

# **ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE**

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# ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE I

## Introduction and Pre-Patriarchal Narratives

Archaeology involves the unearthing, reassembling, and interpreting the fragmentary remains of ancient civilizations. What each civilization leaves behind is limited by a number of factors. First of all, what survives is generally non-biodegradable (though some organic materials have been preserved in the hot, dry climate of the Near East). The most common of archaeological artifacts is the potsherd - a fragment of pottery, the remains of a utensil, often recycled as a writing surface. Building foundations have often survived also, largely because of the habit of ancient civilizations of covering destroyed cities with a layer of rubble, then rebuilding on top of the debris. This process resulted in the formation of *tells* - huge mounds that look like hills, but in reality conceal the remains of as many as a dozen or more civilizations, each built upon the rubble of its predecessor. When archaeologists explore such a site, they normally expose one layer at a time, carefully identifying the artifacts and attempting to discover the time during which the level was occupied. For the most part, their work is like rummaging through a trash dump. The occasional spectacular find - a work of art, a cache of cuneiform tablets, an important building - is the exception rather than the rule.

Archaeological finds contribute to biblical studies in a number of ways. Mainly, they supply information about the life and cultures of the peoples described in the Bible. Direct connections are infrequent. More often, artifacts enlighten previously misunderstood practices or poetic images. When direct connections do occur, they often involve the great civilizations that impinge tangentially upon the biblical narrative - the empires of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Occasionally, they provide additional information about characters mentioned in the Bible (such as Omri and Ahab, kings of Israel).

As with all other pieces of raw data, archaeological discoveries require interpretation, and the interpretation given to them will depend almost entirely upon the presuppositions of the interpreter. For instance, liberal critics have often with confidence proclaimed a biblical narrative to be fictional because of the *absence* of archaeological confirmation. Such foolish arguments from silence have often exploded in the faces of those who deny the accuracy of Scripture when later confirmation has appeared. More frequently, though, scholars have tended to approach Scripture as if it were in continuity with the archaeological discoveries relating to other Near Eastern civilizations. It is generally assumed that Hebrew religion was related to and in fact developed along the same lines as, if not indeed from, the religions of the other civilizations of the Ancient Near East. Thus scholars draw conclusions about the nature of Hebrew religion by observing the religious rites of Egyptians, Mesopotamians and Canaanites, and assume that much of Jewish religious practice was borrowed from these earlier civilizations. This is particularly true of the early Genesis narratives.

## ANCIENT CREATION NARRATIVES

There is no known ancient parallel to the biblical account of Creation, though the closest are the following:

- *Enuma Elish* - This tale originated in Sumer in the third millennium B.C. and was passed on in various forms. The oldest written copies are cuneiform tablets from around 1100 B.C.,

though they clearly were based on much older versions of the story. These tablets were part of Ashurbanipal's library, discovered in the mid-nineteenth century during the excavation of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. The narrative is not really a Creation myth *per se*, but rather the story of how the patron deity of the civilization in question came to dominate the pantheon. In the Assyrian version of the tale, Ashur is the dominant figure, while the Babylonians use it to demonstrate the prominence of Marduk, their patron god. In the context of this tale of war between the gods, a narrative of Creation emerges.

The story begins with primeval watery chaos. Out of this chaos emerge two gods, Apsu, representing fresh water, and the goddess Tiamat, who represents salt water. Apsu and Tiamat then give birth to a series of younger gods. Unfortunately, however, the younger gods are noisy and rambunctious, disturbing Apsu's sleep and keeping him from getting his work done, so he decides to destroy them. Tiamat, worried about this threat to her children, warns Ea (Enki in some versions), who then kills Apsu. This was not exactly the response Tiamat had in mind, so she, in consultation with her adviser and second husband Kingu, calls on the forces of chaos to make war on the younger gods. In doing so, she creates eleven horrible monsters to destroy her children. The younger gods are helpless against such force until a champion steps forward to take up their cause - Marduk (or Ashur, as the case may be), the son of Ea, who agrees to do battle against Tiamat if the other gods will make him their head. He enmeshes Tiamat in a net, then when she opens her mouth to breathe fire on him, he sends into her mouth the four winds, which distend her belly. He then kills Tiamat, splitting her body with his arrows. From her eyes flow the Tigris and Euphrates, and Marduk takes the pieces of her body and flings them above and below, creating the heavens and the earth, including the sun, moon, and the twelve constellations of the zodiac, establishing the lunar calendar. Ea then kills Kingu and creates human beings from his blood. Marduk then assigns different responsibilities to each god, and all are happy because mankind can now act as their servants and they are now set free from work.

- *Atrahasis* - This is another Sumerian Creation tale that exists in many versions, the oldest of which is cuneiform tablets from about 1700 B.C. from the Old Babylonian Empire. The story begins with three leading gods, Anu, Enlil, and Enki, who rule the sky, the earth, and the seas respectively. Dozens of lesser gods maintain the world, largely by digging ditches to keep the Tigris and Euphrates flowing freely. These lesser gods soon tire of this manual labor and rebel and refuse to work any longer. The sympathetic Enki suggests that human beings be created to take on the work. One of the rebels, Geshtu-e, is killed, and the birth goddess mixes his blood with clay, forming fourteen small figurines. The gods then spit on these clay figures and the birth goddess puts them into a sort of kiln for ten months, after which seven men and seven women are "born."
- Egyptian Creation myths - Ancient Egypt produced at least three distinct Creation stories, each having its origin in a different city or geographical location.

The oldest of these tales starts again with primeval chaos, called Nun. Out of this watery chaos arose the self-creating sun god, known as Atum or Ra among other names, but he had no place to stand, so he created a small hill. Then he created Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture), who in turn produced the earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut. These then created Isis and Osiris, Set and Nephthys, from who all other gods and human beings descended.

The version popular in Heliopolis was a little different. Atum, the creator god, brought Shu and Tefnut into being by spitting out the one and vomiting out the other. After

that, the story continues much like the one described above until the tears of the creator fall on the earth and man springs from them.

Elephantine, an island in the Upper Nile, had its own version of the Creation story. Khnum was their creator god, and he formed the world from an egg made out of clay, then shaped human beings on a potter's wheel.

One can easily see that no Creation story in the ancient world is in any way comparable to that found in the Bible. People nonetheless point out a few incidental similarities:

- All begin with some form of primeval chaos, and Genesis 1:2 says that “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.” Furthermore, a linguistic similarity exists between the Hebrew word translated “formless” (*tehom*) and the Akkadian Tiamat.
- Several speak of the dividing of the waters (cf. Genesis 1:6).
- Plants and animals are pictured as being created before man.
- Man is often seen as being formed by some god from clay and then given life.

In contrast to the obviously mythological character of these ancient stories, the biblical narrative seems clear and straightforward. The differences between these myths and the Genesis story are both many and fundamental. Note the following:

- The biblical narrative is monotheistic rather than polytheistic.
- In Genesis, God rather than primeval chaos is eternally existent.
- In Genesis, God creates everything, including what is “formless and void,” then gives form to it.
- Ancient Near Eastern myths say virtually nothing about how anything was made. Instead, they describe how the gods organized pre-existing matter. In Genesis, God creates everything out of nothing by the word of His mouth.
- Genesis portrays a divine unity of purpose rather than the feuding deities of the pagan myths.
- Genesis pictures a good God making a good Creation as opposed to selfish, murderous deities serving their own ends.
- Most of the creative work of the gods in the ancient myths involves bringing other gods into existence, which is clearly not the case in Genesis.
- Genesis pictures a single couple created by God rather than a whole group of humans at once.
- In Genesis, man is created in God's image to be in fellowship with Him rather than being a servant who exists for the purpose of feeding the gods through sacrifices and keeping them from having to do manual labor.

Clearly, then, while a few details may bear some similarity to one another, the underlying worldview concerning who God is, who man is, and man's purpose in the universe is radically different.

## THE FALL

Though a few archaeological discoveries have demonstrated some early parallels to the biblical account (a carving picturing a man, a woman, a tree, and a serpent that antedates Genesis,

for instance), the written accounts from ancient civilizations show virtually no connection. For instance, the *Myth of Adapa* (also found in Ashurbanipal's library) recounts the story of a man who is offered immortality. The god Ea warns him not to eat or drink what the gods offer him, but when he refuses the heavenly feast, he is told that he has missed his chance to become immortal and is cast back to the earth. Unlike the biblical account, we here have a man who loses his chance at immortality because he obeys a deceitful deity. There is also no suggestion that his choice determined the fate of his offspring, or of mankind at large.

It should not surprise us that there are no ancient parallels to the account of the Fall. Ancient polytheistic religions saw man as the offspring of gods who were themselves vicious and capricious. Man therefore was viewed as a combination of good and evil from his very inception. From the point of view of ancient civilizations, man had no state of perfection from which to fall.

## THE GENEALOGIES

A number of ancient Sumerian king lists have been discovered that have interesting similarities to the biblical genealogies. Most contain eight or nine names before the Flood, and the rulers have incredibly long reigns, adding up to over 240,000 years! Interestingly enough, if the first and last names in Genesis 5 are deleted (Adam and Noah - the Sumerian account included neither the first man nor the Flood hero), and the Sumerian numbers are read in the sexigesimal system (base 60, the rather unwieldy number system of the Sumerians) rather than the decimal system, the two lists conform to a very high degree.

## THE FLOOD

The best-known of the ancient Flood stories is found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a poem that existed in the Old Babylonian Empire in oral form in the late third millennium B.C., that was probably first written down during the biblical age of the patriarchs. The present text is based on seventh-century B.C. cuneiform tablets also found in the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. The epic tells of the adventures of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk in Mesopotamia. After the death of his friend Enkidu, he searches for the secret to immortality, and in the process encounters an old man named Utnapishtim who has found it. The tale told to Gilgamesh by Utnapishtim, which makes up only a small part of the epic, is the famous Flood story.

According to Utnapishtim, the story begins in the city of Shuruppak on the banks of the Euphrates. The population of the earth has grown rapidly, and they are so noisy that the gods are unable to sleep at night. In the face of this intolerable situation, Enlil, the councilor of the gods, advises that they destroy the human race, which they agree to do by unleashing a great Flood. The god Ea, disturbed by this plan, warns Utnapishtim in a dream to tear down his house and build a boat. Utnapishtim asks what he should tell the elders of Shuruppak, and Ea instructs him to lie, telling them that he has somehow earned the wrath of Enlil and must leave the city under the protection of Ea. Meanwhile, the gods will shower down rich harvests of fish, fowl, and grain on the city.

Utnapishtim then gathers around him the members of his family and a group of skilled craftsmen and begins to build the boat, which is to be 120 cubits on each side with seven decks and

a dome-like roof resembling the dome of the heavens. He caulks its seams with pitch, gathers supplies, stores a hoard of gold in the boat, and brings in both tame and wild animals. After seven days the work is completed, and Utnapishtim, his family, and the craftsmen celebrate by feasting, then enter the boat.

The next morning the gods send a great storm, opening the dams and dikes that held back the nether waters. The world is plunged into darkness as people are drowned in the waters. The gods themselves are terrified and flee to the highest part of the firmament, cowering in terror along its walls and weeping at the destruction they have brought upon the earth.

The storm lasts for six days, then subsides, and the surface of the sea is calm. When Utnapishtim looks out of the window of the boat, he sees no signs of life, and the only visible land is a mountain fourteen leagues distant. On this peak, Mount Nisir, the boat lands. Seven days after the boat lands on the mountain, Utnapishtim sends out a dove, which soon returns, followed by a swallow, which does the same. Finally he sends out a raven, which does not come back. He then embarks from the boat and offers a great sacrifice to the gods, who, not having eaten for weeks, “gather like flies” around the sweet-smelling offering. The gods regret what they did and determine to bar Enlil from the feast because he is the one who sent the Flood. When Enlil arrives, he is furious because some humans have survived when he intended all of them to die. Ea rebukes Enlil, telling him he should have sent a lion, a wolf, famine, or pestilence upon mankind rather than sending a Flood. Ea denies having told the secret of the gods to Utnapishtim, insisting that he had learned of it in a dream. At the end, the gods decide to bestow immortality on Utnapishtim and his wife and send them to live on an island at the end of the world, which is where Gilgamesh finds them.

The similarities between this tale and the one found in the Bible are numerous and significant, especially because the connections involve several minor details. Note the following:

- The Flood is initiated by deities who are angry with mankind. The “noise” mentioned in a number of the accounts is generally understood to refer, not to excess of sound, but to moral offenses, though this seems somewhat problematic in light of the behavior of the gods themselves in the extrabiblical narratives.
- One man is chosen by the deity for rescue from the mass destruction.
- The deliverance is to occur through the construction of a large boat.
- The boat is built by the man and his family and is caulked with pitch.
- Animals are preserved as well as man.
- Both accounts speak of water coming from the fountains of the deep.
- All life outside the great boat is destroyed.
- The boat lands on a mountaintop.
- Birds are sent out to ascertain conditions on the earth. Noah sends out a raven and two doves while Utnapishtim sends out a dove, a swallow, and a raven.
- Both men offer sacrifices to their deities after disembarking.

Those who argue that the biblical account is derivative say that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is older, it has one of its sources in the Old Babylonian Empire in which Abraham grew up, that he surely must have had knowledge of the story and have passed it on to his descendants, and thus it

became part of the mythology of the Chosen People. When the tale was incorporated into the Bible (which according to critics occurred sometime in the first millennium B.C.), the Israelites gave a monotheistic twist to the old story, retelling it in the form found in Genesis. Those who argue this way neglect the fact that the differences are far more significant than the similarities.

- Overpopulation enters into many of the pagan narratives, but is never said to be an issue in the Bible.
- The wickedness of mankind goes much farther than keeping the gods awake at night; it offends the holiness of God. This may also be seen in the relationship of the Flood narratives to the respective Creation stories. The pagan gods create man to do their work for them, but their rapid multiplication makes them more of a nuisance than a help. God created man to be stewards of His Creation, but their sin, starting from the Fall, got worse and worse until judgment could be withheld no longer.
- The polytheistic framework of the extrabiblical narratives portrays the gods as quarreling with one another and behaving selfishly and immorally, lying and encouraging the hero of the story to lie. God remains throughout the righteous judge who spares the race out of undeserved mercy.
- Utnapishtim lies to the elders of his city while Noah spends his time while the ark is being built as “a preacher of righteousness” (II Peter 2:5) whose message goes unheeded.
- The time frames in the stories are significantly different. In the pagan narratives, the boat is built in a week and the Flood lasts a week. God gives the people of Noah’s day 120 years’ notice (Genesis 6:3), during which time the ark was presumably being built, and the Flood lasts forty days and forty nights.
- The dimensions of the boats are different. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the boat is 120 cubits square and seven storeys high with a domed roof. Noah’s ark has three decks and is 300 cubits long by fifty cubits wide by thirty cubits high, apparently with a flat roof.
- The animals included in the ark are described much more thoroughly in Genesis.
- Utnapishtim bring his treasure and his workmen along with his family, while Noah brings only his wife, his sons, and their wives.
- The reaction of the gods in *Gilgamesh* is almost comic; they climb to the top of the firmament in terror and later complain that they are hungry because they miss the sacrifices of the people they have destroyed. God, having exercised His righteous judgment on sinful man, brings the Flood to an end. He doesn’t need the sacrifices of Noah for His sustenance, nor does He fear or regret the results of His handiwork.
- The boats land in different places - Mount Nisir versus the mountains of Ararat.
- Noah becomes the new father of the human race, but he is not the recipient of immortality as is the case with Utnapishtim.

