give you some examples from these scholars who feel there is substantial evidence mitigating against such a pessimistic stand.

Egypt

I will start here, because there is no doubt that we see clear evidence of Egyptian culture, language, etc., imbedded in both the Old Testament and archaeology. As you may know, the *lingua franca* (official language) used by Heads of State and commerce was Akkadian cuneiform. Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt all conversed with each other in this language. It is a northern Semitic language. If the Israelites actually spent 400 years as slaves in Egypt, we would expect this familiarity of Egyptian language and culture among the Israelites. And if Moses was a real person—a Hebrew brought up in the Royal Egyptian family—he would have probably been tri-lingual, and able to converse in Hebrew, Egyptian and Akkadian.

Exodus, Sinai

We find abundant evidence of an Egyptian heritage and influence throughout the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges. As stated above, we would like more archaeological corroboration

to clearly identify Biblical names, places, events, etc. For some areas the evidence is strong. For others, it is either sparse, or nonexistent. I will elaborate on this later in considering Jerusalem, but will state here the premise that an *absence* of archaeological data does not necessarily mean there is none. Perhaps we have the *wrong site* (historical Mt. Sinai is an example). Or perhaps we just haven't dug in the *right place*. To argue vigorously from "silence" is not strong proof.

We do have some indications of Egyptian influence on two biblical elements: the Tabernacle/construction described in Exodus 25-27; 36-38, and the arrangement of the Israelite travel/military camp. The order of the camp and the order of the march are laid out in great detail in Numbers 2. Much of what Egyptian archaeologists have discovered pertaining to the above find many similarities in the structures/construction/arrangement of the various war camps of the Pharaohs.

The desert Tabernacle of the Bible (Exodus 26) is described as one of elaborate design of gold, silver, bronze, wood, linen, goats' hair and leather. It so happens that this desert tent is also the centerpiece of every Egyptian war camp, but it serves as Pharaoh's personal, special tent, not a religious shrine.

The best example comes from a famous battle (at Kadesh) between Ramesses II and the Hittite nation around 1275 B.C. This is one of the most momentous battles in antiquity and the best documented...at Thebes, Karnak, Luxor, Abydos and Abu Simbel—on papyrus and stone, in both poetic and prose forms. The best pictorial is found at Abu Simbel. The parallels between Ramesses' camp and the biblical Tabernacle, beginning with the dimensions, are striking.

- *The camp forms a rectangular courtyard twice as long as it is wide.*

- *The main entrance is located in the middle of the short walls.*
- *A road from the entrance leads directly to a two chamber tent: a reception compartment and directly behind it Pharaoh's chamber. It too has a 2:1 ratio.*
- *The tent and camp lie on an east/west axis with the entrance on the east.*
- *In pharaoh's inner tent is representation on each side of the winged falcon god Horus.*
- *Their wings cover the pharaoh's golden throne in the same manner that the wings of the Cherubim covered Yahweh's golden throne/ark (Exodus 35:18-22).*

Given your assumption that the Old Testament didn't materialize until the Persian period (fifth century B.C.), we would expect Mesopotamian influence, but we do know from several palatial reliefs found at Nineveh that the Assyrians had a *very different* form of military camp. The camp's perimeter is always *oval* in shape and the form of the king's tent bears little resemblance to the Tabernacle. Where would these sixth century B.C. "authors" come up with this accurate, Egyptian-oriented detail/description seven centuries removed?

I won't elaborate on this (unless you want documentation), but the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, its design, materials, and portability, so graphically designed in Exodus 25:19-22, is also mirrored in Egyptian funerary structures to a high degree of detail.

Another remarkable example is to compare three cities mentioned in Numbers 22 (Dibon); Numbers 13:22; Joshua 10:36,37; Judges 1:10 (Hebron); and Judges 4-5 (Qishon). These passages all describe a well-known, well-traveled road (the Arabah) in the Transjordan from the southern tip of the Dead Sea to the plains of Moab (opposite Jericho). This is not to be confused with the great north-south Kings Highway (also mentioned in the Bible) which stretched from northern Arabia

to Syria.

