The Tablet of Nabu: Another Confirmation of the Bible

This is a fantastic discovery, a world-class find.
Dr. Irving Finkel, British Museum

The Discovery

A significant discovery related to Biblical history was made in the British Museums great Arched Room which holds nearly 130,000 Assyrian cuneiform tablets.{1} Among the tablets, some of which date back nearly 5000 years, one tablet in particular, measuring only 2.13 inches wide or about the size of a small cigarette pack, was recently translated by Assyriologist and Professor from the University of Vienna, Dr. Michael Jursa. This cuneiform tablet was dated to 595 BC, or the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

When deciphered it named a high ranking official of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar named *Nebo-Sarsekim*. Nebo-Sarsekim is also named in the Book of Jeremiah 39:1-3. The passage reads:

> *This is how Jerusalem was taken: In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and laid siege to it. 2 And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiahs eleventh year, the city wall was broken through. 3 Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar,* ***Nebo-Sarsekim*** *a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon.*

Jeremiah identifies Nebo-Sarsekim as a chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar who was with the King at the siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Jeremiah records that several of Nebuchadnezzars

top officials took seats in the Middle Gate once they broke through the walls of Jerusalem.

The Assyrian tablet identifies Nebo-Sarsekim as the chief eunuch of Nebuchadnezzar, thus confirming Jeremiahs reference. The full translation of the tablet reads:

> *(Regarding) 1.5 minas (0.75 kg or 1.65 pounds) of gold, the property of **Nabu-sharrussu-ukin**, the chief eunuch, which he sent via Arad-Banitu the eunuch to [the temple] Esangila: Arad-Banitu has delivered [it] to Esangila. In the presence of Bel-usat, son of Alpaya, the royal bodyguard, [and of] Nadin, son of Marduk-zer-ibni. Month XI, day 18, year 10 [of] Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.{2}*

The tablet is the financial record of Nebo-Sarsekims gift of gold given to the Temple of Esangila, which was located in the fabled Hanging Gardens of Babylon.{3} This financial transaction took place in the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar while Nabu-Sarsekim was serving as the chief officer to Nebuchadnezzar. This was nine years before the siege of Jerusalem. Dr. Jursa states, “It’s very exciting and very surprising. Finding something like this tablet, where we see a person mentioned in the Bible making an everyday payment to the temple in Babylon and quoting the exact date, is quite extraordinary.”{4}

The Significance of the Discovery

The significance of this discovery is that the Tablet of Nabu is a text outside of the Bible that confirms Jeremiahs record of Nebo-Sarsekim as a historical figure. Nebo-Sarsekim is not a prominent figure, but the fact that Jeremiah was accurate on details such as these adds considerable credibility to the Book of Jeremiah. If a writer is accurate on minor details like this, we can be confident that other recorded events which may not have archaeological confirmation are also true.

Dr Irving Finkel, assistant keeper in the Department of the Middle East stated, “This is a fantastic discovery, a world-class find. If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, which other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole of the narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power.”{5}

This discovery of the Tablet of Nabu is yet another among thousands of archaeological findings that confirm characters, places, and events mentioned in the Bible. Not only are major historical figures confirmed, but so have many minor characters such as Nebo-Sarsekim and others also been confirmed. Dr. Geza Vermes, the eminent emeritus professor of Jewish studies at the University of Oxford, said that such a discovery revealed that “the Biblical story is not altogether invented.” He added, “This will be interesting for religious people as much as historians.”{6} When a work has so much historical and archaeological confirmation, particularly when it comes to minor details, we can be confident that it is indeed a very accurate historical document. Discoveries such as this tablet continue to confirm the Bibles historical accuracy. Therefore, we can have greater confidence in the historical nature of the events where we may not have extra-biblical corroboration.

Notes

1. Nigel Reynolds, “Tiny Tablet Provides Proof for Old Testament,” Telegraph.co.uk., 13 July 2007, tinyurl.com/2bbcac.
2. Ibid.
3. Dalya Alberge, “Museum’s tablet lends new weight to Biblical truth,” *The London Times* 11 July 2007, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2056362.ece
4. Ibid.
5. Nigel Reynolds, “Tiny Tablet.”
6. Dalya Alberge, “Museum’s tablet.”

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