These differences are fundamental because of what they say about the character of God, the nature of sin, and the place of man in the universe. If the account in the Bible is merely a revised version of an old Mesopotamian myth, one wonders why the authors of Scripture would want to adapt a story so manifestly unsuited to their understanding of God, man, and history.



## WHAT ABOUT THE LOST ARK?

According to the biblical record, Noah's ark landed on "the mountains of Ararat" after the flood waters subsided. Numerous accounts have surfaced in the last century of those who claim to have seen, touched, or even walked around in the ark. Expeditions have been mounted with varying reports of success, but nothing conclusive has ever been established. Problems include identifying the actual site, which scholars today still dispute, along with the inaccessibility of the region (near the borders of Turkey, Iran, and Armenia) for both climatic and military reasons. Claims of sightings have been challenged for a variety of reasons - lack of confirmation, varying results of carbon dating on wood supposedly taken from the ark, insistence that sightings from a distance involved natural rock formations, and a few examples of outright hoaxes.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

Archaeologists have discovered over a dozen examples of Babylonian ziggurats, multi-leveled towers used as temples to the gods. The top level usually consisted of an astrological shrine of some kind, thus illuminating the phrase in Genesis 11:4. The tower-builders sinned, not so much in self-sufficiency or in refusing to spread out, but in idolatry - building a shrine to the gods of the heavens, and thinking thereby to manipulate the deities who surely needed their offerings.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES

Liberal scholars look at the similarities given above, particularly in relation to the Creation and Flood accounts, note that, from any perspective, the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts are older than the book of Genesis, and blithely conclude that the similarities prove that the Hebrews borrowed their cosmogony from their forebears in Mesopotamia. The important differences in the accounts, however, may better be explained by viewing the Sumerian and Babylonian myths as sin-distorted accounts of the actual incidents recorded faithfully in the Bible. Obviously, such a conclusion stems from presuppositions about the reliability and divine inspiration of Scripture, but it should be noted that opposite presuppositions lie at the root of the opposing conclusions. *Enuma Elish* and the *Gilgamesh* epic do not demonstrate that Genesis is merely an elevated ancient myth. Instead, they demonstrate that the knowledge of mankind's beginnings was preserved through prehistory, and shows how much those events were distorted by human sinfulness and man's propensity to create his gods in his own image.



## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE II

### The World of the Patriarchs

When we turn to archaeology for information about the patriarchal period, we find no direct substantiation of the biblical narratives of Genesis 12-50. Instead, we find discoveries that give us information about life during the first half of the second millennium B.C., as well as those that confirm the existence of peoples, places, and practices mentioned in the Bible.

#### MAJOR SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Important digs that shed light on the patriarchal era include those at Ur, Mari (eighteenth century B.C. Akkadian city where 20,000 tablets were unearthed, mostly consisting of royal correspondence), Boghaz-Koy (sixteenth century B.C. Hittite capital where 10,000 tablets containing archives of the Hittite monarchy were unearthed), and Nuzi (fifteenth century B.C. Hurrian city where several thousand tablets from a personal archive were found). In addition, almost every city mentioned in the patriarchal narratives has been located and excavated.

#### WHEN DID THE PATRIARCHS LIVE?

According to the chronological information contained in Genesis, the patriarchs lived in the early part of the second millennium B.C. The commonly-accepted traditional date for the life of Abraham is 2000 B.C. Liberal scholars have challenged this date for several centuries, largely because of their belief that the books of the Pentateuch were written during Israel's monarchy and compiled in the Intertestamental Period by some anonymous redactor. However, their insistence that the conditions described in Genesis cannot possibly fit the early centuries of the second millennium before Christ are gradually being discredited by discoveries in the region. Though neither the patriarchs themselves nor the incidents described in Genesis have ever been mentioned in archaeological discoveries, a great deal of corollary evidence has been unearthed.

#### UR OF THE CHALDEES

Abraham's birthplace is usually identified with Ur Kasdim in southern Mesopotamia, the capital of the Sumerian and Old Babylonian empires, though some scholars argue in favor of Urartu in northern Mesopotamia. Abraham would have lived in the city during its great third dynasty, founded by Ur-Nammu. Digs on the site have uncovered information about living conditions (two-story brick houses with rooms arranged about a central court, with servant and guest quarters on the first floor and rooms for the family upstairs), education (a high level of literacy, schools where students learned to read, write, and calculate sums, differences, products, quotients, and even square and cube roots!), commerce (ships brought goods to Ur after journeys of up to two years), and religion (their chief deity was the moon god Nanna, who was honored at the pinnacle of the great ziggurat in the center of the city). Abraham thus left a city at the peak of its prosperity and power to follow the call of God and trust His promise to seek a land that he had never seen.

## THE PATRIARCHS IN HARAN

Abraham and his family left Ur and traveled to Haran, where the clan settled for a while until the death of Abraham's father Terah. Part of the clan remained, and it was to this portion of the family that both Isaac (in the person of Abraham's servant) and Jacob returned to seek wives. Digs at Haran verify that the city was occupied during the patriarchal era, but the most important finds have been at Mari. The correspondence between the Akkadian king and his ambassadors in Babylon mentions several places that correspond to those mentioned in Genesis and also indicates that towns existed with the same names as some of the ancestors of Abraham listed in Genesis 11. The appearance of the names Nahor, Terah, Serug, and Reu gives an added air of authenticity to some of the secondary details of the Genesis account. There can be no doubt that Semitic peoples lived in the region of Upper Mesopotamia in the patriarchal era.

## THE PATRIARCHS IN PALESTINE

After the death of Terah, Abraham traveled to the Promised Land, where he basically lived as a nomad. At various times, he lived in Shechem, Hebron, and Beersheba. Excavations at these and other sites mentioned in Genesis have confirmed occupancy during the patriarchal era, though archaeologists have found no mention of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. In Hebron, a well dating to the time of Abraham has been discovered, and it could well be the one mentioned in Genesis as having been dug by the patriarchs (it is honored as such by Muslims in the region today). The cave of Machpelah, where Abraham buried Sarah and where he himself was later buried, is now sealed off by a mosque. Though archaeologists have not been granted permission to explore the site, evidence of remains in the cave has existed from the era of the Crusades (though admittedly the accounts of Crusaders must be taken with a large grain of salt), and was enhanced by the testimony of soldiers who took refuge in the cave during World War I.

The work of Jewish rabbi-archaeologist Nelson Glueck in the Negev uncovered much evidence to support the Genesis account. He unearthed remains that showed that the region was populous and flourishing in Abraham's time. One looking at the region today would wonder how Lot could have chosen it. In the early second millennium B.C., however, it was a garden spot. The entire area lies over a major geological fault line (the Syrian Rift), and is plagued by frequent earthquake activity. Glueck discovered that the cities in the region ceased to be inhabited at about the time of Abraham's sojourn due to an earthquake accompanied by the release of underground natural gas that then exploded, raining fire and brimstone down on the whole region. Most archaeologists believe that the accompanying geological upheaval altered the configuration of the Dead Sea, so that what now constitutes the shallow southern end of that body of water covers the ancient sites of Sodom and Gomorrah. In addition, discoveries in the region have confirmed details of the story such as the gate of the city being the place for conversation and decisions by the elders, and the doors being thick and strong enough to withstand assault by an unruly and lecherous mob of Sodomites.

Several incidents from the life of Abraham have been consistent targets for attack by liberal scholars. One of these is the battle of the kings in Genesis 14, and the other is Abraham's visit to Egypt. Discoveries have shown, however, that the names of the places and rulers mentioned in

Genesis 14 are appropriate to the period, and even confirmed the rather unusual line of march as typical of armies of the era coming from Mesopotamia to Palestine.

As far as Abraham's visit to Egypt is concerned, scholars long argued that the Egyptians were so paranoid about foreigners that none were permitted into the country until the latter part of the second millennium B.C. However, a tomb painting in Egypt from around 2000 B.C. contains pictures of Semitic peoples, making it clear that such people were common visitors to Egypt in the days of Abraham. Egyptian records also speak of a Pharaoh who killed a man in order to take the man's wife into his harem, thus indicating that Abraham's fears were not groundless on that score.

The most interesting material to shed light on the patriarchal period in Palestine is the discovery at Nuzi. Though this family archive dates from fully five hundred years after the time of Abraham, it contains information confirming a number of the cultural practices found in Genesis. The tablets tell of the expectation that a barren wife would provide a handmaid for her husband in order to continue the family line and provide an heir, that fathers could demand of their sons-in-law that they not take other wives (as Laban did of Jacob), that deathbed pronouncements by the head of the clan were considered legally binding, that daughters had reason to expect that part of the bride price would be set aside for their maintenance (as Leah and Rachel expected from Laban), that the possession of household gods carried with it the right of inheritance (though this does not fully explain why Rachel stole Laban's teraphim, since Laban was still alive at the time), and that it was common practice for a childless man to adopt an adult to become his heir with the understanding that such an adoption would be nullified if the man later had a son of his own.

Also shedding light on this era is the discovery of the royal Hittite archives at Boghaz-Koy. For many years, scholars scoffed at the mention of the Hittites in Genesis, believing that no such people ever existed. When the Hittite capital was excavated, however, the tablets proved that the Hittites were just beginning to exert influence in Palestine during the time of Abraham, rose to the height of their power during the sojourn of Israel in Egypt (not coincidentally, this was also the era of the Hyksos dynasty), and that they were in decline by the time of the conquest under Joshua. The tablets also showed that the form taken by the biblical covenants was a common structure followed by the Hittites and other nations of the region in the second millennium B.C.

## THE PATRIARCHS IN EGYPT

We will deal with the events surrounding the Exodus next week, and at that time we will examine some of the issues associated with the date of the event. At this point, it should suffice to note that the Hyksos era (17<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) would fit very nicely with the time of Joseph's ascent to power (in fact, their dynasty gives evidence of a number of Canaanites in positions of great authority), and the strong reaction of "the king who knew not Joseph" would characterize very well the anti-foreign attitude of the dynasty that finally threw the alien Hyksos out of the country. Egyptian records also indicate the accuracy of such details as the practice of giving a trustworthy slave authority over the affairs of the household, the location of storehouses in Egyptian homes in such a way that the steward would be regularly passing through the family compound, the titles ascribed to Joseph, the practice of giving a foreigner in authority an Egyptian name, and the time frame associated with Jacob's burial.



## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE III

### The Exodus

The great foundational event of Israelite history has left nothing but a void on the pages of secular history. Not a trace remains of the Israelite oppression, the man Moses, the plagues, the Exodus, or the wilderness wanderings. In what way, then, can archaeology help to shed light on these important events?

#### THE DATE OF THE EXODUS

While a bewildering variety of theories have been proposed in connection with the Exodus, two approaches predominate - one that dates the Exodus around 1440 B.C. and one that dates it one hundred and fifty years later, in 1290 B.C. The two theories derive from divergent interpretations of available evidence, as follows:

The biblical chronological data are taken literally by those favoring the early date and viewed as symbolic by those favoring the later one. I Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26 both indicate a mid-fifteenth century date for the Exodus. Late-date proponents argue that the number in I Kings represents twelve generations symbolically accounted as forty years each and dismiss Jephthah as an ignorant bumpkin who wouldn't have known anything about chronology. Late-date advocates in general discount the chronological information given in the book of Judges. Their scheme would not allow for anything near the time required by the data given in the book.

Also, Acts 7:30 and Exodus 2:23 would lead to the conclusion that the pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites ruled for at least forty years. Only two pharaohs fit that description - Thutmose III (1504-1450 B.C.) and Rameses II (1290-1224). Early-date advocates thus identify Thutmose as the pharaoh of the oppression, but late-date advocates again discount the biblical data and identify Rameses as the pharaoh of the Exodus.

The Merneptah Stela, recounting the military exploits of an Egyptian pharaoh in 1220 B.C., speaks of the Israelites as having been defeated by him in Palestine. Early-date advocates see this as evidence that Israel was already established in the land by then; late-date advocates note that this is the first and only mention of the Israelites in Egyptian records, despite several incursions into Palestine in the time of Rameses II.

The Amarna tablets, a series of letters from a Palestinian king to the Egyptian pharaoh Akhnaten in the fourteenth century B.C., speak of the terror being caused by a people called the *Habiru*. Early-date advocates see this as evidence of Joshua's battles of conquest, while late-date advocates point out (rightly) that *Habiru* cannot be equated completely with "Hebrews" because the Egyptians used the term to describe a variety of Canaanite peoples.

Under the early-date proposal, Amenophis II would have been the pharaoh of the Exodus. His son and successor, Thutmose IV, left a Dream Stela (affixed to the Sphinx, which he excavated after it had been buried in the sand of the desert), in which he spoke of a dream in which the Sphinx came to him and told him he would rule Egypt some day. This obviously shows that he was not the

oldest son of Amenophis II. Early-date advocates see in this evidence of the tenth plague, while late-date advocates say it proves nothing.

Site excavation is controversial. The treasure cities built by the Israelite slaves, Pithom and Raamses, were built during the Hyksos era, but rebuilt several times thereafter. The latter became the northern capital of Rameses II. Late-date advocates argue that the names given in Exodus were used during the thirteenth-century rebuilding, while early-date advocates counter by saying that the Israelites built earlier versions of the cities, and that the names given were anachronisms used for clarity (such as the use of Dan for Laish in Genesis 14). In either case, though, the construction techniques confirm in interesting details the information given in Exodus (such as the use of straw as an adhering agent).

Excavations of the scenes of the Conquest in Palestine, such as Jericho and Hazor, also yield conflicting evidence that has been interpreted differently by those in the two camps, but we will talk more about those excavations next week.

Exodus 12:40 gives the duration of the sojourn in Egypt as 430 years. This would place the entrance of Jacob and his family either in the early nineteenth century or the late eighteenth century. Late-date advocates either ignore this bit of chronology or use it to support their position, since the late-date entrance into Egypt would correspond with the beginning of Hyksos rule. Early-date advocates point out that Semites were clearly in evidence in Egypt prior to the Hyksos period.

Encounters with the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites during the wilderness wanderings are used by late-date advocates to support their position. They point out that no evidence of settlements by these peoples exists prior to the thirteenth century B.C. Early-date advocates respond that, since Israel obviously was a nomadic people capable of fielding a sizable army, why should not the tribes attacking them also have been nomadic?

## MOSES

Of Moses we have no archaeological evidence, though a few tantalizing suggestions do exist. First of all, the name clearly is Egyptian in character. The root means “to draw out,” and it came to be used in Egyptian to speak of birth, and thus sonship. Thutmose was therefore “the son of Thut” (an Egyptian deity). Moses was thus named “child,” “kid,” or “hey you!”

The early-date reconstruction also suggests the possible identity of the princess who pulled Moses from the water. The pharaoh at the time of Moses’ birth would have been Thutmose I. Since this was less than a generation after the expulsion of the Hyksos, anti-foreign feelings would have been running high, and the decree recorded in Exodus 1 not out of the question. Thutmose I had a daughter named Hatshepsut, who was his only direct heir. The Egyptians would not accept a woman as their ruler, so her half-brother took the throne when Thutmose I died. He also left no heir, however, so Hatshepsut’s stepson was to succeed him. Hatshepsut herself took over as regent when her half-brother died, and ruled the country very effectively until her stepson came of age. He became the great Thutmose III, who extended the borders of his kingdom up through Palestine and to the banks of the Euphrates river. This same king developed such a great hatred of his stepmother, whom he felt had unjustly kept him from the throne (he didn’t gain power until she died), that he had



all records of her expunged, even to the point of chiseling carvings of her from the walls of tombs and monuments. This strong-willed woman could well have been the princess who rescued Moses and claimed him as her son. It would also explain why Thutmose III would have been so anxious to get him out of the country.