Although Thomas Thompson and other “Rejectionists” claim these cities didn’t exist in the late Bronze Age II (1400-1200 B.C.), we have extra-biblical evidence that they *did*. You may know that the Pharaohs recorded, along with their achievements and military exploits, maps and the names of roads, geographical data, etc. We get a rather full picture of this road over time by several pharaohs who mention/describe this specific road on their victory monuments.

The first comes from Thutmosis III (1504-1450 B.C)., who mentions four towns/cities along this road which are also found in the Bible: Iyyim, Dibon, Abel, and Jordan. The second and third come from Amenophis III (1387-1350 B.C.) and Ramesses II (c. 1379-1212 B.C.)—found on the west side of the great hall at Karnak. He mentions two of the names found in the Bible. Further evidence comes from the Moabite stone (ninth century B.C.).

I could go into more detail about this if you are interested, but to summarize what I’m saying, there is evidence from independent and varied sources that such places existed several centuries *before* the proposed dates of the Exodus. Consider this comparison:

Late Bronze Egyptian Name	Biblical Name	Modern Name
(Yamm) ha-Malach	Melah (“Salt”)	Yam ha-Melach
Iyyin	Iyyin	Ay
Heres/Hareseth	Heres/Hareseth	Kerak (CH = K)
Aqrabat		al-Aqraba
Dibon/Oartho	Dibon	Dhiban
Iktanu		Tell Iktanu
Abel	Abel-shittim	Tell Hammam
Jordan	Jordan	Jordan (River)

If you will look at Numbers 33:45-50, you would have to say in

light of the above that this is a pretty impressive and credible piece of ancient historical writing, and most Bible scholars still consider it so. Its exacting specificity and precision of detail strongly indicates that the ancient historian who wrote it had at least had *sources* that accurately preserved the memory of a road (and cities along its route) used in very early times dating clear back to Late Bronze Age II.

On the face of it, we would have to reject Thomas Thompson (et al.)'s conclusion that *no* such cities existed at the proposed time of the Exodus. The places mentioned in the Biblical accounts did in fact exist at the time. None of these pieces of information were fabricated centuries later. There would be no purpose to include them (or make them up).

Israelites

I am not going to spend any time trying to convince you that Moses was an historical person, but I would like to refer you to an Egyptian stele in the temple at Thebes which gives us the earliest known mention of Israel. It is a 7.5 foot high funerary monument of Pharaoh Merneptah, who ruled from 1213 to 1203 B.C. As you may know, these monuments outlined a Pharaoh's lifetime accomplishments and were written (or dictated) by him for his tombstone prior to his death. He refers to conquering Israel (among others) and says, "Israel is laid waste, his seed (people) is not." Israel is referred to as "a people," that is, they were already known and acknowledged as a distinct ethnic group at that time! In my mind, this reference provides persuasive, early evidence against those who argue that there was not a distinct people called the Israelites until after the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century B.C. (600 years later—ridiculous!)

I will be discussing the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) in another context later, but will here state that a people designated as the "Hab(or p)iru" (i.e., Habiru) in the Amarna

Letters (14th Century B.C.) is still considered by many scholars to be a possible, additional mention of the Hebrews.

Another substantial line of evidence comes from discoveries of a new community in the central hill country of Canaan which sprang up late in the 13th to the 11th centuries B.C. Some 300 small, agricultural villages are now known. They are new in the archaeological record and have certain identifying characteristics which include the layout of the village and the signature (Israel: four-room houses, pottery, and the absence of pig bones, which are numerous at other sites in trans-Jordan, and the coastal towns [Philistines, Phoenicians]). The above layouts of village and town fit exactly the biblical descriptions found in Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. These newcomers also brought with them new agricultural technology not evidently known heretofore by the Canaanites living there when the Israelites arrived. And it has been pointed out that this new community did not evolve over time (natural, gradual population increase), but rather, migrated into the area more rapidly, and they almost exclusively chose *new* sites to build, instead of taking over existing Canaanite dwellings, and well away from their urban areas.

