

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
ARCHAEOLOGY



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ARCHAEOLOGY



Christianity is based on actual events that have been recorded in the Bible. Ancient history and archaeology should confirm the accuracy of this record. That is what we find when comparing these finds with the written record of Scripture.

Archaeology not only has confirmed the historical record found in the Bible, but it also provides additional details not found in the origi-

nal writings of the biblical authors. Archaeology also helps explain Bible passages by providing context of the surrounding culture as well as the social and political circumstances.

Of course, we must also admit the limitations of archaeology. Although these archaeological finds can establish the historical accuracy of the record, they cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. Also, we must admit that even when we have an archaeological find, it still must be interpreted. Those interpretations are obviously affected by the worldview perspective and even bias of the historians and archaeologists.

Even granting the skeptical bias that can be found in this field, it is still amazing that many archaeologists acknowledge the biblical confirmation that has come from significant archaeological finds.

Dr. William Albright observed,

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

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck and president of Hebrew Union College concluded, “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.”

Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, remarked that, “On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”

Old Testament Archaeology

There are so many significant archaeological finds that confirm the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous and most significant find is the Dead Sea scrolls. A young shepherd boy found the first of them in a cave in 1947. Eventually, over 800 fragments were found. This includes a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah.

Many of these scrolls are from before the time of Jesus Christ. That is important because it provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament. The earliest copies of the Old Testament that we had before this discovery were a thousand years later. When we compare the Dead Sea scrolls to these later manuscripts, we can see that there were very few variations (mostly due to changes in spelling or grammar). The transmission through the scribes was very accurate.

Another significant find was archaeological documentation of King David. Archaeologists working at one site uncovered an inscription that means “house of David” that dates to the ninth century BC. It is worth mentioning that the inscription was sealed by a later Assyrian destruction layer. That means that there was no possibility of any intrusion by later artifacts and helped to date the inscription mentioning the second king of the united monarchy.

Another important archaeological find was the Hittite nation. The Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament, but there was no solid archaeological evidence they existed until the 20th century. Some argued that the Bible must be wrong since it mentions this nation but archaeological evidence was lacking.

The Hittites were a major force against the Jews. Israel needed to conquer them

in order to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). King David had Uriah the Hittite killed because of his adultery with his wife, Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:3-21). Fortunately, archaeologists did uncover abundant evidence of the Hittites in Turkey. They found a temple, sculptures, and a storeroom with 10,000 clay tablets. Later they even uncovered the Hittite capital city of Hattusha.

New Testament Archaeology

Jesus spent much of his time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the fishing industry there (anchors, fishhooks), which would have been used by many of the disciples. The houses were one-story buildings with roofs of wooden beams or branches. This explains how men carried a man to the roof and let him down in front of Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark

1:21-22, Luke 4:31-36). The remains of a synagogue built in the 4th century sit atop the black basalt foundations of this synagogue that existed at the time of Jesus.

In Jerusalem are many archaeological discoveries from the time of Jesus. That includes the remains of the temple as well as the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

Archaeology (as well as history) verifies the existence of many political leaders mentioned in the New Testament. A denarius coin shows a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. This is also significant because Jesus asked the people whose likeness was on the coin (Mark 12:17). The name Pontius Pilate was found in an inscription at Caesarea Maritima. Archaeologists have uncovered a marble floor that apparently is a remnant of pavement in the palace of Herod Antipas.

Critics used to challenge the historical record of Luke because of alleged inaccuracies. For example, he recorded that Lysanias was the Tetrach of Abilene, but history only recorded that Lysanias was the ruler of Chalcis. Then archaeologists found an inscription that named Lysanias as Tetrarch. It turns out there had been two government officials with the same name.

Classical scholar Colin Hemer documents that Luke is a very accurate historian. He identifies 84 facts in the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Within the last few years, there have been major archaeological discoveries that further confirm biblical history. An article in *Christianity Today* provides a list of the top ten archaeo-

logical discoveries of 2018. Here are just a few of these important discoveries.

Archaeologists uncovered an inscription on a pillar in an ancient potter's village. The inscription includes the name Jerusalem written in Hebrew. This calls to mind the potter's field (Matthew 27:7) bought by the priest with the money Judas returned.

When ISIS terrorists captured Mosul, they blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. This uncovered the remains of a palace of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon. As one article put it, "ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible." Inscriptions found in the old city of Nineveh give an order of Assyrian kings that matches the biblical order.

An inscribed piece of limestone discovered in a tomb along the west bank of the Nile was revealed to be a Semitic abecedary (alphabet in ABC order). It dates back to the time of

Moses and fits with the statement that, "Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said" (Exodus 24:4). It turns out he wasn't the only one writing in a Semitic script in Egypt at that time.

A seal impression found in the ancient Jerusalem wall mentions the governor of the city. Governors of the city of Jerusalem are mentioned in the Old Testament (2 Kings 23:8, 2 Chronicles 18:25). One seal impression found apparently says "Isaiah the prophet." It is with other seals with "King Hezekiah of Judah."

A ring with the name "Pontius Pilate" on it was excavated decades ago but only could be read recently due to advanced photographic techniques. Of course, this is not the first time that his name has surfaced in archaeology, but it is still a significant find. The ring is not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate. It was probably worn by someone authorized to act on his

authority, who would use it to seal official communications.

This is an exciting time for archaeological investigation. New finds provide even more evidence of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Archaeology has provided abundant confirmation of the Bible.

Additional Resources

Joseph Holden and Norman Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible: Discoveries That Confirm the Reliability of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013).

Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997).

Randall Price and Wayne House, *Zondervan Handbook on Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972).

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