## THE PLAGUES

The behavior of Thutmose III in the case of Hatshepsut also illustrates a characteristic of the Egyptians that makes the job of archaeologists much more difficult. They couldn't handle bad news. As a result, their inscriptions only speak well of their pharaohs and of the land of Egypt in general. Remains of the Hyksos suffered the same fate as those of Hatshepsut - the only ones that remain were the ones that were lucky enough to get buried quickly before they could be expunged. Thus it should come as no surprise that Egyptian records say nothing of the plagues recorded in Exodus, nor the loss of tens of thousands of slaves, nor the loss of the royal army in the debacle at the Red Sea.

Archaeology has confirmed, however, that the plagues that God sent against the Egyptians were judgments against their gods as well as against the people and their ruler. Each one was an attack on a specific deity or some aspect of the sacred fertility cycle, from the Nile River to the fertility goddess represented as a frog to the sacred bull of Apis to the sun god Aten to the Pharaoh himself, deified by the people of Egypt.

## THE ROUTE OF THE EXODUS

About all that scholars agree upon about the Exodus is that it began in Goshen in the eastern part of the Nile delta and ended at Kadesh-barnea at the southern tip of Palestine. All the sites mentioned in between are uncertain, including the locations of the Sea of Reeds and Mount Sinai.

The translation of the Hebrew *yam suph* as "Red Sea" has generated a few problems over the years, not the least of which is Cecil B. DeMille's film account of the Exodus, but the correct translation "Sea of Reeds" poses no significant threat to the biblical account. The series of lakes and marshes stretching from the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean Sea had to have been crossed by the fleeing Israelites. Whatever the nature of the body of water parted miraculously by the Lord, it had to have been deep enough to have drowned the pursuing Egyptians.

Those who suggest a northern route for the Exodus point out that it would have been the shortest path to Canaan, but ignore the comment of Exodus 13:17 that God deliberately led the Israelites away from the fortified road along the Mediterranean. The traditional location of Mount Sinai, Jebel Musa in the southern portion of the peninsula, fits the description of being eleven days' journey from Kadesh-barnea (Deuteronomy 1:2). The cities mentioned as being along the route of the Exodus have never been successfully identified, as the wanderings undoubtedly took them throughout the peninsula.

## THE LAW OF MOSES

Early critics argued that the law of Moses must have been composed during the period of the monarchy at the earliest, and assigned much of it to the post-exilic era, suggesting that such a complex law code could not have been composed at such an early period in history. Subsequent discoveries of a variety of law codes antedating those of Moses by centuries, including the great law code of Hammurabi, have silenced such objections, though critics now have reversed themselves and insisted that any similarities between the Mosaic law and these earlier codes prove that Moses borrowed his ideas from Canaanite and Mesopotamian antecedents.

The discovery of Ugaritic religious writings from the fifteenth century B.C. at Ras Shamra in northern Syria has done much to illuminate the Mosaic law, however. The tablets describe Canaanite religious rituals and prove that many of the practices proscribed by the Mosaic law were indeed being practiced by the Canaanites at that time. One interesting example of this is the practice of “seething a kid in its mother’s milk,” mentioned three times in the Pentateuch. The Ras Shamra tablets have shown that this was one of the Canaanite rituals intended to gain the cooperation of the fertility gods.

## THE WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

Of these no evidence has survived. Scholars have suggested that manna could have been the sap of the tamarisk tree which, when digested and excreted by certain insects, becomes a white pulpy substance deposited on the leaves of trees. Such an identification is unlikely, given the description in Numbers of the provision of the food six days a week for forty years and its absence on the Sabbath.

Critics also attack the Tabernacle, of course, but have no basis except their own presuppositions on which to do so.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE IV

### The Conquest and the Period of the Judges

In the same way that the account in the book of Joshua is a continuation of that found in the Pentateuch, so today's discussion of archaeological evidence is a continuation of that covered last week. The main reason for this is that the controversy about the date of the Exodus is inextricably related to that involving the date of the conquest of the land under Joshua. The problem here is even more acute, however, since significant evidence has been uncovered to support both early date and late date theories.

#### THE CHARACTER OF CANAANITE RELIGION

Though numerous findings throughout Palestine have confirmed the depraved nature of Canaanite religion, the most complete picture available is that unearthed at Ras Shamra, the ancient capital of the Ugaritic kingdom. Many of the tablets found at Ras Shamra contained religious poetry and give a fairly complete picture of the Canaanite cultus. Though variations existed from place to place, Canaanite religion may be summarized thusly.

The Canaanites worshiped a god named El, the great Father who made earth and mankind. Like Zeus of ancient Greece, he was bloodthirsty, killing off rival deities (even members of his own family) without compunction, and lustful, often cohabiting, forcefully or otherwise, with goddesses and mortal women alike. His place at the head of the pantheon had been taken by his son Baal, the storm god, who sent the rain needed to water the land. He was accompanied by one or more of three sister-consorts, Anath, Astarte, and Asherah. The worship of these deities coincided with the cycle of the agricultural year and consisted largely of a wide variety of fertility rituals, including cult prostitution (both male and female) and human sacrifice. Images of the consorts of Baal are almost always naked, and are a bizarre combination of virginity and fecundity.

Thus the Canaanites had taken God's promise of regular seasons and ascribed His blessings to the most vile of deities, whom they worshiped with unspeakable rites. Is it any wonder that God commanded the Israelites to destroy them?

#### JERICHO AND THE BEGINNING OF THE CONQUEST

The miraculous crossing of the Jordan River near Jericho has been corroborated by numerous fragments of evidence. The Bible says that the waters of the Jordan were piled up near Adam, and that the riverbed was dry down to the mouth of the Dead Sea. Scholars have uncovered at least seven accounts of incidents in history where the Jordan River has done exactly what the book of Joshua describes, the most recent of them in 1927. In the region around Adam, the Jordan flows between high cliffs. Since the entire Syrian rift is subject to periodic earthquake activity, portions of the cliffs sometimes collapse into the river, damming it up for a brief period of time and draining the riverbed down to the mouth of the Dead Sea. God may well have miraculously timed such an earthquake to bring His people into the Promised Land.

Once they arrived, they confronted the walled city of Jericho, an oasis in the Jordan Valley and the oldest city ever uncovered by archaeologists, with layers dating back to about 8000 B.C. The

archaeological evidence at Jericho has been a matter of great dispute. One of the earlier scholars to explore the tell, British archaeologist John Garstang, announced that he had found evidence of the Israelite conquest and that the destruction of the city not only fit the description given in Joshua, but also fit the biblical date of the Exodus - about 1400 B.C. Twenty years later, another British archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon, did a much more thorough excavation of the site and announced that Garstang's dating had been faulty - that the city he had uncovered had been destroyed about 1550 B.C. - too early for the Israelite conquest - and that the site had remained uninhabited until long after the conquest was completed. She thus concluded that the biblical story of the fall of Jericho was a complete fabrication.

Kenyon died before she was able to publish a complete account of her findings, and thus her conclusions remained unsubstantiated for several decades. When her findings were published posthumously in the early eighties, it became clear that her conclusions on the date of the destruction of the city were based on the absence of certain types of pottery characteristic of the fifteenth century B.C. The major problem with her conclusion is that the area she excavated was part of the poorer section of the city, and the type of pottery she sought was of the expensive imported variety. Ironically, Garstang, who had excavated another section of the tell, found the very kind of pottery that Kenyon sought in vain, but had said nothing about it because at the time the science of pottery dating had not advanced to the point where he saw any significance in his finds. Consequently, Kenyon's conclusions were based on faulty assumptions and on the limited scope of the area in which she did her excavations.

The other features of the site confirm the biblical account to a remarkable degree. The city was protected by two walls, a stone outer wall and a brick inner wall. Between the two walls was an earthen rampart. Numerous houses were built on this rampart, and this region between the walls composed the poorer district of the city - probably the area in which Rahab lived (the Bible tells us she lived in a house on the walls of the city and had a window overlooking the walls). When the city was destroyed, the walls fell outward - probably due to an earthquake - so that the fallen bricks and stones formed a ramp that gave the invaders easy access into the suddenly-undefended and indefensible populated region. The city was thoroughly burned by the invaders, leaving a full yard of ash and rubble covering the site.

Interestingly, excavators discovered large amounts of grain in the storerooms of the city. This is important for several reasons. First of all, it was common in the ancient world for cities to be taken by prolonged sieges. The Egyptians customarily laid siege to a city just before the grain harvest, when their stores of food would be near exhaustion and the grain fields outside the city could be used to sustain the invading army. No siege had been used at Jericho, however - the granaries were full. This also confirms the biblical account in that the conquest began shortly after the celebration of the Passover and the end of the spring harvest. Furthermore, grain was so valuable that it was used as a medium of exchange, and invading armies characteristically plundered the granaries of conquered cities. This had not happened in Jericho, however, in accord with the command given by God that nothing was to be taken from the city, and that it was to be burned to the ground. Even Kenyon's discovery of the long period during which the site was uninhabited confirms the biblical account on that score.

## THE PROBLEM OF AI

After the destruction of Jericho, Joshua and the Israelites turned to the nearby city of Ai, where they were soundly beaten because of Achan's sin in keeping plunder from Jericho. Once Achan had been dealt with, the city was conquered and destroyed. The problem here is that the site normally identified as Ai (et-Tell) was not inhabited during the entire second millennium B.C., which allowed liberals to argue that the entire Ai story was fabricated. More recently, excavations at Khirbet el-Maqtar have revealed characteristics that make it a good candidate for the biblical Ai, leaving liberals once again with worthless arguments from silence.

## THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN

Having defeated Ai, the Israelites renewed the covenant on Mounts Ebal and Gerazim, a natural amphitheater with the town of Shechem in the valley in between. After being fooled into making a treaty with the Gibeonites, Joshua agreed to protect them if they would become "woodcutters and water carriers" for the Israelites. Archaeology has confirmed the ability of the Gibeonites to do these things. Not only is the city of Gibeon surrounded by hills that were once heavily wooded, but the town itself possesses a remarkably complex water system, including both above-ground and underground cisterns and reservoirs that would allow it to obtain water to withstand any enemy siege.

The Israelites then encountered the cities of the Amorite league, a confederation of towns in southern Palestine. These cities included Hebron, Lachish, and Eglon, as well as Jerusalem. Excavations of these sites show that all were burned in the late thirteenth century B.C. - the time that would fit the late date of the Exodus - and give no evidence of destruction in the early fourteenth century. It is worth noting, however, that Joshua 10 tells us that Israel destroyed the inhabitants of these towns, but says nothing about the destruction of the cities themselves. In fact, we know that by the time of the judges, Jerusalem was again under the control of the pagan Jebusites. The late-thirteenth century burnings could well have been inflicted by the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah, whose stela was mentioned in last week's lesson.

## HAZOR AND THE NORTHERN CAMPAIGN

The early verses of Joshua 11 describe the defeat of the northern confederacy, led by Jabin, the king of Hazor. The problem posed here is greater than that of the southern campaign, because the Bible specifically says that Hazor was burned, and again the burn level falls into the latter part of the thirteenth century. Not only that, but the layer above the burned city contains remains that are clearly Israelite in nature.

The obvious response is that the destroyed city is from the time of the judges, when Deborah and Barak defeated an army led by Sisera, the captain of the host of a later Jabin of Hazor. The problem here is that the account in Judges says nothing of Hazor being destroyed. More recent excavations, however, have located an earlier burn level that fits the early date of the Exodus. The site also contained mutilated images of Canaanite gods - certainly not something that would have been done by other Canaanites or by Egyptian invaders.

## THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

The period of the judges was an unsettled period in the history of Israel, and indeed in that of the entire region of Palestine. The Egyptians and the Hittites, who had struggled for control of the region for most of the second millennium B.C., were in no position to exert control - Egypt was going through one of its periodic dynastic struggles, and the Hittite empire was declining, soon to disappear into oblivion.

The period of the judges poses a problem for advocates of the late date for the Exodus because the Bible gives so much chronological information about the period. If taken sequentially, the biblical narrative would consume 410 years - far too much, even from a conservative perspective. Scholars have thus concluded that the judgeships mentioned in the book must have been largely regional, and thus could easily have overlapped. It is one thing to have them overlap into the period of 350 years required by the early date, and quite another to squeeze them into the 200 years that would be left by late-date advocates. Liberals don't try, of course - they simply ignore the chronological notes in the book of Judges, assuming their inaccuracy.

From a conservative standpoint, however, the period of the judges may be fit quite nicely into what we know of Egyptian history in the latter part of the second millennium B.C. Periods of invasion fit snugly into eras when Egypt is preoccupied with internal troubles or ruled by weak pharaohs, and periods of peace and stability fit into times when Egypt reasserted its control of the region.

## THE PHILISTINES

Toward the end of the period of the judges, Israel faces a new arch-enemy in the form of the Philistines. Archaeology has identified the Philistines as part of a larger migration of seafaring peoples fleeing the collapse of the Mycenaean empire after the fall of Troy. They sailed across the Mediterranean, stopping briefly on Cyprus, then staged an invasion of Egypt, the successful repulsion of which was recorded on the wall of the tomb of the victorious pharaoh. The invaders were then given land in Egyptian territory in return for serving the pharaoh, and some settled in southern Palestine, which was nominally under Egyptian control. [That some Philistines had settled the region earlier is affirmed by the book of Genesis, but has not been confirmed by archaeological evidence and is thus doubted by liberal scholars.]

Archaeology has confirmed that the Philistines, from whom Palestine derives its name, controlled the cities ascribed to them in Scripture in the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C. The artifacts recovered show them to be quite unlike the uncultured boors to whom their name is often applied today. In fact, their pottery brought to the region the refined techniques practiced on their home island of Crete. They also brought with them the technique of ironworking, which gave them a huge military advantage over the Israelites, who were still in the Bronze Age. The Bible indicates that they maintained a monopoly over ironworking until their defeat at the hands of David. Archaeologists have also confirmed that the Philistines quickly adopted the gods and cult practices of the Canaanites, including the worship of the grain god Dagon and the goddess Ashtoreth (Astarte).

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE V

### The United Monarchy

As one might expect, the closer we get to the present time, the more archaeological evidence is available to substantiate the biblical narratives. Thus the accounts of the United Monarchy period, despite the *almost* complete absence of references to specific biblical characters, find more substantial support than any we have thus far studied.

#### SAMUEL AND THE YEARS OF TRANSITION

Samuel played a critical role in the development of the nation of Israel. He was the last of the judges, a faithful priest, the first of the prophets, and the man used by God to anoint Israel's first two kings. While Samuel lived, Israel was a loose confederation of tribes united only by their common sanctuary at Shiloh. Here the Ark of the Covenant rested in a tent similar to (or perhaps identical to) the wilderness Tabernacle. Priests such as Eli exercised considerable authority in the life of the nation.