This new people introduced the terracing of hills for their agricultural needs, which were carefully designed with retaining walls (rock) to take advantage of all rainfall (as well as available springs) coming down to these areas of rocky, sloping terrain. These villages stretch all the way from the hills of the lower Galilee in the north to the Negev in the south. Population estimates at the end of the Bronze age in this area numbered 12,000 (13th century) but grew rapidly to about 55,000 in the 12th century B.C., and then to about 75,000 in the 11th century B.C.

As I mentioned above, another uniqueness in these settlements is that their food system was found by archaeologists to be void of pig bones in excavated remains. This is another

indication of a particular, ethnic/religious community. And religiously, there is also a complete absence of any kind of temple, sanctuary, or shrine, and also of any stone idols (deities). This assemblage is sufficiently homogeneous and distinctive to warrant *some* kind of designation, or label. If not Israel, *WHO?* Archaeologist William Dever has suggested naming this 12th to 11th century assemblage of individuals as “proto-Israelites.”

David, Solomon, and Jerusalem

As you may know, there is a hot debate going on among archaeologists concerning the tenth century B.C., the purported time of the United Kingdom under David and his son, Solomon. Are they historical figures, or did some author(s) invent these mythical persons centuries later? And what can be said about Jerusalem? There is very little archaeological evidence to substantiate that it existed in the tenth century B.C. as described in the Bible. This has led a small group of archaeologists to conclude David and Solomon never existed, and Jerusalem was not the thriving royal capital of the Israelites. I will develop this in more detail later, but I first want to say again that an *absence* of evidence does not necessarily and automatically bring us to conclude *nothing* was going on in the tenth century B.C. at Jerusalem. This is an argument from silence. There are alternative explanations. First of all, the most likely place where Jerusalem’s public buildings and important monuments would be located is on the Temple Mount, which for obvious reasons (Arab occupation), cannot be excavated. Thus, the most important area for investigation to uncover possible confirmation for David and Solomon is off limits to us.

Secondly, even those areas which *are* partially available to excavate—the ridge known as the City of David, for example—was continuously settled from the tenth to the sixth centuries B.C. Destructions leave a distinct mark in the archaeological record. But where there is continuous occupation (i.e.

conqueror after conqueror) we would not expect to find remains of earlier building activity for the simple reason that Jerusalem was built on terraces and bedrock. Each new conqueror destroyed what was underneath, robbed and reused stones from earlier structures, and set its foundations again on solid rock.

We mostly have Herod to thank for our present inaccessibility to what lies underneath the flat, massive platform of today's Temple Mount when he began construction in 20/19 B.C. To accomplish this task of leveling, it is estimated that roughly 1.1 million cubic feet of rock was removed from the northeast corner and was used in the southeastern corner to first fill in a portion of the Kidron Valley and then raise up 150 feet from bedrock with fill to level that side!

So we would not expect to find abundant remains of earlier strata (though there are a few indications [capitals, columns, masonry] of Herod's Temple). For these reasons it is dangerous and misleading to draw negative inferences from the lack of archaeological evidence.

Fortunately, however, we *do* have another means of testing what was happening in Jerusalem even *before* the tenth century B.C. It comes from the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) where Jerusalem (referred to as "Urusalim") is specifically mentioned. These 300 documents, written in Akkadian cuneiform, are mostly diplomatic correspondence from local rulers in Canaan to two Pharaohs—Amenophis III [1391-1353] and Amenophis IV (also known as Akhenaten) [1353-1337]. At this time Canaan was under Egyptian hegemony, and Jerusalem was ruled by a local king, or vassal.

It is clear from these documents that 400 years *before* our century in question (tenth century B.C.), Jerusalem was a capital city over a considerable area, and we are told it had a palace, a court with attendants and servants, a temple, and scribes who had charge of diplomatic correspondence with

Egyptian authorities. Six letters were sent by the king of Jerusalem to the pharaohs, which confirm a diplomatic sophistication of his court and the quality of his scribe.

Apart from these crucial letters, we find the *archaeological* evidence to confirm this history both *opaque* and *nil*. Scholars would never have guessed from their excavations of Jerusalem that any scribal activity took place there in Late Bronze Age II. We should not be surprised at this, however. From the standpoint of location, elevation, climate, water sources, and defense, Jerusalem is, and always has been, by far the most choice and desirable place for occupation and settlement. That being the case, we should be surprised if we found *no* indication of ancient activity there.

The truth of the matter is we must realize how little has been recovered; and perhaps how little can ever be recovered from ancient Jerusalem. There is very little from the 17th century, the 16th century, 15th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 11th, 10th, or the 9th century B.C.! Or to put it in other terms, we have little archaeological evidence of Jerusalem for the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age I or from the first couple of centuries of Iron Age II—a period of a *thousand* years!

But it isn't totally void of evidence. The "Stepped Stone" Structure on the eastern ridge of the city of David, the oldest part of Jerusalem, is a mammoth, five-story support for some unknown structure above it. It measures 90 feet high and 130 feet long. The dates given to it by archaeologists range from the late 13th to the late 10th centuries. But whatever the exact date will turn out to be within these centuries, this structure shows that Jerusalem could boast of an impressive architectural achievement(s) and had a population large enough to engage in such huge public works projects. This structure dates to David's time, or earlier. Contrary to some archaeologists who claim "no evidence," some 10th century pottery has been found, though not in great abundance (which holds true for all the other centuries at Jerusalem). Milat

Ezar also dates a black juglet found which dates to the tenth century. Ezar also dates the fortifications and gate just above its location as also tenth century B.C.

Granted, the Jerusalem of the United Monarchy was not as grand or glorious as Herod's Jerusalem, but the alternative conclusion that the city was abandoned for a thousand years on the basis of the paucity of archaeological evidence, seems to me to be very improbable. And I reach this conclusion, not on any Biblical evidence, but quite apart from it.

A further example comes from the fifth century B.C., and specifically the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of Jerusalem by Ezra and Nehemiah after the Babylonian captivity (when the Persians allowed the Jews to return). The Temple is assumed not to have been anything beyond a very modest structure. In fact, it was never even referred to by the Jews as the "Second Temple" and was demolished when Herod began his project in the first century B.C. But there is little doubt that Nehemiah's wall was constructed, even though almost no trace of it has been found in excavations. Jerusalem of the Persian period is known only from fills and building fragments and is mainly identified because it is sandwiched between the debris from the Iron Age and the Hellenistic periods. This is another example of the difficulty in recovering strata that developed peacefully and did not end with some catastrophic construction, and thus another caution against drawing negative conclusions from negative archaeological evidence. I will come back to this with some conclusions after we have considered David and Solomon.

David and Solomon

With respect to David, until recently no historical, archaeological evidence has been available to deny or confirm if he lived. But in 1993, the discovery by excavator Avraham Biran of a stone slab (and two additional fragments of same) at the ancient Tel Dan near Mt. Hermon contains an extra-

biblical reference to David. The specific words are “Beth David,” or, “House of David.” This is a formulaic term frequently used, not just by Israel, but by all peoples throughout the Levant to describe a particular dynasty—their own, or other States (political entities). A small group of archaeologists have rejected it out of hand, and some have even suggested that it is probably a forgery *planted* by Avraham Biran himself! In reality, the inscription was found, *in situ*, in *secondary* use, that is, reused and inserted into the outer wall of a gate that was destroyed in the eighth century B.C. by the Assyrians. Paleographically, experts date it to the ninth century B.C.

The discovery of this artifact presents a terrible problem for the archaeologists you appear to have been reading, because this is a non-Israelite source, outside the Bible, that refers to the dynasty, or “House” of David.

There are two other possible indications (not yet conclusive) which mention David. Kenneth Kitchen (University of Liverpool) makes a strong case for a mention of David by pharaoh Sheshonq I in the tenth century B.C. It is in the temple of Amun at Karnak. This pharaoh is mentioned in I Kings 14:25 (Hebrew: *Shishak*). The exact letters are *dvt*. In the transliteration of words from one Semitic language to another, **d** and **t** are often used interchangeably. We have a clear example of this from the sixth century B.C. in a victory inscription of an Ethiopic ruler who is celebrating his triumphs. He quotes two of David’s Psalms (19 and 65), and the reference is *unmistakably* to the Biblical king David. Here too the **t** is used rather than the **d**. Granted, this is sixth century, but it shows an Ethiopic king was aware of and refers to David as a real person and two of his literary efforts.