Israel's main enemy at this time was the Philistines. We talked last week about how peoples from Crete and Turkey had invaded the domain of the Egyptian pharaohs in the twelfth century B.C., and that some of these had settled in southwestern Canaan along the Mediterranean coast. These Philistines became the dominant power in the region, and in fact gave their name to the whole area ("Palestine"). The Philistine settlement was centered around a group of five cities - Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza - along the coast. In the days of Samuel, however, they extended their influence inland and to the north as well, controlling important posts like Bethshan near Mount Gilboa. They also maintained a monopoly on the production of iron, which gave them an enormous military advantage over the bronze-age Israelites.

When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant in battle against the Israelites, Hophni and Phinehas were slain and Eli died when he heard the news. Archaeological excavations have demonstrated that Shiloh was destroyed shortly thereafter, probably by the Philistines, and that the site remained uninhabited after the middle of the eleventh century B.C., which explains why Samuel set up a circuit based on his new headquarters in Ramah.

The growing power of the Ammonites and Moabites in the east, the Arameans in the north, the Edomites in the south, and the Philistines in the west, all of whom had by this time developed monarchies of some sort (though the Philistines formed a confederation, with each major city having its own king), contributed to the demand of the Israelites for a king to reign over them "like the other nations." They clearly felt that their lack of organization around a visible leader put them at a disadvantage.

#### SAUL AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MONARCHY

Samuel anointed Saul, a strapping young man from the tribe of Benjamin, to be Israel's first king. After a clumsy effort to avoid the responsibility bestowed upon him, Saul established his capital at Gibeah and set out to meet the Philistine threat. Archaeological digs at Gibeah have uncovered a primitive fortress, constructed of uncut stones, and containing little in the way of

creature comforts, that dates from the latter part of the eleventh century. This is undoubtedly the remains of Saul's "palace," and conforms perfectly with what we know of the character of this ignorant rustic.

With the defeat and death of Saul on Mount Gilboa, the Philistines took his body, attached it to the wall of nearby Bethshan, and placed his armor in the house of their god in the city. Excavations of Bethshan have located both the city walls and the temple of Ashtaroth in question.

## DAVID AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF ISRAELITE POWER

The great kingdom built by David and maintained by Solomon was established in an era during which the great powers in the Middle East were experiencing decline. The Hittite Empire was in the last stages of irreversible decline, while the Egyptians were suffering through the closing years of a fading dynasty and the Assyrians had retreated back to the banks of the Euphrates to deal with their own internal problems. In this environment, David built an empire that stretched from the Gulf of Eilat in the south to the regions beyond Damascus in the north. He did this by establishing friendships where he could and conquering those who showed no inclination to be friendly. He conquered the Philistines, breaking the iron monopoly in the process, along with the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites, and formed alliances with some of the neighboring Aramean kingdoms (such as Toi of Hamath). His most important alliance was with the great Phoenician king Hiram of Tyre, the head of the northwestern Canaanite confederacy formed around the cities of Tyre and Sidon (Hiram was apparently another one of those royal names that was used for many generations, since an Egyptian sarcophagus dating to an era several centuries before the time of David mentioned a Phoenician ruler named Ahiram).

Liberal scholars for many years questioned the biblical accounts of David's musical accomplishments. Yet discoveries of Ugaritic sacred texts at Ras Shamra demonstrate that the kinds of instruments mentioned in the Psalms were in general use in the region at the time, and even include striking similarities to the poetic structure and phrasing of the worship music of the Israelites. Even the names given to the various musical guilds - Asaph, Heman, Ethan, etc. - are Canaanite names that were common in David's time but unknown in the era of the Exile, when liberal critics would date the worship music of Israel.

David's conquest of Jerusalem was an important step in solidifying the monarchy. Though excavations in Jerusalem have found no specific remains from the time of David, the boundaries of the Jebusite city he conquered have been located, shedding light on some of the details of his strategy for taking the virtually impregnable mountaintop fortress. Though scholars still debate the precise meaning of the verse (II Samuel 5:8) describing the taking of the city, the Jebusite water system has been unearthed.

David is also the first biblical figure to be mentioned by name in an artifact uncovered by archaeologists. Excavations at Tell Dan in 1993-1994 uncovered the city where Jeroboam erected one of his golden calves. During the dig, three fragments of an Aramaic inscription were found dating to the ninth century B.C. (one of the fragments was first spotted by a photographer taking a publicity picture in front of the newly-excavated city gate). The inscription praised the military



prowess of Ben Hadad of Syria in hyperbolic terms, including his victories over the “House of David.”

## SOLOMON AND THE GOLDEN AGE

It should come as no surprise that the greatest amount of archaeological information left behind by the United Monarchy should come from the reign of Solomon. While David fought the wars that consolidated the Kingdom of Israel, it was Solomon who built that kingdom’s lasting monuments. Numerous excavations have uncovered remains of Solomon’s kingdom, though the significance of some of them continues to be disputed by scholars.

Solomon’s greatest building project, of course, was the Temple in Jerusalem. Of this mighty structure nothing remains. Because the Dome of the Rock currently occupies the Temple Mount, archaeologists have not been able to gain access to the site where Solomon’s Temple stood, though the devastation wrought by the Babylonians and Romans makes it doubtful that they would be able to find much anyway. He also built a palace in Jerusalem of which no remains have yet been discovered.

However, archaeologists have uncovered a place of worship at Tell Tayinat in northern Syria that is remarkably similar to the description of the Temple given in the Bible. The sanctuary in Syria was built by Phoenicians at about the same time as Solomon’s Temple. The striking similarities should not be totally unexpected, since Scripture tells us that Hiram of Tyre supplied architects and builders to help Solomon with his construction projects in Jerusalem. The temple at Tayinat has the same proportions as the Jerusalem Temple but is about one-third smaller in size. It also contains a similar altar of sacrifice, along with furnishings such as free-standing pillars by the main entrance (Jachin and Boaz were probably the opening words of the inscriptions on each pillar), a large “sea” for the cleansing of priests and sacrifices, and decorative cherubim (winged sphinxes, or lions with human heads, not chubby little angels).

It is also worth noting that in the late 1970s an artifact appeared at an antiquities shop in Jerusalem that is believed to be a remnant of the First Temple. This artifact is an ivory pomegranate, about the size of a man’s thumb, inscribed with the words “Belonging to the Temple of Yahweh, holy to the priests.” Scholars believe it once formed the tip of a staff used by the priests in the Temple worship, though its authenticity is still a matter of debate. Also in dispute is the authenticity of the Jehoash Inscription. This ninth century B.C. fragment speaks of the renovation of the Temple that took place during the reign of Joash (II Kings 12:1-16). In recent years archaeologists have discovered a bone seal and a jar handle from the period and Muslim workmen have found pieces of animal bones and pottery fragments dated to the First Temple era, though more than a century after the time of Solomon.

Archaeologists have also uncovered remains of fortifications built by Solomon at the cities of Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo. These fortifications have exactly the same style and dimensions in each city. In fact, archaeologist Yigael Yadin used the discovery at Megiddo to pinpoint the fortifications at Hazor. When he marked out stakes and strings on the ground and told his workers to start digging, he told them what they would find at each spot. In each case, they uncovered exactly what he had predicted. [NOTE: At one time it was believed that the stable complex at Megiddo had

been built by Solomon, since the Bible tells us that he built cities for his chariots and horsemen throughout the land, but since the stable is located on a level higher than that of the Solomonic fortifications, it probably was built by Ahab a century later.]

Another interesting aspect of the reign of Solomon involves his commercial ventures. The description in the Bible indicates that he would have controlled both major trade routes through Palestine - the one through Transjordan and the one along the seacoast. This would have made him the middleman in all transactions between Arabia and Assyria in the east and between Egypt and Turkey on the west - a sure recipe for enormous wealth. Archaeologists have confirmed the activity of Phoenician traders as far westward as Sardinia and Spain, both of which are candidates for the location of Tarshish. In the south, Ophir, the source of Solomon's gold, has never been located, though most believe it was either in southern Arabia or on the east coast of Africa. His Red Sea trade from Ezion-geber would have brought him into contact (and possible conflict) with the queen of Sheba (present-day Yemen; the visit of the queen to Solomon was in all likelihood for the purpose of trade negotiations, though no evidence has been found in South Arabia dating as far back as the tenth century). Ezion-geber itself has never been identified either, though archaeologist Nelson Glueck thought he had found it under a tell between Eilat and Aqaba. What he originally thought was a building used to smelt copper (causing him to suggest that the rich copper mines in the southern Negev were "King Solomon's Mines") turned out to be part of a fortification whose date of construction and purpose remain unknown. Thus Ezion-geber remains a mystery. The recent identification in southern Jordan (biblical Edom) of huge copper mines dating from the tenth century B.C., however, could well be those of Israel's wealthiest monarch.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE VI

### The Divided Monarchy - Israel

When Solomon died, he was succeeded by his foolish and headstrong son Rehoboam, who rebuffed the people's demands for tax cuts by threatening even heavier levies than his father had extracted. Rehoboam's intransigence caused the ten northern tribes to secede and appoint as their king Jeroboam, who had been one of Solomon's officials. Thus began the Divided Monarchy period, which will be our subject for the next two weeks. This week, we will look at the Northern Kingdom of Israel; next week, the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The Northern Kingdom lasted for 209 years, from the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. to the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. The precision with which these dates are able to be established is due in large measure to the discovery of the royal chronicles of the Assyrians, which mention a significant number of the incidents recorded in the Bible's account of this time period. By combining the chronological data of the Eponym tablets (an eponym was a kind of royal scribe in Assyria) with that given in Scripture, much of the chronology of the Divided Monarchy period can be fixed with a large degree of certainty. It is also worth noting at this point the contributions of Edwin R. Thiele, whose doctoral dissertation on the chronology of the Divided Monarchy, published as *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, laid the groundwork that enabled scholars to harmonize the various chronologies of the period given in various sources.

During the 209 years of its existence, the Northern Kingdom was ruled by nineteen kings representing nine dynasties. As these figures would indicate, the political situation was often in turmoil, and assassinations and coups were not uncommon. All nineteen of the Israelite kings are judged by the chroniclers of biblical history to have been wicked, largely because of their persistent efforts to encourage the people in the worship of idols.

#### THE EARLY YEARS (931-885 B.C.)

When Jeroboam became king, he feared that if the people continued to go to Jerusalem to worship, they would soon want to return to the Davidic monarchy as well. In order to prevent this, he set up shrines with golden calves at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south. Excavations at Dan have uncovered what probably was the shrine erected there by Jeroboam, though, as one might anticipate, no sign of the golden calf remains.

During these early years, Israel and Judah fought each other frequently, weakening both countries and leaving them vulnerable to fragmentation - Syria, Philistia, and Moab all broke away from what had once been Solomon's great empire during these years - and attack by their greedy neighbors, particularly the emerging Syrian power in the north and Egypt in the south. Archaeologists have discovered a stela from the reign of the Syrian king Benhadad I that confirms the order of succession of the early Syrian rulers given in Scripture.

#### THE DYNASTY OF OMRI (885-841 B.C.)

With the emergence of the military leader Omri after a series of civil wars in 885, the fortunes of Israel took a turn for the better - at least in a political sense. While the Bible has nothing

good to say about the man, archaeology indicates that he was one of Israel's greatest leaders. His power was such that the Assyrian tablets refer to Israel for over a century after his death as the House of Omri. He also purchased the hill on which he built his new capital city, Samaria - an ideal location that he and his son fortified almost to the point of impregnability. The main reason Omri is criticized by the historians of Scripture is because of the marital alliance he formed with the Phoenicians, taking the daughter of the king of Sidon to be the wife of his son, the crown prince Ahab. When Jezebel became queen, she turned her efforts toward incorporating Baal-worship into the practice of Israel. Her success in doing so brought God's scathing rebukes through the mouth of Elijah the prophet.

Excavations of Samaria have uncovered the original palace built by Omri, the powerful fortifications that surrounded the city, Ahab's "ivory palace," (it was actually built from white marble, but contained many decorative ivory carvings), and extensive evidence of the idolatry, wealth, and vanity of the residents. Before long, the wealthy citizens had copied the decor of Ahab's palace in their own homes, and archaeologists have found numerous ivory carvings representing pagan deities, both Canaanite and Egyptian. They have also discovered enough makeup kits (palettes containing a variety of decorative compounds) to lead them to suspect that every woman in the city must have owned one.

Until the discovery of the House of David inscription, Omri was the first biblical character to be mentioned by name in records uncovered by archaeologists, though he is mentioned after his death. His name appears on the Moabite Stone, a four-foot stela left by Mesha, king of Moab, to record his exploits for posterity. Mesha mentions that Moab had been subjugated in the time of Omri, then goes on to boast of his fight for freedom. As previously noted, Omri's name also appears in the Assyrian tablets, but only in the form of their name for the country of Israel.

Ahab was a great builder who expanded Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo, including extensive water storage systems that represent great feats of engineering for his era. Archaeologists have concluded that the great stables discovered at Megiddo and originally ascribed to Solomon were really built by him. Confirmation of this comes in the Assyrian record of the battle of Qarqar - a battle that the Bible never mentions, but which must have been the crowning military achievement of Ahab's career - on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. The monolith lists the contributions of the various kings who opposed the Assyrian army, and Ahab's name is second, right after the Aramean king Benhadad I. His contributions included the largest number of chariots and horses, though the Arameans provided more men. Though Shalmaneser III claimed a great victory, this outcome is doubtful, since he pursued his aggressions no further and returned to his home on the Euphrates.

After the death of Ahab in battle, the Omrid dynasty declined rapidly. In the closing years of the dynasty, its kings were preoccupied with the revolt of Moab, recorded on the Moabite Stone by the boastful Mesha. The biblical account of Mesha's sacrifice of his eldest son on top of the city wall in full sight of the invading armies has been indirectly confirmed by archaeologists, who have found that such a strategy was prescribed by the followers of Chemosh, the Moabite god, as the way to lift a siege.

## THE DYNASTY OF JEHU (841-752 B.C.)

Despite the fact that Syria allied with Ahab against the Assyrians in the battle of Qarqar, the two had been enemies throughout most of the Omrid dynasty. It is ironic, therefore, that both dynasties should end by assassination at about the same time. Jehu destroyed the remains of the Omrid dynasty by slaughtering all surviving members of Ahab's family, including the bloodthirsty Jezebel, while Benhadad I was murdered by Hazael, described in Assyrian records from the period as "the son of nobody."

Jehu turned out to be great at tearing down, but not very good at building up. During his reign, Israel was subject to the power of the Assyrians, as indicated on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. The obelisk includes a picture of Jehu (the only contemporary picture of an Israelite monarch) bowing down to the ground before Shalmaneser as he offers tribute to the Assyrian king.

During the dynasty of Jehu, the Northern Kingdom's longest, the Arameans were their principal foe. Assyria was going through a period of weakness under a series of weak monarchs. This allowed Syria and Israel free reign to destroy one another. During the reign of Hazael in Syria, the Arameans had the upper hand, and Israel became a client state of Syria, but Hazael's successor Benhadad II, seriously weakened by the assault of the Assyrian monarch Adadnirari III, was repeatedly defeated by the Israelite armies, leading to Israel's greatest age of prosperity under Jeroboam II. Jeroboam turned the tables and conquered Damascus, and Syria became a client state of Israel until both were finally obliterated forever by the mighty Assyrian empire.