An additional reference comes from the Moabite Stone (which is not yet completely deciphered). It is also called the Mesha Stele, which is contemporaneous with the Tel Dan inscription (ninth century B.C.) Andre Lemaire, the eminent French

paleographer, believes he has detected a reference to the House of David on the Mesha Stele.

With respect to Solomon, we can pretty well document when he ruled (and) died by comparing the King Lists of the Assyrians and the Egyptians with each other as well as with various kings of Judah, of Israel, of Egypt, and Assyria mentioned in Kings, Chronicles, and the Prophets of the O.T.

Astronomy helps us here. The Assyrians recorded a solar eclipse during the reign of Assur-dan III, and modern astronomers have calculated a firm date that it occurred in 763 B.C. We have from Assyria a record of 261 continuous years, with names and dates of kings as well as the noting of any important events which occurred during each year. We thus have a "peg" for a long line of Assyrian rulers from 910 to 649 B.C.

There is no controversy about the *Divided* kingdom. At some historical time (Solomon's death—930 B.C.) the United Kingdom split, with Rehoboam, Solomon's son, ruling as king of Judah in the south, and simultaneously, Jeroboam I assumed rule of northern Palestine and became the first king of Israel.

Solomon's son, Rehoboam (his reign: 931-913 B.C.) is not mentioned by name in Egyptian or Assyrian records (like Ahab, Jehu, and Jeroboam, etc), but we have a very clear and accurate Egyptian chronology of the ten kings of the XXII Dynasty, beginning with Shoshenq I (Shishak in Hebrew)'s invasion of Israel (926,925 B.C.) during the time of Rehoboam's reign. (Cf. I Kings 14:35,36; II Chronicles 12:1-9 where this king and this event are recorded.) Both Egyptian and Bible chronologies mirror one another!

We are talking history here. The Bible records this invasion during Rehoboam's reign. Shoshenq chronology confirms the event. And if we can point with accuracy to an event which occurred at the very time the Bible designates Rehoboam and

his reign, what assumptions should we come to about the history immediately preceding it? If Rehoboam is an historical figure, why do we assume arbitrarily that his father (Solomon) is a fictitious/mythical character just because we haven't yet been fortunate enough to find archaeological confirmation? Until recently we have said the same thing for a time about many of the items/people/places mentioned above. Again, lack of evidence does not equal "myth."

In the ninth century B.C., Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) mentions two kings of Israel: Ahab (872-853 B.C.) in 853 B.C. and Jehu (841-818 B.C.) in 841 B.C. Using the Assyrian dates, we can count back the years from 853 B.C. 78 years and arrive at the year of Solomon's death and the beginning of the reigns of both Rehoboam and Jeroboam I (931/930 B.C.) The Biblical chronology *mirrors* these dates. Now, without written records of some kind, how could this clever author(s) of the fifth century B.C., who purportedly conjured up all of this, create such a detailed chronology with such accuracy?

I am not going to go into more detail about Solomon which ties into the hot debate over the tenth century B.C. These involve for example Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor which the Bible attributes to Solomon with their impressive renovations during this century. We are told in the Bible that Solomon married pharaoh's daughter and gave Gezer to him as her dowry (1 Kings 3:1; 7:8; 9:16,24; 11:1). This Pharaoh was probably Siamun (979-960 B.C.).

In summary, all indications are that Solomon's life took place in the middle of the tenth century B.C. (970-930). Using the Egyptian and Assyrian king lists, which agree with the Biblical royal chronologies, we can pinpoint Solomon's death: 930/931 B.C. We find at this time that the pharaohs were marrying their daughters to various foreign rulers. There is no reason to reject the premise that mini-empires such as David's and Solomon's could flourish in the centuries between 1200-900 B.C. when the power of the two great empires (Egypt

and Assyria) began to and did wane.

I do not think one can make a good case that some Hellenistic writer from 300 B.C. would possess the resources/information at that late date to write with such accuracy of the United Kingdom as we find from the biblical sources.

I have borrowed liberally from a host of archaeologists to respond to your question. I have not taken the time to document/footnote all this material which has come from numerous, well-known archaeologists from Europe, Israel, and the U.S.A.

If you would read a wider spectrum of scholars you will find the vast majority reject your major premise on these areas. I can document all of this if necessary.

Jimmy Williams
Probe Ministries

“Is There a Version of the Bible that Agrees with the Chester Beatty Manuscripts?”

I read your article on early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Someday I would like to make my own translation of the Bible using these early manuscripts. God willing I hope to someday attend Dallas Theological Seminary. Since p45 p46 p47 p66 p75 [of the Chester Beatty Papyrus group] contain almost all of the New Testament, is there a version/translation of the Bible that agrees with these manuscripts?

Thank you for your e-mail. And thank you for informing me you

have read my essay, ["Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?"](#)

I commend you on your desire to learn the Koine Greek of the New Testament so that you may be able to translate it in the original language. I myself attended Dallas Theological Seminary (1960-64) and received my Th.M. degree. I have never regretted that I went there.

I believe that at DTS you are given the largest "shovel" with which to dig into the Scriptures. I have continued to study Old and New Testaments in the original languages now for forty years. I never fail to see something that blesses me and gives richer clarity and meaning to my understanding of the text.

Now let me respond to your question about the Chester Beatty Papyrus group.

P 45 was originally a codex which contained all Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. Unfortunately, what we HAVE are two leaves of Matthew, seven of Luke, two of John, and thirteen of Acts.

P 46 consists of eighty-six nearly perfect leaves, out of a total of 104, which contain Paul's epistles. Philemon and the Pastoral Epistles (I & II Timothy, Titus are missing, but Hebrews is included.

P 47 contains Revelation 9:10 to 17:2, except one or more lines is missing from the top of each page. So this is a little under half of the book of Revelation.

These three volumes are dated at the early 200s A.D. Mr. Beatty found these papyrus leaves in Egypt in 1930 and bought them from an antiquities dealer.

There are also portions of seven manuscripts of the Old Testament as well as some extra-canonical writings.

Photographic facimilies have been created for each page and are available for study. All of the verses which we have from

them have been edited by Frederic Kenyon. They have also been made available in the critical text of Erwin Nestle's translation of the New Testament (title: *Novum Testamentum Graece*).

Most modern versions/translations of the New Testament in English are based upon this text, so the Chester Beatty Material is imbedded within the translation wherever extant material was available to impact or contribute to the text.

This entire work is based on a compilation mostly of the Chester Beatty material, but also includes the other ancient Greek documents of the New Testament.

I would recommend that you buy Nestle's Greek Text of the New Testament, start learning Greek, and you will be reaching your stated objective, since the Chester Beatty material is there. You could check with the American Bible Society (the actual publisher is Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, Germany). Or, contact the nearest theological seminary to your home, and go to their bookstore. They will have it or they can order it. I do not think you will find it in a Christian bookstore (although they may be able to find and order it for you.)

I believe this is a good first step. Looking at the Chester Beatty facsimiles would be a daunting and discouraging venture unless you were well versed in the Greek of the Bible.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

“You Should Ask God to Show You How Demonic Harry Potter Is”

Why is it so vital that America's children be entertained by the likes of [Harry Potter](#)? There's plenty of adventure in the Bible. I am a devout Christian and my gut feeling is that Harry Potter is yet another device to enable Satan to get his filthy foot in the door. Is it any wonder that this nation is under such ruthless attack? What are we feeding our children's mind and souls with? I tell you: Alternate lifestyles, evolution and now sorcery and witchcraft. I'd advise you to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit if you are indeed a real Christian and ask God to reveal the truth about Harry Potter. He has told me and I say that this literature is of a demonic nature and should not be assimilated by any child.

I respect your opinion and the right (and responsibility) you have to make choices for your family.