It was during the reign of Jeroboam II that Jonah prophesied. The city of Tarshish to which he sought to flee was a Phoenician colony on the coast of Spain. Nineveh during the eighth century B.C. was a mighty city, later brought to its height by Sennacherib. The city occupied more than 1700 acres (remember that the City of David in Jerusalem was only about *two* acres) surrounded by a wall more than seven miles long and thick enough for chariots to ride on top of it. It has been extensively excavated, including many palaces in addition to that of Sennacherib. The city is also the site of a mosque that is, according to Muslims, the burial place of Jonah.

## THE FINAL YEARS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM (752-722 B.C.)

The end of the dynasty of Jehu corresponded closely with the usurpation of the Assyrian throne by the great warrior Tiglath-pileser III, who quickly turned his attention westward and began to exert pressure on Israel and Syria. Both Menahem of Israel and Rezin of Syria are mentioned as paying tribute to Tiglath-pileser both in the Bible and in the Assyrian tablets. When the great Assyrian turned his attentions to Armenia, Rezin and Pekah of Israel formed a coalition to try to break the Assyrian yoke. When Ahaz of Judah refused to join, they besieged Jerusalem, and Ahaz wrote to Assyria for help. Tiglath-pileser was glad to oblige, and Damascus was burned to the ground in the ensuing invasion. When Pekah was assassinated, the Assyrians replaced him with the puppet ruler Hoshea. All of this is duly recorded in the royal chronicles of the Assyrian empire. Less than a decade later, Tiglath-pileser's son Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria, and the city finally fell under his successor Sargon II in 722 B.C. Archaeological work in Samaria has demonstrated the utter devastation wreaked upon the city by the vengeful Assyrians, though the heavily-fortified city held out for three years before falling to Sargon.

An archaeological dig at Khorsabad has unearthed Sargon's palace, a treasure trove of Assyrian artifacts. His records include an account of the deportation of thousands of Israelites after the fall of Samaria, as well as the forcible settling of captives from other regions in the territory formerly occupied by Israel.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE VII

### The Divided Monarchy - Judah

The Southern Kingdom of Judah, though smaller in extent and often weaker politically, retained a higher degree of faithfulness to God and thus lasted longer than the Northern Kingdom. Nineteen kings ruled over Judah in the 345 years of its existence (931-586 B.C.), all from the line of David (plus one queen, Athaliah, the wicked daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who ruled as regent during her son's infancy). Eight of these nineteen kings were evaluated by the biblical historians as being good rulers because of their efforts to lead the people in faithfulness to the Lord. The other eleven were to one extent or another idolaters.

For a number of reasons, the archaeological remains of Judah are less extensive than those of Israel. First of all, Judah was smaller. Secondly, its principal city, Jerusalem, was utterly destroyed, not only by Nebuchadnezzar, but later a second time by Titus, and significant portions of it are presently unavailable to archaeologists. Thirdly, the kings of Judah do not appear to have undertaken the same massive building projects characteristic of northern kings like Ahab and Jeroboam II. Fourthly, Judah had less contact, at least for most of its history, with the great rulers of Assyria, whose chronicles have given us much insight into and confirmation of the political dealings of Israel. As a result, most of the archaeological artifacts of interest in relationship to Judah come from the closing years of its history. Other evidence does exist, however, and we shall take note of it as we proceed this morning.

#### THE INVASION OF SHESHONK I

After the division of the kingdom, Judah and Israel immediately went to war with each other. The resulting weakening opened the door for an invasion by the Egyptian pharaoh Sheshonk I around 925 B.C. He destroyed many of the cities of Judah and exacted tribute from Rehoboam. When Sheshonk died, he was buried in Karnak, and a tomb inscription in hieroglyphics records a list of the cities he conquered, corroborating the biblical account.

#### UZZIAH, HEZEKIAH, AND THE ASSYRIAN INVASION OF JUDAH

Aside from the Moabite Stone's record of Moab's successful revolt against Israel in the time of Ahab and Jehoshaphat (whose alliance with Ahab drew him into the fighting), which we talked about last week, archaeology sheds very little useful light on the Southern Kingdom until the middle of the eighth century B.C., when Assyria became interested in the region. In 743 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III swept through the western country and exacted tribute from Menahem of Israel, he also received it from Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah. Another interesting sidelight about Uzziah is the discovery of an ossuary claiming to contain his bones. This ossuary was found, not in the royal cemetery, but at the foot of the Mount of Olives - in a place where lepers were often buried, and quite in accord with the biblical account of this monarch.

Some years after the fall of Samaria, Sargon II was replaced on the Assyrian throne by his son, Sennacherib. The latter led his armies through Palestine on a devastating march that destroyed a long list of cities. This invasion is recorded on the Taylor Cylinder, discovered in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh. The cylinder corroborates the biblical account in many ways. It details the

tribute given by Hezekiah, and the list is very close to the one given in the Bible. It lists certain cities as having been destroyed, but when it comes to Jerusalem, the cylinder boasts only that Sennacherib shut up Hezekiah, king of Judah, inside the city “like a bird in a cage.” Needless to say, the cylinder fails to mention the destruction of the Assyrian army outside the walls of Jerusalem; the best it can manage is to confirm by its silence that the city was not taken. The cylinder also gives insight into the Assyrian officers who managed the siege - Tartan, Rabshakeh and Rabsaris. These were not names, but titles, referring to military commanders and diplomatic officials.

Hezekiah had prepared well to withstand the siege. The most difficult part of holding out against a prolonged siege was ensuring a supply of fresh water for the people. As with most cities, Jerusalem drew its water supply from outside the city limits. Hezekiah solved the problem by digging a tunnel to the water supply, excavating a pool at the inside end of the tunnel, and sealing off the outside access to the spring. This tunnel still exists in its entirety today. In 1898, a child playing in the tunnel saw some writing on the wall. When scholars examined it, they found it to be an inscription made by one of the workers who had dug the tunnel in the time of Hezekiah. It indicated the precise length of the tunnel in cubits (1200 cubits, which proved that the cubit measured 18 inches), and described the process used to dig the tunnel. Apparently, the workers had used picks to tunnel through the solid rock, beginning at both ends and working toward the middle. Their calculations were so accurate that the two groups followed paths that diverged by only about a foot - the place where they met can still be clearly seen near the middle of the passage.

The Assyrian records also corroborate the biblical account of the death of Sennacherib. His son and successor, Esarhaddon, recounts how two of his brothers murdered his father while he was at prayer in a temple in Nineveh.

The Bible tells also of the visit of representatives of Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from a serious illness. Assyrian records speak of Merodach-Baladan’s efforts to stir up a rebellion against Assyria in the western provinces at this time. This was probably the real reason the king was so solicitous of Hezekiah’s health. Of course, Hezekiah’s foolishness in showing him the contents of the royal treasury led later to the conquest of the city by the Babylonians.

Another interesting tidbit from the reign of Hezekiah concerns his chief steward Shebna. Isaiah criticized Shebna for cutting out a rock tomb for himself in the style of the pagan Phoenicians, and said that the Lord would cast him away because of his pride (see Isaiah 22:15-19). Archaeologists believe that they have discovered this very tomb across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem.

## MANASSEH, JOSIAH, AND THE END OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

During the reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah’s wicked son, the Southern Kingdom was totally subservient to Assyria. Manasseh visited Nineveh to bring tribute, and even went so far as to set up a pagan altar modeled on one he had seen there in the Holy of Holies. He also set up idols for the worship of pagan gods such as Baal and Molech (an Ammonite deity whose worship often included the offering of babies by fire). Archaeologists have uncovered several shrines to Molech (one as far



away as Carthage, a Phoenician settlement in North Africa), in which they found ossuaries filled with the charred bones of young children.

After Manasseh's son Amon ruled for two years and was assassinated, Josiah ascended the throne. When he came of age, he initiated a religious revival in the land. This included the destruction of pagan temples, the desecration of pagan altars, and the tearing down of the "high places." That such places of worship existed in Judah has been confirmed by the unearthing of temples in the Negev settlements of Arad and Beersheba.

Scripture also tells us that Josiah's workmen, while cleaning out the Temple, which was in a terrible state of disrepair, found a book of the law. Liberal scholars have long postulated that such a find was really a fabrication, and asserted that the book of Deuteronomy was composed for the purpose of stimulating Josiah's revival. Archaeologists have been able to shed some light on the incident through Babylonian court records. The Babylonian king Nabonidus, who was quite an antiquarian in his own right, tells of his practice of prying open the cornerstones of old buildings, since these often contained old manuscripts and tablets. It was common practice throughout the Middle East to put important documents into the cornerstones of public buildings. In all likelihood, the carpenters and masons working under Josiah had found the book of the law while repairing the cornerstone of Solomon's Temple.

Josiah reigned during the years when the Assyrian Empire was engaged in a death struggle with the Babylonians. After the Assyrians sustained a major defeat, Pharaoh Necho of Egypt sent an army up the Mediterranean coast to come to their aid. Josiah wanted to cut off this source of aid to the Assyrians and led his army to try to stop Necho at Megiddo. Judah lost, and Josiah was killed in the battle. Necho's help turned out to be fruitless anyway, since he and his Assyrian allies were defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish, which ended the Assyrian Empire forever and signaled the rise of Babylon to dominance in the region.

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND THE FALL OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

Josiah's successors were initially tributary to Egypt, but Babylon soon asserted its authority in the region. Contrary to Jeremiah's advice, the kings continued to look to Egypt for deliverance, and brought down upon themselves the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar. Babylonian records confirm the captivity of Jehoiachin (even to the point of listing the rations he was permitted while in exile in Babylon), as well as the blinding of Zedekiah. They also verify the total destruction of the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army in 586 B.C. in response to the rebellion of Zedekiah against his Babylonian masters.

As Nebuchadnezzar's army swept through Palestine, they destroyed city after city defended by Zedekiah's army. One of the last cities to fall (before Jerusalem itself) was Lachish. In the excavation of Lachish, ostraca (potsherds with writing on them) were found containing correspondence between a military officer and the commander of the Lachish garrison. These speak eloquently of the fear generated by the Babylonian invasion, accuse the princes of "weakening the hands" of the people (ironically the same charge that these very princes leveled against Jeremiah), describe the signal fires from nearby cities (at one point, the officer tells his commander that the fire of nearby Azekah could no longer be seen - apparently, that city had fallen). One of the ostraca

mentions a prophet who had warned of the coming destruction, and who easily could have been Jeremiah himself.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE VIII

### The Exile and Beyond

When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C., Judaism changed forever. The captives lived in Jewish enclaves throughout the Babylonian and (later) Medo-Persian empires, sustaining their culture and religion as best they could. The period before us today covers about 150 years, from the fall of Jerusalem to the end of the Old Testament era. Though the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires left extensive archaeological remains, little of it relates directly to the exilic and post-exilic accounts given in the Old Testament.

#### THE JEWS IN EXILE

The “poor of the land” who were left behind by Nebuchadnezzar to till the vineyards because they were not considered a threat to revolt have left little evidence of their passing. Gedaliah was appointed governor and ruled from Mizpah until his assassination. Excavations at Mizpah indicate occupation in the early sixth century B.C., and one scholar discovered a cistern apparently used for waste disposal. It contained a number of human skeletons, and he theorized that this possibly could have been the pit into which Gedaliah and the other victims of his overthrow were deposited.

Archaeologists have confirmed the thoroughness of Nebuchadnezzar’s destructive vengeance. City after city in southern Palestine was reduced to rubble and remained unoccupied throughout the sixth century.

The Jews in Babylon, meanwhile, settled down to make a life for themselves. They preserved their culture and religion by setting up synagogues. Evidence of Jewish settlements in Babylon has been discovered in various places. These artifacts include lists of tradesmen with characteristically Jewish names as well as the ration receipt for the captive king Jehoiachin.

The great prophet of the exile was Ezekiel, who was taken to Babylon as part of the second wave of captivity (597 B.C.). Liberal scholars have often criticized his book, maintaining that it could not have been written in the sixth century because of its rather peculiar practice of dating prophecies according to the year of Jehoiachin’s captivity. However, archaeologists have discovered in Palestine a number of jars stamped with seals dating them to the early sixth century that confirm Ezekiel’s method of dating. Despite the fact that these jars were made after the capture of Jehoiachin, they are said to belong to the steward of “Jehoiachin, king of Judah.” In other words, even after Jehoiachin was taken away to Babylon, the Jews still considered him their true king, discounting the puppet Zedekiah as a mere regent.

#### THE FALL OF BABYLON

Critics continue even today to date the book of Daniel in the second century B.C., largely because of its explicit and detailed prophecies concerning the empire of Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, Antiochus Epiphanes, and the Maccabees. The narrative portions of the book are scoffed at as mere pious fiction. But while archaeologists have yet to uncover evidence of Daniel’s role in the closing years of the Babylonian Empire and early years of Medo-Persian rule, one particular

historical narrative - that of the handwriting on the wall and the fall of Babylon - has to a large extent been confirmed.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, no evidence existed of a Babylonian monarch named Belshazzar. Existing lists did not mention his name and indicated that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon. However, records discovered in the Persian royal palace in Susa indicate that Nabonidus, a scholar, amateur archaeologist, and devotee of the moon god Sin, left his kingdom in the hands of his son Belshazzar, who ruled as coregent during the final years of the empire. Babylon was taken with minimal loss of life, though Belshazzar himself was slain. Nabonidus himself was pensioned off to a small kingdom at the fringe of the Persian domains.

Archaeology has also confirmed Daniel's description of Nebuchadnezzar as a great builder. The most spectacular buildings excavated in Babylon date from Nebuchadnezzar's reign, including the famous Ishtar Gate, the temple and ziggurat dedicated to Marduk, and the as-yet-unconfirmed site of the Hanging Gardens.

## THE DECREE OF CYRUS AND THE REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM

Since liberal scholars delight in dating much of the Old Testament in the period after the exile, it should come as no surprise that they also date the post-exilic books to a time deep in the Intertestamental Period. Haggai and Zechariah are too explicit to miss, but Ezra and Nehemiah are generally dated in the third century, while Esther is relegated to the second century, often even later than the date assigned to Daniel. Evidence continues to get in the way of the smug liberal assumptions, however.

Though the actual decree of Cyrus recorded in Scripture has not been found, a remarkably similar one has been discovered. It speaks of Cyrus' treatment of the Babylonian captives from many nations, indicating that he allowed them all to return to their homes and rebuild their cities and the houses of their gods. Without question, the decree recorded in Scripture is a specific version of the same pronouncement.

Of the early returnees under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel we know little, except that the names of the leaders are of Babylonian derivation, exactly what one would expect of a generation raised in a strange land. It is worth noting that the offerings collected for the building project were given in drachmas - a Greek form of coinage. Archaeologists have discovered that Greek coinage - the world's first - made its way into the Middle East in the late seventh century and was soon copied by Babylonians and Persians because of the way it simplified financial transactions (before the use of coins, precious metals had to be weighed prior to every transaction). Thus another liberal objection to the authenticity of the biblical narrative gives way to the facts uncovered by scholars and their shovels.

The opposition encountered by the early builders and the correspondence of the opponents with the Persian king Darius, as recorded in Ezra, have found confirmation from an unusual source. The discovery of a Jewish settlement on the island of Elephantine, in the Nile River near the first cataract, revealed a great deal of correspondence in the Aramaic language from the late sixth century to the late fifth century B.C., a time corresponding with the final hundred years of the Old Testament

era. The Aramaic of the letters corresponds closely with the language of the Aramaic portions of Ezra and Daniel (some scholars suspect that the Elephantine community descended from those Jews who left Palestine at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; in any case, they were a heterodox group, erecting a temple on the island and worshipping other gods along with Jehovah), controverting the liberals' contention that the biblical narratives were late fictions that could not have dated from the sixth century. The Elephantine papyri also mention several names from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, including the high priest Johanan and the sons of Sanballat, Persian governor of Samaria.

The other leading opponents of the work, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian, have also been confirmed archaeologically. Tobiah was the first of a family dynasty among the rulers of the Ammonites, and inscriptions in the Ammonite capital mention both him and his descendants. Geshem was the Persian governor of Arabia, as a recently-discovered inscription confirms.

The first-century historian Josephus also affirms the accuracy of the post-exilic narratives. He not only notes that the writing of the Old Testament had been completed by the end of the fifth century B.C., but also that Ezra the scribe was responsible for gathering the holy books of the Jews into a single collection. Thus Jewish accounts confirm the historicity of the biblical narratives where Persian sources are silent.

Archaeological digs in Jerusalem itself have also confirmed the narrative of Nehemiah in that part of the wall built in the time of Nehemiah has been discovered.

## THE JEWS OF THE DIASPORA

As indicated before, no mention of Esther has yet been uncovered by archaeologists in the annals of the Persian Empire, leading liberal scholars to label the book a piece of historical fiction. Discoveries have shown, however, that for historical fiction purportedly written over three centuries after the events were supposed to have occurred, it is amazingly accurate in certain details. The great palace of Xerxes at Susa has been unearthed, and the descriptions in the book of Esther fit it very well. Furthermore, the titles of officers in the Persian government are given with surprising accuracy for one supposedly writing during the Hasmonean dynasty. Mordecai and Esther are names of Persian derivation, and archaeologists have actually discovered dice of the kind used by Haman to cast lots to determine the fate of the Jews. Finally, the character of Xerxes as portrayed in the book of Esther is quite consistent with the accounts found elsewhere - he was a vain and impulsive ruler who did not shun violence and was used to having his own way.

## THE BEHISTUN INSCRIPTION

One final note should be made concerning the post-exilic period. Darius the Great, the Persian king under whom the Temple was rebuilt, commemorated his victories over a group of rebellious officers in the civil war in which he came to power. The inscription is located over 300 feet high on the side of a cliff. It pictures Darius, backed by armed guards, standing before nine men in chains, and with his foot on the neck of the tenth. The relief is accompanied by descriptive narration in three languages - Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian (Akkadian); Old Persian, being an alphabetic form of cuneiform, was the first to be deciphered. The deciphering of the Behistun

Inscription was the key to unlocking cuneiform, the wedge-shaped writing used in ancient Mesopotamia by Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, much as the Rosetta Stone had unlocked the mysteries of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Only after the Behistun Inscription was translated did scholars have a means of reading the library of Ashurbanipal, with its records of the Sumerian accounts of the creation and flood that we discussed at the beginning of the course.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE IX

### The Intertestamental Period

The Intertestamental Period is often referred to as the Four Hundred Silent Years because during the time from the end of Malachi to the coming of Christ, God did not reveal himself to His people through inspired prophetic utterance. Consequently, the period we are discussing today contains no Scripture to confirm other than prophetic passages dealing with the era such as Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 11. It is worth noting, however, what archaeologists have discovered about the development of Judaism and the history of Palestine in the years between the Testaments.

The main written sources for the period are the books of the Apocrypha, especially I and II Maccabees, and the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus. While these do not carry the same weight as Scripture, they have been shown to be reasonably accurate in describing the history of the Intertestamental Period.

### THE DECLINE OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

The Old Testament era ended while Artaxerxes (the king for whom Nehemiah was the cupbearer) was on the throne of Persia. Artaxerxes, like his predecessor Xerxes, had tried and failed to spread Persian power into Greece. As Persia declined, Greece entered its Golden Age - the age of Pericles, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the great historians, poets, dramatists, and artists of the classical era. Persia was never again to be a threat to the Greeks, but until they were unified, the Greeks would never be a threat to the Persians.

### ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE HELLENISTIC AGE

The unification of the Greek city-states was accomplished under Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great. [In 1977, archaeologists uncovered what they believe to be the tomb of Philip in the city of Virginia.] Alexander became king of Macedonia at age 20 when his father was murdered. When the city of Thebes rebelled, Alexander crushed the revolt and destroyed the city, which motivated the Greek city-states to acknowledge his sovereignty and send troops to join his army. He then became the champion of the Greek way of life and set about to avenge the indignities heaped upon the Greeks by the Persians in their repeated attempts to expand their empire westward.

He marched across Asia Minor with little opposition and encountered the main body of the Persian army at Issus. Despite being badly outnumbered, Alexander routed the forces of Darius III, whose army went scurrying for cover across the Euphrates. He then marched southward, where again most cities opened their gates to his advancing army. One exception was Tyre, where Alexander set up a thirteen-year siege, ultimately fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy of Tyre's destruction when he took the ruins of the old city on the shore and threw them into the sea to form a land bridge out to the island on which the city had been rebuilt after it was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. His army then crossed the land bridge, broke through the city walls, and laid it waste, leaving little more than bare rock (Ezekiel 26:14). Gaza also resisted and was reduced to rubble after Alexander's officers constructed a ramp that allowed their army to reach the city walls (much like that used four hundred years later at Masada), while Alexander's military coffers were enriched with the spoils of the city.

During the siege of Gaza, Josephus tells us that Alexander visited Jerusalem, where he was welcomed openly by the high priest. Alexander told the priest that he had had a dream while growing up in Macedonia that prophesied this event, and he entered the city in peace and worshiped in the Temple. Though archaeologists have uncovered no record of such a visit, it is certainly in character for Alexander, who was a visionary, and made a practice of worshipping in the temples of the lands he conquered and showing respect for their gods.

Meanwhile, the Samaritans, who had consistently opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the second Temple, after being rebuffed by Nehemiah, had obtained a scroll of the Torah from a renegade Jew. This Torah became the center of Samaritan worship and the basis for an independent textual tradition, the Samaritan Pentateuch, which was passed on for the next 500 years. In the middle of the fourth century B.C., the Samaritans had begun building their own temple on Mount Gerazim in Samaria. The temple was completed only a few years before the conquest of the region by Alexander the Great. When the Samaritans refused to submit to Alexander, he razed their new temple and tracked down the rebels in the Judean wilderness. He found them in a cave near the Wadi Daliyeh and slaughtered every man, woman, and child. In 1962, the bones of those who were killed were discovered by members of the same Bedouin tribe that had earlier found the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the cave they also discovered numerous artifacts, including a collection of documents - mostly contracts and other legal papers - and a variety of coins from the period.

Alexander then continued southward, where he conquered Egypt and made plans for a great city at the edge of the Nile delta - the city of Alexandria. It was in Egypt that Alexander was first acknowledged as a god by the people he conquered. He then moved eastward, defeating the Persians once and for all and destroying their chief cities of Susa and Persepolis, but he still was not satisfied. He continued through Afghanistan into India, reaching the Indus River and mourning that there were no worlds left to conquer. At the urging of his tired and plunder-sated army, he then headed for home, but he died of a fever before ever arriving - at 33, the greatest conqueror the world has ever known.

After his death, his empire was divided among his generals. Palestine went to Ptolemy and his descendants, the Hellenistic rulers of Egypt, who were kind to the Jews and allowed them to practice their religion without hindrance. In fact, Ptolemy Philadelphus is said to have encouraged the Jews to translate their scriptures into the Greek language so they could be included in the great library he was compiling in Alexandria. The result was the Septuagint.

The effectiveness of Alexander's conquests in spreading the Greek language and the Greek way of life is reflected in the archaeology of Palestine, where after 300 B.C. Greek pottery appears in increasing numbers, Greek coins become the models for those minted in Judea, and Greek architectural styles characterize the construction that has survived.

## THE LATE SELEUCIDS AND THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

Near the beginning of the second century B.C., the Seleucids of Asia Minor, under the leadership of Antiochus III (the Great), took Palestine away from the Ptolemies. Their policy was quite different from that of the Ptolemies. They were insistent upon religious uniformity and complete Hellenization of subject peoples and viewed the Jews as hopeless recalcitrants. The



discovery of a Greek-style gymnasium in Jerusalem from the Seleucid period indicates the extent of efforts to school the Jewish people in the ways of the Greeks, and may be the very gymnasium established by the usurper-priest Jason, appointed by Antiochus Epiphanes to Hellenize the Jews.

Differences among the Jews themselves, some of whom wanted to adapt to Greek ways while others clung to the ancient traditions, only made matters worse; Jason, a Hellenizing high priest, persecuted the traditionalists, known as Hasidim (Jason's tomb was found by archaeologists in 1956; its Greek-style architecture, painted interior, and secular inscriptions confirm the Hellenizing beliefs of the Sadducees.). When Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) tried to force pagan worship on the Jews, even to the point of setting up an idol of Zeus with his own face on it in the Holy of Holies and sacrificing pigs on the brazen altar, the Jews rose up against him. The revolt was led by Mattathias of the Hasmonean family, a priest from the town of Modin. His sons carried on the revolt, which achieved military success under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, who recaptured Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple - the origin of the feast of Hanukkah. He was succeeded by his brothers, Jonathan, a skilled diplomat, and Simon, who took upon himself the high priesthood.

Archaeologists have uncovered a fortress built by Judas Maccabeus at Bethzur in southern Palestine. Numerous coins from the era also confirm the history recorded in the books of I and II Maccabees.

## PALESTINE UNDER THE HASMONEANS

The son of Simon, John Hyrcanus, declared himself king, and thus became the first ruler of the Hasmonean dynasty. While the Maccabees had been defenders of the Jewish traditions, the Hasmoneans sided with the Hellenizers. It was during the reign of John Hyrcanus that the sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees appeared and that conflicts between them grew to epic proportions.

John Hyrcanus was succeeded by Alexander Jannaeus, who expanded the Hasmonean kingdom until it rivaled that of Solomon, but after his death, the kingdom disintegrated in civil war between the Pharisees and Sadducees. This warfare only ended with the coming of the Romans, in the person of the general Pompey, who conquered Palestine in 63 B.C. Numerous archaeological remains have been discovered in Jerusalem from the Hasmonean period, including walls (the Hasmonean rulers fortified Jerusalem in such a way that each sector of the city could stand alone and defend itself against attack), building foundations, and extensive amounts of pottery and coinage. The Pool of Bethesda, mentioned in the Gospel of John, was also expanded during the Hasmonean period.



## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE X

### The Dead Sea Scrolls

Archaeologist W.F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University has justifiably called the Dead Sea Scrolls “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.” In the years since the discovery of this hoard of materials, both the scrolls themselves and their significance have been a matter of considerable debate.

#### THE DISCOVERY OF THE SCROLLS

One day in 1947, a Bedouin of the Ta’amireh tribe was searching among the rocky cliffs of the Judean wilderness for a lost goat. Hoping to scare the goat from its hiding place, he threw a rock into an opening in the cliff above. Instead of the bleating of a goat, he heard a loud crash. Concerned that he may have disturbed one of the fearsome djinn believed by the Arabs to inhabit the wilderness, he fled, but returned the next day with a friend to examine the cave. Inside the cave he found numerous pottery jars, some broken and some intact, containing blackened scrolls. He took these scrolls to an antique dealer, who took them to a Syrian Orthodox metropolitan to assess their value. The metropolitan recognized their antiquity, though not their content, but as soon as they came to the attention of scholars, they caused a sensation. After a circuitous journey involving several sales, incidents of coercion, and great secrecy, the scrolls were obtained by the state of Israel and now reside in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem.

The original discovery sparked a scouring of the surrounding wilderness to see if the caves contained any more treasures. Eventually, thousands of manuscript fragments were uncovered in eleven different caves, but none were as spectacular as the original finds.

The manuscripts were dated between 250 B.C. and 70 A.D., using both the somewhat inexact radiocarbon dating technique on the linen in which the scrolls were wrapped, as well as the more precise paleographic evidence (the style of letter formation - a science to which the Dead Sea Scrolls contributed much additional evidence).

#### THE CONTENTS OF THE SCROLLS

The original discovery included both biblical and sectarian manuscripts. The biblical materials included two scrolls of the book of Isaiah (one complete), a commentary on the book of Habakkuk, and an Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis (the *Genesis Apocryphon*). The sectarian materials included a *Community Rule* for the Essenes, a book of *Thanksgiving Hymns*, and an eschatological work called *The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness*. Later discoveries included fragments from every book of the Old Testament except Esther, an almost complete (though in terrible condition) scroll of the books of Samuel that appears to have been the Hebrew original from which the Septuagint translation was made, fragments of various apocryphal works (some in the original Hebrew), other Bible commentaries, a *Temple Scroll* containing a description of the ideal Temple similar in conception (though not in detail) to the closing chapters of Ezekiel, a copper scroll containing a list of fabulous treasures and indicating where they were buried (treasure hunters have tried without success to turn up any of the treasures mentioned by following its directions), some letters written by the early second-century Jewish rebel Bar Kochba, and even a

few tiny fragments that were identified by one Catholic scholar as coming from scrolls of the New Testament (most scholars have questioned Father Callahan's identification of these fragments, which are little bigger than a man's thumb).

## THE AUTHORS OF THE SCROLLS

The authors of the scrolls are believed to have been a community of a sect called the Essenes. Josephus, Philo, and the Roman historian Pliny all mentioned this secretive sect, describing them as ultra-conservative and ascetic. It appears that the Essenes, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, grew out of the turmoil surrounding the Maccabean revolt. Unhappy with the Hellenism of the Sadducees and the perceived compromises of the Pharisees, they denounced the religious establishment and settled in a closed community in the wilderness of Judea. They were led by a man referred to in the scrolls as the Teacher of Righteousness, whom scholars have been unable to identify with any of the known figures of the period. They renounced the Temple worship and priesthood as being hopelessly corrupt and even used their own (solar) calendar instead of the lunar one used by most Jews.

The sectarian literature describes a man called the Wicked Priest who persecuted the community and eventually brought about the death of the Teacher of Righteousness. For this villain there are many candidates, including the Seleucid puppet Menelaus, the Maccabean priests Jonathan and Simon, and the Hasmonean rulers John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus.

The community practiced their own rituals, including baptism for purification, celibacy among the core members (one Essene community required all members to be celibate and perpetuated its membership by taking in orphans off the streets of Jerusalem), and community of property.

The Essenes loathed the Romans (called Kittim in the scrolls) and included them, along with the apostate Jews, among the Sons of Darkness. It appears to have been the Romans who eventually destroyed the community. Judging by the coins left behind, the settlement was destroyed by fire around 68 A.D. during the Roman invasion of Palestine. Before the Essenes passed from the scene, however, they concealed their precious library in jars in the various caves in the surrounding wilderness.

It appears that the Bedouin were not the first to find these stores of manuscripts. The church father Origin, in his *Hexapla*, attempted to draw together evidence from all available biblical manuscripts, including a few he had found in a jar in a cave near Jericho. Five hundred years later, a letter from the Patriarch of Seleucia mentions manuscripts found by an Arab who followed his dog into a cave in the same region. Some of these found their way to a synagogue in Cairo, where they were eventually discarded in the *genizeh* (holy manuscripts could not be burned, so they were accorded ceremonial retirement when they got worn out; a *genizeh* is the place where they were laid to rest), and discovered a thousand years later. It was not until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls that some of the manuscripts in the Cairo *genizeh* were identified as having come from the same community.

## KHIRBET QUMRAN

The community of the Essenes was excavated in the mid nineteen-fifties. Archaeologists located the community's central meeting hall, living quarters, kitchen, scriptorium (still with its benches and inkpots), and the pottery room where the distinctive jars in which the scrolls were stored had been made. The settlement also contained several pools used for ritual baptisms. Outside the community was a common graveyard containing over a thousand skeletons.

## THE SCROLLS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

The main contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to Old Testament studies is their confirmation of the incredible accuracy of the scribal transmission process. The Isaiah scroll found in the original cave differed very little from the oldest manuscript available previously, which dated from the tenth century. The textual transmission process involved far less corruption than that associated with the Greek text in the Middle Ages.

The Samuel scroll, as mentioned previously, appears to have been the Hebrew manuscript from which the translators of the Septuagint were working. Scholars have known for years that there were some significant differences between the Septuagint and Masoretic texts of the Old Testament, though many of these can easily be ascribed to errors of translation on the part of the Alexandrian rabbis. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, indicate that some textual variants in the Hebrew did exist before the text was standardized in the time of the Masoretes.

The Dead Sea manuscripts have also been a blow to liberal scholars in some areas. The manuscripts have shown the folly of the conjectural emendations of the Old Testament text to which liberal scholars have been prone, particularly in relation to the poetic passages of Scripture. In addition, liberal claims that books such as Daniel are products of the late Intertestamental Period are left with no leg to stand on when people who were living in that time clearly revered them as Scripture. The Dead Sea Scrolls have also damaged the claims of the Documentary Hypothesis, which visualized an intertestamental redactor who edited the text of the Pentateuch into its present form. Large numbers of fragments in the caves came from the Pentateuch, and they indicate that the Qumran sect had access to a text that differed in no significant particulars from our own.

## THE SCROLLS AND THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

The main light shed by the scrolls on the Intertestamental Period has been on the Essenes, of course. They provide little help with the history of the period, largely because of the symbolic language in which much of the sectarian material is couched. As noted earlier, the major figures in the literature cannot be identified with any certainty.

The scrolls do indicate, however, that the Qumran sect had a fervent Messianic hope. They viewed their Teacher of Righteousness as the forerunner of the Messiah and taught that the Messiah would return to establish his kingdom forty years after the death of their Teacher. Actually, they believed in two Messiahs, one Davidic - a king - and one priestly. The royal Messiah would defeat the Kittim and the apostate Sons of Darkness and would establish the Kingdom of Light. The priestly Messiah would then purify the Temple and introduce true worship once again.

## THE SCROLLS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The scrolls have significant amounts of terminology in common with the New Testament. Liberals have used the similarities to undermine the uniqueness of Christianity, suggesting that the latter was simply an outgrowth of the Essene cult. Some of the similarities include: the practice of water baptism, community of property, the idea that the members of the sect were the elect of God, the light/darkness dualism so prevalent in the writings of John, the rejection of the Pharisees and Sadducees as corrupt, the expectation of a coming kingdom, and even such details as a three-step process of discipline (cf. Matthew 18), beatitudes, the concept of mystery, and the use of the term Belial for Satan.

There are also important differences, however. While John the Baptist grew up and ministered in the Judean desert and probably knew of the Essenes, his baptism and preaching differed significantly from theirs. John's baptism was a symbol of purification, but was only to be undertaken once, unlike the repeated baptisms of the Essenes, which seem to have taken the place of sacrifices in the polluted Temple. Community of property among the Essenes was mandatory - required for entrance into the community, quite unlike the voluntary and temporary practice among the members of the Jerusalem church.

The Essene concept of election, far from encouraging evangelism, required that they shut themselves off from the world. They expected only the destruction of the heathen, not their conversion. Furthermore, the Essene literature spoke of hating the Sons of Darkness, which some scholars suspect was the source of Jesus' comments in Matthew 5:43, since no Old Testament passage speaks of hating one's enemies. As far as the light/darkness dualism is concerned, Jesus seems to have been using an image familiar to His listeners to communicate His own unique truth about God, Himself, and the world.

While Jesus, like the Essenes, rejected the Sadducees and Pharisees as corrupt, the reasons are different. The Essenes saw the works and rituals of the religious leaders as corrupt, while their own were righteous and acceptable before God. Jesus taught a Gospel of grace in which no man's works made him acceptable before God. In fact, some scholars believe that Jesus may have explicitly repudiated the Essenes as well, though they are never mentioned by name in the New Testament. In several places, Jesus warns His followers against the Herodians. Most over the years have assumed that the Herodians were supporters of the pseudo-Jewish Herodian dynasty, and thus a political party in Palestine. Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin, however, has suggested that the Herodians may have been the Essenes, since there is evidence that Herod gave protection to the sect during his years in power. He even sees a cryptic reference to the Essene use of seven loaves of bread in their weekly worship in Jesus' comments on the "leaven of the Herodians" (Mark 8:15).

As far as the expectation of a kingdom is concerned, the kingdom preached by John the Baptist and Jesus differed as much from that of the Essenes as it did from that of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The similarities of detail again indicate that the language used by Jesus and the apostles did not come out of a vacuum, but was the religious language of the day, perfectly intelligible to their hearers despite being set in a new context and used to communicate deeper truths.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also provided a few problems for liberal New Testament scholars. They proved that the so-called Gnostic influences in the writings of John and Paul (used by liberals to deny the authenticity of their works) were nothing of the kind, but rather common to Jewish thought and religious language of the first century. Of course, if Callahan was right in his identification of the Cave 7 fragments as coming from the books of the New Testament, it would destroy all liberal attempts to late-date those writings and prove that they came from the period before the destruction of Jerusalem.





## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE XI

### The Life and Ministry of Jesus

As we enter the New Testament period, we move into an era with an extremely narrow focus from an archaeological point of view. Instead of searching out evidence covering hundreds of years, we are restricted to less than half a century. Instead of scouring the entire Middle East, our attention centers on an area smaller than the state of New Jersey.

In the search for artifacts associated with the life of Jesus, we must recognize that in some senses very little direct evidence is available. There are several reasons for this. One, of course, is the relative brevity of Jesus' earthly life. Another is the fact that He spent most of His time in small towns and villages, many of which left little behind when they died and cannot today be identified with any certainty. The third problem is that the place where the most important events of Jesus' life took place - Jerusalem - was totally demolished about a generation after He died (along with most of the other important cities in the region), and has been rebuilt often since. Furthermore, *the* critical location - the Temple Mount - is inaccessible to archaeologists because it is now the site of the Muslim Dome of the Rock. Of course, one of the greatest difficulties confronted by scholars is that Jesus left behind Him virtually nothing in the way of physical remains - no buildings, works of art, or writings.

Another problem stems from the multiplicity of traditional sites associated with Jesus' ministry. These "holy places," venerated for centuries, are often inaccessible to archaeologists, who are thus in no position to confirm or deny the claims made for the various shrines, even if their labors might make it possible to do so.

### HERODIAN PALESTINE

If there was any aspect of Herod the Great's reign for which he deserved his appellation, it is his building projects. He fawned on his Roman protectors by building temples, amphitheaters, and gymnasiums in the Roman style in cities all over Palestine. He rebuilt Samaria and constructed a new seaport capital, naming both after Augustus Caesar (Sebaste - from a form of Augustus - and Caesarea). He courted the favor of his Jewish subjects by remodeling and beautifying the Temple in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, he protected himself against his enemies by constructing a chain of fortresses on his eastern border, including Machaerus (where Josephus tells us that John the Baptist was imprisoned and executed), Herodium (where Herod was buried after his death in Jericho), and Masada (the famous location of the Zealots' last stand in 73 A.D.). The beauty of his secular structures gives evidence of why the Romans respected him and why the Jews loathed him - like all others who have tried to govern them, Herod never really understood the Jewish character, nor appreciated the reasons for their resistance to Roman culture. Of the Temple, whose magnificence is described in great detail by Josephus, nothing remains except relatively small portions of the retaining wall built by Herod around the base of the Temple mount when he enlarged it (one of these is the Western Wall or Wailing Wall).

Herod's sons (those he didn't kill, at any rate) were also builders. Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Philip all added their touches to the architecture of first-century Palestine. Coins of their reigns,

along with those of the prefects who succeeded the deposed Archelaus, abound in the sites of the region.

## BETHLEHEM

Bethlehem is a town much visited by tourists, but, as one might easily imagine, no positive confirmation exists of the events surrounding the birth of Christ. The location of the shepherds' field is, of course, purely conjectural, and the traditional site of Jesus' birth - the cave located inside the Church of the Nativity - is not susceptible to archaeological verification (what would Mary and Joseph have left behind?), though the tradition connecting the cave to the birth of Christ goes back to the time of Constantine. [NOTE: That may sound like a long time - over 1600 years - but it is important to remember that Constantine had a very poor record for accuracy in identifying holy places. For instance, his mother supposedly discovered Pilate's staircase in the ruins of Jerusalem, and it was miraculously transported to Rome, where pilgrims may still visit it today!]

One archaeological discovery in connection with Jesus' birth that does bear some interest was made in Egypt. Census records from the early second century not only indicate that the Romans took tax censuses every fourteen years, but also mention that they required each citizen to return to his home town to register. The dates of these censuses also fit nicely with those of Jesus' birth. By counting backward in intervals of fourteen years, we find that a census would have been scheduled for somewhere around 7 B.C. (most scholars believe that Jesus was born around 6 B.C.).

Archaeology has also confirmed the accuracy of Luke's historical information about the rulers who governed Palestine at the time of Jesus' birth and again when He began His public ministry.

## NAZARETH

Nazareth was an extremely small village in Jesus' day, and almost nothing remains of the town in which He grew up. The only certain feature is the town's only well, which undoubtedly was the one to which Mary went to draw water. The nearby Church of the Annunciation rests on completely unsubstantiated tradition, and the synagogue where Jesus preached, destroyed in the Roman invasion of 70 A.D., has never been positively identified, though two churches claim to have been built over its ruins.

## SAMARIA

Sychar has been located at the foot of Mount Gerazim, but the only positive identification again involves Jacob's well - surely the one near which Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman.

## GALILEAN MINISTRY

Many of the small towns in which Jesus ministered have never been located with any certainty, including Cana and Bethsaida, though these uncertainties have not stopped the shrine builders or tourist guides. Perhaps the most interesting archaeological discoveries in connection with the life of Jesus have been made at Capernaum. Here archaeologists have uncovered a second-

century synagogue, apparently built on the site of the one destroyed by the Romans (which would have been the one in which Jesus preached), and apparently used by Christians. A nearby house bears inscriptions on the walls identifying it as the home of Peter (again, these are second-century inscriptions). The locations of Gadara and Magdala are known, though nothing has been uncovered that could connect them with the ministry of Jesus.

Tiberias, Herod Antipas' capital on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, was shunned by Jews for its paganism and the Gospels do not indicate that Jesus ever visited there. After the destruction of Jerusalem, however, it became the center of Palestinian Judaism and the center that produced both the Palestinian Talmud and the work of the Masoretes.

Further to the north, Caesarea Philippi stands at the foot of Mount Hermon, believed by some to be the site of the Transfiguration. The ruins reveal the temple built by Herod Philip in honor of Augustus - the first site of emperor worship in Palestine. In this thoroughly pagan town, Christ revealed Himself to His disciples as the Messiah following Peter's confession of faith.

## JUDEAN MINISTRY

The sites of Jesus' baptism and temptation are unknown except in very general terms (i.e., the Jordan River and the Judean wilderness). Bethany has been identified, though the location of the tomb of Lazarus (over which, of course, a church has been built) may not be affirmed with any kind of certainty beyond the word of tradition, which is uncertain indeed.

## JERUSALEM

In Jerusalem, numerous walls and gates have been excavated, some of which may be connected with the ministry of Jesus (e.g., the gate leading out of the city across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives). Of the Temple, all the evidence that remains in addition to the Western Wall is a cracked pillar left in the quarry by the builders and a pair of inscriptions warning Gentiles to stay out of the sanctuary at the peril of their lives (these were apparently carried off when the Temple was destroyed; they were found in ruins in other parts of Palestine). Both the Pool of Siloam and the Pool of Bethesda have been excavated. Buildings bearing tangential relationship to the ministry of Christ include the Herodian and Hasmonean palaces and what may have been the house of the high priest Caiaphas (compete with twelve ossuaries, one belonging to Caiaphas himself). The Antonia fortress at the corner of the Temple Mount has been excavated. This may have been the location of Jesus' trial before Pilate (the Hasmonean palace is also a possibility), and was almost certainly the place where Jesus was mocked and scourged by the Roman soldiers before His crucifixion. The paving stones bear markings left by bored Roman troops, including the remains of some sort of game of chance.

Other sites connected with the death of Jesus are purely conjectural. The house identified as that of the Last Supper is too recent to qualify for the honor. Two sites on the Mount of Olives claim to be the Garden of Gethsemane. The route of the Via Dolorosa is highly debatable. Even the location of Calvary is a matter of dispute, with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which claims to be the site of both the crucifixion and burial of Christ, and "Gordon's Calvary" vying for attention. Christ's tomb likewise has two claimants, neither of which can cite positive evidence, though the

tradition associated with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre goes back to the fourth century. The Garden Tomb, located near Gordon's Calvary, tends to be favored by Protestants because of its characteristics that match the description in the Bible. A chapel rests on the supposed site of the Ascension, but again archaeological verification is by the very nature of the case impossible.

Other discoveries have shed light on the death and burial of Christ, however. An ossuary from slightly before the time of Christ contained the bones of a man who had clearly been crucified. Unlike popular works of art, the nails had been driven into the arms above the wrists (between the two large bones of the forearm), and one spike had been driven through both heels of the feet. The crucified criminal thus had his arms spread out to his sides, but his feet and legs were twisted sideways, while he sat on a small piece of wood nailed to the cross that served to prolong his suffering. As far as the burial of Christ is concerned, the Garden Tomb, while it may not have been the actual tomb in which Christ was buried, must at least have been very much like His borrowed sepulcher, given the evidence of a track into which a large circular stone could be rolled in order to seal the tomb.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE XII

### The Book of Acts

Unlike the cities associated with the ministry of Jesus, many of which have yet to be identified with any certainty, most of the towns mentioned in connection with the ministry of Paul in the book of Acts have been located and excavated. These excavations have uncovered few direct connections to Paul's work, but have told us much about the world in which he traveled and ministered.

#### THE ACCURACY OF LUKE'S HISTORIOGRAPHY

Archaeology has confirmed the accuracy of Luke's work in Acts to an amazing degree. Despite the critics' usual tactic of doubting the accuracy of everything in Scripture unless it receives external confirmation, detail after detail of Luke's account have been demonstrated to be accurate. One of the more interesting examples of this is his use of Roman imperial titles. The Roman Empire used a bewildering variety of titles for its officials, yet Luke shows a familiarity with the correct nomenclature that reduces to foolishness any critical assertions of a late date of composition for the work. Time after time, Luke uses the right title for Roman officials small and great; archaeology has confirmed that, even in cases where unusual titles were in use, Luke has gotten them right. [NOTE: The same is true of the Gospel of Luke; he uses precise terms like "tetrarch" where other Gospel writers use general terms like "king."]

#### THE ROLE OF THE GOD-FEARERS

On several occasions in the book of Acts, most notably in the case of Cornelius, Luke speaks of a group of people called "God-fearers," who appear to have been Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel, participated in the life of the Jewish synagogue, yet would not take the final step of circumcision needed to become Jewish proselytes. These people proved to be a fertile field for the spread of the Gospel - monotheists familiar with the Jewish Scriptures yet uncomfortable with the more detailed requirements of the Jewish law. In excavations at Aphrodisias in southwestern Turkey, archaeologists have discovered a remarkable synagogue inscription that lists the founders of the synagogue (all bearing Jewish names), then below them lists "worshippers of God" who contributed to the building project - all of whose names are typically Roman or Greek. Since the lists are of about equal length, this discovery gives some idea of the prevalence of what the Bible calls "God-fearers." While the terminology used by Luke was not technical - other inscriptions have used the same term to refer to pious Jews or even Christians - it does indicate a significant portion of the Roman population to whom the Gospel had a decided appeal. In Jerusalem, an inscription marking the Synagogue of the Freedmen, largely responsible for the death of Stephen, has been found near the gate traditionally associated with his martyrdom.

#### THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

The Ethiopian eunuch would have been a high official in the kingdom of Nubia, near the first cataract of the Nile and stretching from southern Egypt into the Sudan. In this kingdom, the kings were considered semi-divine, and thus too holy to attend to the practical matters of running the kingdom. This responsibility was left to the queen mother, the Candace (like the Egyptian pharaoh,

a title rather than a name). Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of a long series of Candaces ruling Nubia. It was common in the ancient Near East for female rulers to be protected by castrati such as this eunuch.

## TARSUS

Tarsus had long been a trade center at the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, and its inhabitants had been given the privilege of Roman citizenship in 64 B.C., when the city became the Roman administrative capital in Cilicia. The city contained a large Jewish community and a cosmopolitan population that espoused a variety of philosophies and worshiped a variety of gods. Given the temptations of the city, it is understandable that Paul's father sent him away to study in Jerusalem.

## DAMASCUS

At the time of Paul's conversion, this Syrian trading center appears to have been under the rule of the Nabatean king Aretas IV. Why Caligula would have given him the governorship of this important city is anyone's guess, but then who knows why the insane Caligula did most of what he did. Archaeologists have uncovered both the remains of the city wall over which Paul escaped and Straight Street on which Ananias lived. Of course, there is now a church on the alleged site of Ananias' home.

After leaving Damascus, Paul spent some time in Arabia. Whether his sojourn was in the kingdom of Aretas (perhaps in Petra?) or further south, in Arabia proper (Mount Sinai?) is impossible to know.

## ANTIOCH

The earliest center of Hellenistic Christianity was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire (after Rome itself and Alexandria). Its population at the time was much greater than it is today. As was the case with most commercial centers, Antioch had a suburban district notorious for its licentious practices, replete with heathen temples and their associated cult prostitution. It also had a large Jewish population. That Christianity blossomed in such a place shows the hunger people felt as a result of the barrenness of pagan worship. It was here the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, and it was from here that Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey.

Excavations at Antioch in 1910 uncovered an ancient chalice used in Christian worship (probably second to sixth centuries). Although early speculations that this cup might have been the actual Holy Grail were accorded all the respect they deserved (i.e., none), it is in any case one of the finest examples of early Christian art extant, including engravings of Christ and the apostles on the outside of the cup.

## PAPHOS

At the site of the conversion of Sergius Paulus and the contest with Elymas the sorcerer, archaeologists have confirmed both the propriety of the title used by Luke for the proconsul and the existence of Jewish sorcerers in the imperial court.

## GALATIA

Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe have all been excavated. Interesting details include an inscription mentioning an official named Lucius Sergius Paulus, probably the son of the Cyprian proconsul, and the discovery at Lystra of evidence pointing to the worship of Jupiter and Mercury (the gods with whom Paul and Barnabas were initially identified) in the city.

## MACEDONIA

On Paul's second missionary journey, he revisited the Galatian churches and then headed for Macedonia, stopping first at the city of Philippi. The city was a Roman colony to which many army officers retired, and thus its Jewish population was negligible. The various terms used by Luke to describe rulers and practices again correspond precisely with the indications of archaeology. The same is true in connection with Paul's visit to Thessalonica, even down to the term used for the rabble-rousers who stirred up a riot against Paul and Silas.

## GREECE

Paul then moved on into Greece. At Athens, both the agora where Paul spoke daily and the Areopagus where Paul appeared before the philosophers of the city are well-known. Though no altar to an unknown god has been uncovered in Athens, a number of them have been found in other cities of the Roman Empire.

In Corinth, archaeology has uncovered evidence of the city's depravity (the pagan temple on the Acrocorinth that served as the site of debauched rituals), as well as the basis for Paul's frequent athletic allusions in the Corinthian epistles (the city served as host to the quadrennial Isthmian games, second only to the Olympics in importance). An inscription dating precisely the proconsulship of Gallio provides a fixed point around which much of the rest of Paul's ministry may be dated.

## EPHESUS

In Ephesus, where Paul spent much time during his third missionary journey, archaeologists have uncovered the remains of the magnificent temple of Artemis, one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was three times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. The goddess herself was somewhat of a hybrid of various eastern and Egyptian fertility goddesses and the Greek and Roman goddess of the hunt. Statues of her appear with several rows of large breasts and surrounded by a variety of animals. Small copies of her image were made in the city and sold for household shrines and as souvenirs for tourists. The riot in Ephesus occurred when Paul's preaching cut into this lucrative

trade. The amphitheater where the riot occurred has been discovered, as have samples of some of the occult texts that were burned in the great bonfire of the vanities.

## CAESAREA

After his arrest in Jerusalem, Paul spent about two years in custody in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea. Here he appeared before Felix, Festus, and Herod Agrippa II. Contemporary writers such as Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus tell us something of these men. Felix exercised “the power of a king with the mind of a slave.” Tacitus’ description fits the venality the proconsul displayed in keeping Paul in custody while hoping for a bribe. Little is known of Festus, but Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I. He was considered an expert on Jewish affairs and was consulted by Festus for help in preparing the report Festus had to send to the emperor along with his famous prisoner. His too-close relationship with his sister Bernice was also a source of scandal throughout the empire.

## MALTA

The island today continues to show enormous pride over the role of Paul in the conversion of its people. Churches abound commemorating the various incidents associated with Paul’s visit. Again, Luke’s titles precisely fit the official usages of the day.

## ROME

In Rome, the Mamertine prison, where Paul probably spent his last days, still stands. In addition, tradition has identified the location of Paul’s execution in a field near the Ostian Way.

## MISCELLANEOUS

A house-church very similar to that in which the early Christians met (see Paul’s letter to Philemon, for example) has been uncovered in Dura-Europos. It appears to have been an ordinary house whose interior was remodeled to provide large and small meeting rooms for the Christians in the city.



## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE XIII

### The End of the New Testament Era

The final session of our course will be somewhat of a catch-all, as we look at a variety of subjects associated with Christianity, Judaism, and the Holy Land in the second half of the first century.

#### THE JEWISH REVOLTS

Roman insensitivity to Jewish scruples stirred up constant unrest in Palestine, and the earlier success of the Maccabean revolt encouraged Jewish zealots to believe that they could overcome even the might of Rome. Increased insurrectionary activity by the Zealot party led to a pacification mission by a Roman legion under the command of Vespasian and his son Titus, both future emperors of Rome whose reputations were made largely through their success in putting down the Jewish revolt.

Excavations at Gamla on the Golan Heights have clarified details of the first major clash between Jews and Romans, and the findings have confirmed to a remarkable degree the account given by Josephus, who before defecting to the Romans was the Jewish commander of the Gamla fortress. The collapsed watchtower and the breaches in the walls made by the Roman forces are still visible, as are the caved-in houses caused by Roman soldiers attempting to scale the roofs in search of Jewish resistance fighters.

By the time the Roman legion had reached Jerusalem, the Christians in the city had fled to the wilderness, in accordance with the advice given by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. This “desertion” was the cause of much ongoing bitterness between Christians and Jews in Palestine in the years that followed. When the destruction of Jerusalem was complete, the remaining Zealots, led by Eleazar ben Yair, fled with their families to Masada, a fortress built by Herod the Great near the Dead Sea. The fort was built on a high plateau accessible only by a narrow road winding up the side of the mountain. Here a thousand Zealots prepared to make their last stand against the Roman army. Having prepared ahead of time for such an eventuality, the Zealots had enough provisions stored on the peak to withstand the ensuing siege for three years. Finally, the Romans tired of waiting and constructed a huge siege ramp to give access to the walls of the fortress. Despite a hail of arrows from the battlements, the siege ramp was completed, and the Romans were able to breach the walls. When they entered the compound, however, they found nothing but corpses. Further examination disclosed two women and their children, who had hidden in a storage cellar. They related the account of the Zealots’ last stand, and how the leaders had decided that death was preferable to dishonor and enslavement at the hands of the Romans. The leaders made a suicide pact, in which each man would kill the members of his family, then the leaders would kill the men, and finally each other, until the last man left, whose name had been drawn by lot, would kill himself, leaving the Romans with nothing but an empty victory. The fortress still stands today in the Judean desert. The siege ramp is still visible, and excavations in the interior of the fortress have disclosed significant stores of grain that would have allowed the Zealots to hold out against a much longer siege, along with a few of the actual potsherds bearing the names of Zealot leaders that were used to determine who would be the last to carry out the terms of the suicide pact.

Later, in 135, another Jewish revolt broke out under the leadership of a messianic pretender named Bar Kochba. The revolt was brutally put down by Hadrian's legions, and Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city in an attempt to ward off the Jewish infection of the province. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls set off a rabid hunt for antiquities in the Judean wilderness. Among the fragments discovered in one of the caves was a series of letters from Bar Kochba to one of his officers during the closing days of the rebellion.

## THE EARLY ROMAN PERSECUTIONS

Two first-century Roman emperors persecuted Christians - Nero and Domitian. Nero's persecution, in 64 A.D., was an isolated outburst in which the emperor sought a scapegoat to deflect public attention from his own problems and to put a stop to the rumor that he had been responsible for the great fire that destroyed large portions of the city of Rome. The persecution was relatively brief and was confined largely to Rome and its immediate environs, though Nero's tactics were brutal and the persecution claimed the lives of both Peter and Paul. The Colosseum where most of the sadistic tortures of Christians took place is still standing in Rome, of course, though most of the artifacts are associated with later Roman persecutions.

Domitian was a paranoid who instituted a persecution of all sects that were not included on the list of legal religions, reasoning that they were a threat to the stability of the empire. Flavius Clemens, a relative of the emperor, and his wife Domitilla were both executed for being Christians (scholars have speculated fruitlessly about whether this Clement was the author of the late first-century epistle known as I Clement), and the Apostle John was exiled to Patmos. This was the first time Christians were treated by Rome as a sect distinct from Judaism. The break between Jews and Jewish Christians as a result of the fall of Jerusalem was a major factor in this distinction, along with the increasingly Gentile makeup of the church.

It was probably during the persecution of Domitian that the catacombs underneath the city of Rome first began to be used for Christian worship. The labyrinth of tunnels had long been used for burial purposes, but the outbreak of persecution forced Christian worship underground, and these tombs turned out to be ideal for the purpose. Excavations have uncovered significant amounts of Christian art, inscriptions, and graffiti on the walls of these underground tombs, including the tomb of the aristocratic Domitilla. The catacombs continued to be used for Christian burial and worship until the issuing of the Edict of Milan in the early part of the fourth century.

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation has a number of archaeological connections. The island of Patmos, on which it was written, was used as a place of exile for political prisoners, and according to tradition John was sent there during the persecution of Domitian. The island later became the site of a monastery established in honor of the Apocalypse and its author.

The seven cities to which the book was addressed were located in western Asia Minor. A messenger traveling the great Roman road through the region would arrive at the cities in the order in which the letters are found in chapters two and three. Archaeology has shed light on several of the comments made in the letters at the beginning of the book. For instance, the mention of the

“synagogue of Satan” in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia indicate the presence of large and virulently anti-Christian Jewish communities, which archaeology has confirmed. “Satan’s throne” in Pergamum could have been either the temple of Zeus or the temple of Aesculapius (the Greek god of healing whose symbol was the caduceus), both of which have been excavated. The reference to Jezebel in the letter to Thyatira could have been an allusion to the city’s flourishing craft guilds, most of whom were associated with pagan deities, and into which Christians apparently were being drawn. Sardis was located on a supposedly impregnable cliff, yet had been conquered on two separate occasions by armies scaling the cliff in the middle of the night and surprising the unprepared defenders, giving greater significance to Christ’s threat to come upon them like a thief in the night unless they repented. Philadelphia was located at an important crossroads, and thus had an open door of witness to the travelers who passed through the town on their way through Asia Minor. In addition, the reference in the letter to Philadelphia about writing the names of the righteous on the pillar of the temple has been found to be common practice in the Jewish synagogues of the day.

Laodicea was a thriving commercial center, noted empire-wide for the production of a beautiful and luxurious black woolen cloth (perhaps Lydia’s “purple” if the cloth was produced by dyeing, or perhaps from a special strain of black sheep), which is the source of the allusion to white garments in the letter to the church there. The eyesalve mentioned in the letter was Phrygian powder, an ointment for ophthalmia, while the “gold tried in the fire” refers to the thriving banking business in Laodicea. The lukewarm water could have been a reference to the medicinal hot springs of Hierapolis, the water from which was neither medicinal nor hot by the time it reached Laodicea.

The mysterious sect of the Nicolaitans has never been identified, nor has the cryptic number 666, although many scholars believe that the latter refers to Nero Caesar, which when rendered into Hebrew and converted into a numerical value by the process of gematria yields the number 666. Such a conclusion, however, would either imply that the book of Revelation had been written during Nero’s persecution rather than Domitian’s (which is possible though not supported by any early church tradition), or that the author had been influenced by the Nero Redivivus superstition of the early church that identified the Antichrist with a resurrected Nero. Such ideas, of course, have done nothing to stop interminable speculations throughout history which have tended to identify every villain who comes upon the international stage with the number of the Beast.

## NAG HAMMADI AND THE Gnostics

The discovery at Nag Hammadi in Egypt of a library belonging to the ancient Gnostics has done much to improve our knowledge of that heretical movement, known largely through the writings of its enemies in previous years. The find included several Gnostic gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas, which contain infancy and childhood narratives from the life of Jesus, along with numerous sayings of Jesus that are not included in the New Testament. Despite the claims of liberal scholars that these findings shed new light on Jesus and the process by which the New Testament came into being, they really do little more than shed light on the Gnostic movement and confirm what its enemies had been saying about it all along. The childhood stories picture Jesus as a rather temperamental and decidedly dangerous miracle-worker who creates and destroys, heals and kills. The sayings tend to reinforce the Gnostic denial of the flesh, both by denying the resurrection and emphasizing the evils of sex and marriage (one, for instance, suggests that because women cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, God will change the righteous ones into men in order to give them

access!). Other Gnostic gospels provide the first mention of Catholic doctrines like the perpetual virginity and assumption of Mary.

The Nag Hammadi find also included a copy of the Gospel of Truth, probably written by Gnostic leader Valentinus in the middle of the second century. This document contains the famous Gnostic Pleroma myth, with its peculiar notions of the relationship of God to creation, matter, and Christ Himself.

Obviously, much more could be said about the relationship of archaeology to Christian history, from ancient monasteries to the kingdom of Charlemagne to Crusader castles in the Holy Land. But we will draw our study to a close as the Bible itself ends, and leave for another time the consideration of the light shed by archaeology on the history of the church.