However, one of the things we do at Probe Ministries is to “engage the culture.” That means interacting with issues and topics in our culture and examining them from a Christian world view. Some parents—MANY parents—do not have children who accept their “no” the way yours might, and will need to confront the Harry Potter phenomenon head-on. For example, dads of kids with a custodial mom who buys the books for them regardless of what the dad wants. If we can help people to find a way to use this major cultural icon to teach Christian truth, to find what is good in a major literary and now film genre and help them understand spiritual truth through it, then that's what we're called to do. Even if other Christians don't understand or agree.

I assure you that I have sought the guidance of the Holy

Spirit; we would be foolish to do what we do here at Probe without His wisdom and guidance! I believe this falls under the category of “disputable matters.” That means the Lord can lead you to avoid Harry Potter books and He can allow others to read them without sinning, and He still remains Lord and God.

By the way, the last time I checked, the test of a “real Christian” was the presence of the indwelling Christ as a result of trusting Him for life and salvation, not one’s position on Harry Potter.

Respectfully,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What “Does Eating Christ’s Flesh and Drinking His Blood Mean?”

In John Ch. 6, Jesus says, “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you,” and that He has eternal life. Can you either give me a good explanation of what this means or point me toward some good resources to learn from?

Thanks for writing. Commentators from different denominations and traditions differ on what this passage means. Some believe that Jesus is here referring to participation in Holy Communion or the Eucharist. But I don’t believe that this is His intended meaning, for it would clearly imply that eternal life is received purely through a ritualistic act – and this

is quite at odds with the entire testimony of the NT. Indeed, in this very passage Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of faith (John 6:35, 40, 47).

I agree with one commentator who wrote, "Flesh and blood here point to Christ as the crucified one and the source of life. Jesus speaks of faith's appropriation of himself as God's appointed sacrifice...". In other words, through faith in Christ we participate in all the benefits of His substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. And through such saving faith we receive the free gift of eternal life.

If you haven't yet visited Bible.org at <http://www.bible.org>, I would highly recommend this site. They have loads of information about the Bible from a conservative perspective.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

"What About Us Women Not From Venus?"

This question is sent in response to the article ["Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus."](#) Are all women relationally oriented? What about the introverts out there? What about the goal-oriented women?

Being an introvert myself, I have had to work at caring for other people and reaching out, as God commands. I naturally want to do things by myself and for myself. When I get stressed out or upset, I withdraw from people into my "cave."

I am also goal-oriented. I cannot multi-task. I can only focus on one thing at a time. My motivation is achieving the goal. I strongly dislike group projects.

My fiancé is the opposite of me. He is very relational, loves to be around people, talks a lot, and is not as goal-oriented.

In my experience, there are many people like us. How can this be explained? If God designed woman to be relational, then why am I (and many others) not wired that way?

Great questions.

I do think that at our core, women are relationally-oriented, which you will probably see once you have children and the concept of “family” becomes much more important to you. Particularly in American culture which has been so steeped in feminism, women’s mindsets have been shaped to be more male-like, and there are more and more women saying the same thing as you.

When Ray and I give our “Mars/Venus” lecture, we run into couples like you and your fiancé from time to time, where it looks like somebody switched the labels. <smile> But the interesting thing is, you guys still find each other! There is still a beautiful complementarity to the male-female relationship where each person’s strengths and weaknesses are balanced by the other person’s strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes people become independent and self-reliant not because of their gender but because of their family dynamics. That doesn’t change what it means to be a woman at the core of your being, though. Your experience of being independent and self-reliant is going to be different from a man’s experience. And honestly, they are both a challenge to living as God wants us to—depending fully on HIM instead of on ourselves. Being fiercely independent can be a curse; it’s a way of digging our own cisterns (Jer. 2:13) instead of going to the source of Living Water in complete dependence and neediness. But you

didn't ask that question, so I'll get off my soapbox now!
<grin>

I'd be interested in having this discussion with you a few years down the road after you're married and hopefully have children. I wonder if you would still see yourself as not being relational anymore. If you think of it, pop back in and let me know, OK?

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries