

Institute for Christian Teaching

THE BIBLE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Randall W. Younker

**414-00 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904**

**Symposium on the Bible and Adventist Scholarship
Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic
March 19-26, 2000**

The Bible and Archaeology

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Department of Education
Symposium on the bible and Adventist Scholarship
Dominican Republic, March 21, 2000

Randall W. Younker
Institute of Archaeology
Andrews University

Introduction

A couple of years ago, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) aired a critically acclaimed special on Genesis. While the program received numerous favorable reviews, a question that apparently lurked in the back of many minds was openly voiced by *Newsweek* magazine, "But Did It Really Happen?" Just last year (1999), the cover of the October 25 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* displayed a painting depicting Eve offering Adam an apple while the title queried, "Is the Bible True?" Both of these international magazines point up a question (a modernist question if you will) that continues to gnaw at us, even as we enter a new millennium and the so-called post modern era—is the bible true?

Why does this question continue to haunt modern society? I suppose it is one thing to read and even enjoy the stories in the Bible; it is quite another to hold that they actually happened. Imagine the impact on western society if we became convinced that the events described in the Bible actually happened and the claims that the Bible makes are actually true—especially if it is realized and accepted that the God of that Bible places demands on those who believe, that there are real soteriological, ethical and eschatological issues we must each confront.

Archaeology and History

For many, especially the secular minded, the only external source for getting at the historical claims of the Bible is through archaeology. What precisely is archaeology? As it happens this very question has been hotly debated in recent years, even by those who are practitioners. For many lay people, archaeology conjures up images of "Indian Jones-like" characters who endure life-threatening adventures while undertaking exotic quests for fabulous treasures. In recent years there has been a vigorous argument that archaeology should function as a subset of the field of anthropology, studying ancient social systems,

etc. However, the more traditional understanding sees the archaeologist as a special type of historian who, rather than pursuing the events of the past by researching sources in a library, tries to get at history in a more direct way by excavating the contemporary artifacts of history from the earth.

It is interesting to note that the modern discipline of archaeology was originally born out of an interest in recovering history—and not just any history, but, specifically, Bible history. Dr Randall Price notes that the word archaeology first appears in English in 1607, where it was used to refer specifically to the “knowledge” of ancient Israel from literary sources such as the Bible (1997: 25). Thus, from the beginning, the idea of archaeology was linked to the Bible. It was only as archaeology shifted its focus to other lands to recover their histories that a special term had to be coined for that branch of archaeology that retained as its primary focus, the Bible; thus, “Biblical Archaeology” was born.

Beginnings of Biblical Archaeology

As Dr Price’s comments imply, early Biblical archaeology was initially more of a literary pursuit. The lands of the ancient Near East were essentially closed to westerners until the European powers began to attempt penetrations into the weakening Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 19th century. Most Biblical and Near Eastern archaeologists mark the beginning of true archaeology in the Holy Land with Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798. As has been often recounted, Napoleon had the foresight to bring with him a large contingent of *savants* who, in the wake of the general’s conquering armies, combed the land of Egypt for clues to her past. The results of the work of these gifted scholars and artists were published in Paris between 1802-25 in the multi-volumed *Description de l’Egypte*. One of the significant discoveries of this invasion was the Rosetta Stone found in the town of Rosetta in the western delta of Egypt. This trilingual stone, of course, unlocked the secrets of ancient Egypt, one of the countries that interacted with Palestine throughout the latter’s history. For the first time, Biblical scholars had access to the history of a neighboring country of ancient Israel and were able to see Israel’s own history in a broader historical context.

From this initial opening, interest in the ancient lands of the Bible exploded across the continent of Europe and in England. The governments of all the major powers, including Russia, Germany, France and Great Britain were eager to support any expeditions into the ancient Near East because it gave them a

presence within the crumbling Ottoman empire and an opportunity to exploit any weaknesses. Soon each country was supporting various expeditions into Egypt, Mesopotamia, and, eventually even the Ottoman backwater of Palestine. The earliest expeditions tended to be geographical surveys since these mysterious lands were still largely unknown to the western world.

While these geographical surveys were being carried out, other explorers focused on the ruins at specific sites. Tremendous interest in ancient Babylon was sparked by the explorations of the actual ruins by the British Resident to Mesopotamia, Claudius James Rich (1787-1821). After wandering around the ruins and conducting some very unscientific probes, Rich wrote a couple of memoirs about ancient Babylon. Enthusiasm for his discoveries and mockery for the infidels is noted by a contemporary poem by Byron, which Moorey (1990: 7) describes as the earliest popular recognition of the importance of fieldwork for biblical archeology:

But to resume, - should there be (what may
Not
Be in these days?) some infidels, who
Don't
Because they can't, find out the very spot
Of that same Babel, or because they won't
(Though Claudius rich, Esquire, some bricks has got,
And written lately two memoirs upon't) (Byron 1820)

This poem also hints with precocious foresight a growing conflict between bible-believers and the expanding influence of historical criticism within some theological circles. As British archaeologist, P. R. S. Moorey points out (1991: 13), when the “monuments” (as newly discovered extra-biblical inscriptions were known at that time) from the ancient Near East were first discovered, they were used more to elucidate than to authenticate the Scriptures. However, as the historical critical approach continued to expand among academics, those scholars who wanted to maintain a high view of the Bible began to employ archaeology as a tool to refute the critics. And those early excavators seemed to provide a series of stunning discoveries that seemed to be just the material the apologists needed. This unfortunately led to an “archaeology has proven” the Bible” approach by conservatives and evangelicals that began with the Anglican clergyman and Assyriologist, A. H. Sayce, and reached its peak during the time of William Foxwell Albright, the “dean” of American Biblical Archaeology.

Because this impression that archaeology's role is to "prove the Bible" is so strong, especially among more conservative and evangelical scholars, it is appropriate to digress for a moment and examine Biblical principles that can inform us of the abuses and proper uses of archaeology with regards to Biblical research.

Applying Archaeology in Biblical Research—Some Bible Principles

Since the basic principles of a proper Biblical hermeneutic using principles derived from Scripture, itself, have already been thoroughly outlined and discussed by Hasel (1985), Maier (1994), Davidson (1995) and others, this essay will focus only on those principles that are most applicable to archaeology. These are: (1) that God can and has communicated to humanity through Scripture (2 Tim 3:15-16; 1 Pet 1:19-21; based upon the analysis of a number of Biblical passages by Nash [1982] and Larkin [1988], I would even affirm that these principles are in harmony with and, indeed support a position that maintains that God's communication with humanity through Scripture is in the form of propositional revelation--this, I believe, is an important position that is misunderstood by many in the Adventist church, yet is critical to conducting a proper hermeneutic); (2) that God's communications to us in this mode (and all modes) are completely truthful and reliable (Isa 8:20; John 17:17); (3) that, with God's help through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, humanity is fully capable of understanding these communications (John 6:45; 1 Cor 2:13-14; 2 Cor 3:14-18).

From these three general principles can be derived a couple of more specific principles. These are: (1) God has revealed Himself to humanity in *history*—in the process that produced Scripture, in the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, and through events in history as recorded in Scripture (Heb 1:1,2); (2) and, that the Bible's version of human history is reliable and trustworthy (e.g. John 21:22).

From the above specific principles dealing with Biblical history can be derived a couple of important corollaries. These are: (1) faith and a personal relationship with God are impossible without God's transcending into human history; (2) genuine interpersonal knowledge [with God] is impossible apart from historical knowledge (by this I am not referring to historical knowledge imparted through humanistic historical methodologies as will be explained below).

Importance of Biblical History to Faith

Both evangelical Christian philosopher Ronald Nash and theologian Gerhard Maier acknowledge that faith, and the personal relationship with God that it encompasses, is impossible without history. This is because it is in historical events (both past and present) that we encounter God—that we meet him, come to know Him and develop a personal relationship with Him. Maier (1994: 219) after supporting this with several Scriptural examples, comments: “faith can only arise where God has previously—not thought, but acted. That is, it arises as biblical faith only in the realm of biblical revelation whose occurrence has extended itself into history.” (It is important to note here that Maier understands God’s “acts” and “revelations” that extend into human history to include not just phenomena such the miraculous intervention of saving Israel at the Red Sea [a “completed” historic event], but also God’s other revelations, such as his promises and “words” given to the prophets. Indeed, in Hebrew thinking, deed and word are essentially synonymous. Thus, acceptance, confidence and trust in all of God’s revelations, whether His completed deeds of the past or promised words for the future are the essence of Biblical faith. This acceptance, confidence and trust is, of course a gift from the Holy Spirit, as noted above [John 6:45; 1 Cor 2:13-14; 2 Cor 3:14-18]. This understanding is within the Scriptural framework of faith given in Hebrews 11.)

The British evangelical scholar C. F. Henry points out that “God reveals himself . . . within this external history in unique saving acts.” Therefore, Maier adds (1994: 210), we must insist that “historical acts” belong inextricably to divine revelation,

God is the ultimate ground of history. God revealed himself in history in such a way that his revelation could be discerned even in the midst of a fallen human race. When we speak of the historical nature of the Bible, we have in mind precisely that crossover of the eternal divine revelation into the present space-time world (*transitio revelationis*).

Significantly, Maier is careful to note that historical investigation alone cannot create faith, because faith requires a personal relationship [encounter] with the one [God] who encounters us in the events of history. (This encounter with God is not simply knowledge or persuasion on the intellectual level that God exists—many may believe in God’s existence but are not believers and will not be saved.)

This is, in part, why believers are (or should be) reluctant to say that history (or archaeology) “proves” faith. By itself, it can’t. Nevertheless, history plays a crucial role because genuine interpersonal knowledge is impossible apart from historical knowledge. As Nash points out (1984: 149),

To whatever extent faith knowledge is analogous to interpersonal knowledge, it is obvious that a faith commitment requires prior historical knowledge. Trust is inseparable from knowledge. When a person becomes a friend or falls in love he makes a commitment that goes beyond what he knows; but nonetheless the commitment would never have been made without some prior knowledge. The person making the commitment reasons that even though there may be much about this person he does not know, he knows enough to believe, to trust, to make a commitment that goes beyond the evidence. But the commitment is still based on some evidence.

Moreover, cognitive knowledge continues to be important, even essential to interpersonal knowledge; historical knowledge continues to be relevant even after a personal commitment is made (1984: 149).

Again, as Nash illustrates,

But historical knowledge continues to be relevant even after a commitment is made. Suppose one person who makes a commitment to another discovers that what was believed about the history of the other is false. For example, imagine a person whose father dies shortly before his birth. Over the years, as this person grew into young manhood, he was told many stories about his deceased father that represented him as courageous, noble, and virtuous. Holding a faith-image of his father as a great man, the young man is understandably proud of his father; he believes *in* his father. But now suppose that the young man discovers that all of the stories about his father are false; his father in truth was just the opposite of what the young man believed him to be. Dare we hold in this case, as theologians like Bultmann appear to suggest in the case of Jesus, that the historical truth is irrelevant to the son's faith in his father? In the case of any normal and reasonable person, we would expect that the correction of the man's false historical knowledge about his father would destroy his faith knowledge in his father. Why should the relationship of faith knowledge to historical knowledge be any different in belief in Jesus Christ? Changes in our historical knowledge can change and even destroy interpersonal relationships. This is the way it is in nonreligious dimensions of life; and this is the way it is in religion.

These comments illustrate why the historical veracity of Scripture is so important to the traditional Bible-believing Christian. Everything is at stake. This is why the believer takes all challenges to the Bible's revealed history seriously. The stakes have not been lost on the historical critics. As archaeologist (and historical critic) William Dever candidly notes, "For Protestantism, however, higher criticism struck a mortal blow to the very heart: the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the concept of the Bible as 'Word of God,'" (1990: 15). This is because one of the basic tenants of historical criticism is the *principle of criticism* that requires the scholar to approach the text with an attitude of *methodological doubt*. As Old Testament historian Max Miller says, in rejecting a conservative attitude toward Scriptures, "This [the Bible-believing] position short-circuits normal historical investigation, if for no other reason than that it conflicts with one of the basic tenets of modern historiography—namely, that the historian must always approach his or her sources with a critical spirit, with some degree of skepticism" (Miller 1992: 63). Dever voices a

similar need for skepticism: “Whatever degree of historical reliability we encounter in the various literary genres of the Hebrew bible, it is evident that all require careful critical interpretation before they can be used by the historian of ancient Israel. The Bible cannot simply be read at face value as history; nor of course, can any other ancient text be so read” (Dever 1990: 5).

This skepticism is specifically directed at virtually all the major historical events that the Biblical record portrays. Again, Miller and Hayes are quite direct in describing the historical critical position: “Specifically we hold that the main story line of Genesis-Joshua—creation, pre-Flood patriarchs, great Flood, second patriarchal age, entrance into Egypt, twelve tribes descended from twelve brothers, escape from Egypt, complete collections of law and religious instructions handed down at Mt. Sinai, forty years of wandering in the wilderness, miraculous conquest of Canaan, assignment of tribal territories, establishment of the priestly order and cities of refuge—is an artificial and theologically influenced literary construct” (Miller and Hayes 1986: 78).

Because believers realize the importance of history to the Christian faith, it is important and even essential that we become active in the investigation into history. However, because, as noted above, historical research involving what God has revealed through Scriptures requires personal interaction with the author beyond the normal, believers find the principles set out by the historical critical method, including the principle of criticism, principle of analogy and the principle of correlation to be inadequate at truly getting at the past. As Maier’s argues:

It would [be] . . . erroneous . . . to isolate historical research from its larger connections with revelation and encounter, and even more mistaken to want to burden it with the entire responsibility for deciding yes or no. The kernel of truth in the view that wants to dissolve ties between faith and history lies here: historical research overwhelms, indeed becomes a form of antitheology, when it is said to be the sole deciding factor in deciding the faith question. The tragedy of those who champion the absolute freedom of historical criticism from church dogma lies not least in the fact that they make this erroneous move. Instead, faith in the self-revealing God and trust in his revelation must be underway before we tackle historical investigation of the Bible (1994: 214).

Having made this comment, Maier immediately anticipates the challenge any critic will make: “But doesn’t that mean that those persons are right who raise the objection that theologians who believe in revelation are not really working ‘historically,’ that they are convinced in advance that “the Bible is always right”? Maier answers this question with two statements:

(1) Like every other act in life, historical investigation entails the danger that the interpreter's faith will be changed or even destroyed. To that extent, then, historical work is not undertaken as a game but as a serious risk—just like every other step in faithful discipleship. (2) As long as the interpreter, however, trusts God and his Word, he will agree with revelation also at those points where it stands in tension with or contradiction to other sciences and life experiences. Revelatory truth possesses a higher worth for him than any “truth” outside of revelation. Examples of this are found in Luther and Bengel, who would have rather [done] violence to secular history” than give up the preeminence of Scripture (1994: 214--215).

From the above discussion we learn that history is crucial to faith and it is essential that the believer investigate history. However, that research needs to involve an encounter with the author of history and His revelation must have priority in historical research. This leads us back to the role of archaeology in the research of Biblical history.

What Archaeology Can Not and Can Do

The idea expressed by Maier that the believing interpreter must trust God and His Word and agree with revelation at those points where its stand in tension with or contradiction to other sciences provides an important reminder of the limitations of archaeology. It should not be considered a final authority. Certainly, its purpose cannot be to “prove” the Bible. We have subjugated the Bible's own self-described authority to one outside of the text, if we allow archaeology that position of authority. This is an important point because the history of Biblical archaeology has revealed a tendency on the part of conservative scholars to use the Bible in this very way. However, as Adventist archaeologist and Old Testaments scholar Lloyd Willis notes, “Because archaeology is interpretive in nature [subjective] apparent contradictions are inevitable, and the Christian can then be left in a quandary. Faith should be in God and Scripture” (1982: 560 n. 1). There are some other inherent weaknesses in archaeology that also make it unsuitable for serving as an absolute authority. It cannot generally prove the details of significant events. Nor can it verify the theological dimensions of Biblical events.

Positive Contributions of Archaeology

In spite of these weaknesses, however, there are a number of positive things that archaeology can do. For example, it can serve as a test for literary reconstructions of the biblical texts. That is to say, archaeology can “falsify” bad theories about the Bible or to put it in a more positive light, archaeology can

provide a different point of “view against which to test . . . [a historical critical] interpretation of the documents (Lance 1981: 66). This use is not really necessary for the believer, but may help a non-believer who is struggling with such challenges. Second, it can provide the contemporary setting and context—historical, cultural, linguistic and religious—for the writing of Biblical materials and the events these materials describe. In this sense it can sometimes provide clarification. Third, it can sometimes provide corroborative evidence for the existence of specific people, places and even events mentioned in the Biblical writings. It should be understood that corroboration is not the same thing as proof. One does not need to prove something that is already established. Corroboration is simply additional evidence or perspective on something that is already accepted as true. Again, this usage is not essential for the believer, although it can be edifying for an already established faith. It can also help the unbeliever who is challenged by claims that the events and people of the bible are totally fictitious. It should be noted that these archaeological data cannot in themselves result in conversion—only the Holy Spirit can do that—but it can be information that the Spirit can use to positively impress a struggling individual. In the closing pages of this essay, we will review some of the more significant discoveries from that last 150 years that illustrate these three usages.

Archaeology, Biblical People and Events

From the very beginnings of field investigations into the ancient Near East, archaeology has continuously verified the existence of people mentioned in the Bible as well as the occurrence of biblical events. The first of these discoveries that has a direct bearing on the Bible was made in 1843, by Paul Emile Bott (1802-1870), a French consular officer and antiquarian. He was excavating at Khorsabad also known Dur Sharrukin (Sargon’s Castle), in Iraq. He found a number of cuneiform tablets as well as bas-reliefs with inscriptions. When he brought these back to Europe, a scholar named Longperrier was able to make out the name *Sar-gin* on one of the inscriptions. He was able to identify this name with Sargon, King of Assyria mentioned in Isaiah 20:1. This was, to my knowledge, the first biblical character whose existence was confirmed independently of the Bible. This discovery naturally created a great amount of excitement and interest in Europe—and the discoveries kept coming.

In 1846, an Irish clergyman named Edward Hincks, was able to read the name of king Nebuchadnezzar (II) and his father, on clay bricks that travelers had brought back from Mesopotamia. This both confirmed the existence of this person noted in the book of Daniel, and his claim to be a great builder of Babylon.

The next series of discoveries was by Austen Henry Layard. He undertook excavations at the twin sites of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus (traditional site of Jonah's grave) that turned out to be biblical Nineveh. Among the biblical significant finds uncovered by Layard was the Black Obelisk (1846). Although Henry Rawlinson made the initial attempt at translating the 210 lines of cuneiform in 1850, he missed some critical readings. George Friedrich Grotefend and Edward Hincks supplied these a short time later that same year. In August 1850 Grotefend suggested that the Assyrian king's name on this obelisk should be read as Shalmaneser (V), the same person mentioned in 2 Kings, 17:13! Then in December, Hincks argued that '*Yua, mar Humri*, was none other than Jehu, son of [the house of] Omri. Jehu, of course, was the king of Israel known for his aggressive chariot driving (2 Kngs 9:20). In 1851 Henry Rawlinson found his own Biblical names on a colossal stone human-headed bull statue of the Assyrian King Sennacherib (2 Kings 18) that Layard had brought back from Nineveh. In this case, Rawlinson found the names, *Hezekiah, Jerusalem and Judah*. When fully translated, this inscription (known as the **Bull Inscription**) tells of Sennacherib's conquest of Hezekiah and Judah (2 Kngs 18-19; Isa 36-37).

In 1852 working on slabs that Layard had brought back from the North-West Palace at Nimrud, Edward Hincks read the names Manahem of Samaria. Manahem is mentioned in 2 Kngs 5:19-20 as asking a king of Assyria ("Pul" in the Bible) for help. By 1853, Layard, with the help of his epigraphers, was able to claim that he had found nearly fifty-five rulers, cities, and countries mentioned in both the Old Testament and the newly discovered Assyrian texts (Moorey 1990: 11).

While many additional finds have been made between 1850 and 1950 that can illustrate how Biblical persons and events have been confirmed, we will quickly skip to some of the more spectacular finds of the last few years. These include the probable ossuary of Caiaphas, the high priest who presided over part of the proceedings against Jesus before the Savior's crucifixion; the discovery of King David's name on an Aramaic stele from Tel Dan—the first extra-biblical mention of David ever reported; the name of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe (as well as his fingerprint); and the seal of King Hezekiah, himself.

Beyond the confirmation of the existence of people and events mentioned in the Bible, archaeology has recovered a number of documents that have provided scholars with the “skeleton” of history—a chronological framework. Initially, the extra-biblical chronological data seemed to be at odds with the Bible’s internal chronology for ancient Near Eastern history. However, closer analysis of these apparent contradictions by the late Adventist Old Testament scholar, Edwin R. Thiele showed that the apparent disparate data could actually be harmonized in almost all cases. Thiele’s research, accepted for his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, has caused many scholars to have greater respect for the Bible’s chronological statements. Earlier this year (2000) this confidence was affirmed by Anson Rainey, Professor emeritus at Tel Aviv University in Israel during a visit with me at Andrews University.

Historical, Cultural, Linguistic and Religious Settings and Context

One of the earliest discoveries not only led to the first extra-biblical identification of a person mentioned in the Bible, Sargon, but also provided more information on the historical context that helped clarify the Biblical account about the fall of Israel. Specifically, Col. Henry Rawlinson and Edward Hincks (an Irish clergyman) were able to decipher some of the wall inscriptions that Botta had copied. It turned out that these inscriptions recounted one of the gravest events in Israelite history: the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 (2 Kngs 17:6). Botta’s discoveries accomplished two things for Biblical studies: it confirmed the existence of Sargon in Isaiah 20 (whose existence had be questioned by some critics), and confirmed and clarified the circumstances of a biblical event—the fall of Samaria. We now know that the siege was begun by Shalmaneser V (2 Kngs 17:3-6), but completed by his general who became Sargon II.

Archaeology has provided even more dramatic historic, cultural, linguistic and religious insights into the fall of Lachish, recounted in 2 Kings 18. Not only do we have the Biblical account, but Sennacherib’s pictorial account has been recovered from his palace, as well has his own written account of the battle. In addition to this, the site of Lachish has been excavated bringing to light even more details of the battle. These discoveries have informed us all sorts of details about this biblical event. Seals inform us that people from the north spelled their names differently than people from the south (northerners tended to abbreviate the theophoric element that part of the name dealing with Yahweh) in their names—a point that ironically coincides for their more rapid apostasy). Evidence from seals and Assyrian reliefs also seems to

suggest that a lot of northerners were living in Lachish and that they had a false temple there—a fact, which if true, makes Micah 1:13 make more sense—“You who live in Lachish . . . you were the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion because the transgression of Israel was in you.”

Refuting Criticisms against the Bible's Historicity

The final area where archaeology can make a contribution is in refuting the challenges that critics have laid against the Bible's historical veracity. There are at least five reasons why various scholars have rejected the historicity of the bible, and I believe that archaeology can help in refuting each of them. The first is the difficulty that secular historians have with the attribution of supernatural activity in the natural world, a phenomenon that occurs frequently in Scripture (see Miller and Hayes 1986: 59 and Millard 1994: 42, 63-64). The idea that God intervenes in our space-time continuum is not subject to empirical verification. By this I refer to the causative factor of an event. This does not mean that a “residue” of the event might not be empirically detectable. But because the cause of an event is not generally detectable in the historical residue of the event (the archaeological remains), the reliability of the Bible cannot really be proven or disproven in an empirical manner. In short, supernatural causation, by its very nature, is impossible to test; it is purely a philosophical issue. The invocation of a supernatural cause cannot be used to “prove” the truth of an event, at least through empirical approaches. However, neither can it be used to deny the event. There is another aspect to the appearance of the supernatural in Scripture that should caution even a secular historian from rejecting its basic historicity, even if he/she does not believe in God. A number of important inscriptions produced by archaeology has been compared with the Biblical materials by Moshe Weinfield (1983). As Alan Millard points out, the similarity between ancient Israel's reporting of events and that of other ancient Near Eastern peoples must be recognized. “There is no difference in the type or result of these episodes: divine intervention brings success to the narrator's side in an unexpected way. Each nation believed her own deity or deities acted on her behalf. Just as the Lord sent hailstones on the Amorites, so that more died from them than from Israelite swords, so Adad finished off the enemy of Sargon of Assyria with thunder and hailstones. There need be no doubt that the Assyrian enemy's experience was as real as the Amorites', both being beaten down by heavy hail. Again, the historian and commentator is obliged to treat the reports as factual evidence of ancient events.” Millard

notes that Israel records numerous examples of what they believed to be God's intervention at key moments in their history. He argues "had nothing occurred to display the power of their God memorably, there would have been little impetus to believe in him when Canaanite and other gods were so much more attractive and so much less demanding. The continuity of that belief through the Exile and other adversities, a continuity that contrasts with the extinction of all the contemporary religions, is a noteworthy testimony to faith firmly founded in history" (1994: 64).

The second reason why critical scholars are skeptical about the historical reliability of Scripture is the alleged existence of exaggerations or even outright fabrications. During the latter part of the 19th century when the historical critical method was becoming widely accepted, a favorite example that presented as illustrating the bible's historical inaccuracy was the references in Daniel to Belshazzar as the final king of Babylon. Some scholars, such as Hitzig in his *Commentary on Daniel* (p. 75) went so far as to suggest that Belshazzar was a pure invention on the part of the writer of Daniel chapter 5 (see Free and Vos 1992: 201). However, as is now well known, in 1854 some clay cylinders were found at the ancient city of Ur upon one of which was inscribed a prayer on behalf of King Nabonidus and his son--Belshazzar. Other documents were subsequently discovered that indicate that King Nabonidus preferred to live in Teima in northern Arabia, rather than at the capital city of Babylon. He apparently left his son Belshazzar in charge—in effect a coregent—as second in the kingdom. This position assigned to Belshazzar explains why he offered Daniel the third highest position in the land instead of the second—Belshazzar already occupied the latter. (A similar claim was made about Sargon in Isaiah 20.)

The point here, however, is not to show how archaeology has proven the Bible. Indeed, none of these Belshazzar tablets actually refers to those final, fateful events in the Great Hall of the palace that Daniel describes where the king was weighed in the balances and found wanting. In this case, archaeology is more effective in disproving the critic's claims that there was no Belshazzar than in proving the Bible account of events true. The archaeological evidence that there was indeed such an individual is gratifying to the believer, but is not and should not be necessary in proving the historicity of the Bible.

The real point that must be made here is that many skeptics actually use what is called *ex silentio*, an "argument from silence," to show that the bible is inaccurate. Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen has been quoted as saying, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." To be able to make such a claim

skeptics must have in their possession all records of the relevant period that ever existed and trust that the ancient scribes were complete in their recording. However, what are the odds of archaeologists ever finding all the ancient records? What is the likelihood of all those tablets even surviving until the present; and how would the skeptic ever know that they, indeed, had recovered all the relevant records? The archaeologist and biblical scholar, Roland de Vaux (1970: 70) warned,

Finally, one must remember that the witness which archaeology and the texts afford is and always will remain incomplete. The earth's crust has preserved only a small portion of the monuments and objects of antiquity, and archaeology has recovered only a small proportion of these; also, those texts which we have represent only a very small part of that which was written, and even so would not represent everything necessary for the work of the historian. Thus archaeology can mitigate the silence of ancient texts to a certain degree, but *one must also admit that lack of archaeological evidence would not be sufficient in itself to cast doubt on the affirmations of the written witnesses* (emphasis added). (For the improbability of obtaining all such records see Yamauchi 1972: 146-162).

The third objection of critics is the apparent presence of anachronisms in the Bible. An anachronism is when an event or phenomenon from a later period of history is read into an earlier period. For example, if I were to say that George Washington was driven to his inauguration in an automobile, that statement would be an anachronism since no automobiles existed until well after Washington's time. Scholars have identified a number of what they consider to be anachronisms in Scripture, suggesting that the stories were written much later than the times about which they purport to describe. Obviously the presence of anachronisms can cast doubt upon other details of the narrative, undermining its historical credibility. To a certain extent this objection is not too different than the previous argument in that the identification of anachronisms is often derived from an argument of silence. The problem with anachronisms is that future archaeological research has often shown them not to be anachronistic at all. Some good examples of this include the references in the patriarchal narratives to camels and tents (Gen 12:16). In the mid-1970's two prominent scholars, T. L. Thompson and John van Seters introduced new arguments that they believed undermined the historicity of the patriarchal narrative. These arguments included the presence of references of tents and camels. In the case of the camels, it was argued that camels were not domesticated until well into the 1st millennium BC, well after the supposed patriarchal period in the 2nd millennium. Similarly, they argued that tent dwelling (in the manner that Abraham and his family are said to have lived) was more common in the 1st millennium than the second. Both the reference

to tents and camels were, thus anachronistic, and cast doubt upon the historical reliability of the Genesis narratives that contained them.

My own research, however, and that of several other scholars, has shown that there is actually plenty of evidence for domesticated camels from the second millennium BC. Some of this evidence includes a bronze figurine of a camel in a kneeling position found at Byblos and dated to the 19th/18th centuries BE; a gold camel figurine in a kneeling position from the 3rd Dynasty of Ur (2070-1960 BC); a petroglyph at Aswan in Egypt which shows a man leading a camel by a rope (writing next to the picture suggests its dates to 2423-2263 BC); and a figurine from Aabussir el Melek, Egypt showing a recumbent camel carrying a load (dated to the 3rd millennium BC). To these examples, I can take pride in adding another that was discovered by myself (Younker 1997), along with colleagues, Dick and JoAnn Davidson (our children), William Shea and David Merling during an excursion into the Wadi Nasib in the Sinai during the month of July 1998. There I noticed a petroglyph of a camel being led by a man not far from a stele of Ammenemes III and some famous proto-Sinaitic inscriptions discovered by Georg Gerster in 1961. Based on the patina of the petroglyphs, the dates of the accompanying inscriptions and nearby archaeological remains it would seem that this camel petroglyph dates to the Late Bronze Age, probably not later than 1500 BC. Clearly, scholars who have denied the presence of domesticated camels in the 2nd millennium BC have been committing the fallacy of arguing from silence. This approach should not be allowed to cast doubt upon the veracity of any historical document, let alone Scripture.

It is interesting to note how, once an idea gets into the literature, it can become entrenched in conventional scholarly thinking. I remember doing research on the ancient site of Hama in Syria. As I was reading through the excavation reports (published in French), I came across a reference to a figurine from the 2nd millennium which the excavator thought must be a horse, but the strange hump in the middle of its back made one think of a camel. I looked at the photograph and the figurine was obviously that of a camel! This scholar was so influenced by the idea that camels were not used until the 1st millennium, that when he found a figurine of one in the second millennium, he felt compelled to call it a horse! This is a classic example of circular reasoning.

As for tents, Assyriologist Donald J. Wiseman (1983: 145) notes that there are over 30 references to tent dwellers in ancient texts from the 2nd millennium—outside of the Biblical references. That is more

than occurs in all the 1st millennium texts that archaeologists have found so far. So why should references to tents in Genesis be considered anachronistic? These examples show that scholars should be careful in using anachronisms for casting doubt upon the historical reliability of the Biblical narratives. Any new find may prove them wrong. When I was attending a seminar with several other students at the University of Arizona, I recall that on one occasion Bill Dever cautioned us to be aware of the possibility of finding “that ugly little fact that will destroy our elegant theory.”

The fourth reason why people doubt the reliability of the Bible’s history is the impression that archaeological research as disproven biblical history (the patriarchal period, the Exodus, Jericho, etc.) This leaves the impression that some *positive* evidence has been found (as opposed to the arguments from silence that were reviewed above) that has conclusively shown the Bible to be wrong on some historical point. However, such evidence is much less available and unequivocal than people realize. Indeed, the preeminent Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin is said to have made the comment that in over 50 years of archaeological research he had not seen anything that contradicted the basic historicity of the Bible (although he did question some details).

One of the major examples that is used to illustrate how archaeology has disprove the Bible’s historical reliability is the case of Jericho. In the 1930’s British archaeologist John Garstang claimed he had found evidence of Joshua’s conquest of Jericho! He had excavated a city at Tell es-Sultan (which most scholars believe is Old Testament Jericho) that he identified as City IV. According to Garstang, this city had been abruptly destroyed by fire as evidenced by a meter covering of ash. Even more striking was Garstang’s dating of this destruction—1400 BC. This was the very time of the Conquest if one counts the 480 years between Solomon and the exodus as recorded in 1 Kings 6:1 as a valid chronological datum point.

However, when this site was re-excavated by Kathleen Kenyon during the 1950’s she failed to find any evidence of occupation of any kind during the time of the Conquest, regardless of when one dated this event. The city was empty! This conclusion was most disappointing to Bible believers, but historical critics used these findings as exhibit A in proving that the bible was historically inaccurate and unreliable. It is still important to note that this conclusion was based on what scholars did not find, not what they did find. Nevertheless, the apparent absence of a occupied city at the expected time was generally promoted as

positive evidence that disproved the historicity of the Bible on a major event. Any questions of possible site misidentification, misdating of the ruins, etc. were not seriously considered.

That is, until the late 1980's when Dr. Bryant Wood, whose Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Toronto dealt with Late Bronze Age pottery (the time of the Conquest), decided to re-examine Kenyon's' research. He discovered that Kenyon based her conclusion that the city was not lived in during the time of the Conquest on the fact that she did not find any imported pots from that date (Late Bronze Age) in the ruins. However, she had not analyzed the local, common wares. As he studied these locally made pots from City IV he discovered that they could actually be dated to ca. 1400 BC—the time of the Conquest. Moreover, he noted other evidence that pointed to this same date including a carbon date from a burnt beam of the street of City IV that dated to ca 1410 +/- 30 years, and a number of scarabs from nearby tombs that were from pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty—the time of the Exodus. (These included scarabs of Thutmoses III, Amenhotep II and Hatshepsut). Doctor Wood made many scholars upset when he announced that Kenyon was wrong in her conclusions; however, none has come forward with an adequate rebuttal. One scholar allowed that maybe Jericho was lived in during 1400 BC, but since modern scholarship has shown that the Exodus/Conquest is not historical, the evidence that Dr. Wood has presented is irrelevant—a classic case of circular reasoning. It should be noted that Dr Wood's claims remain controversial and need further examination and verification. His work does illustrate, however, that there are still possibilities that can and should be considered and that the conclusions of established science should not be taken for granted.

The final reason why skeptics have doubted the historical accuracy of the Bible is the presence of apparent contradictions within the Biblical text, itself. While this is not strictly an archaeological issue (except when archaeology produces literary materials that can illuminate the problem), it still warrants a few brief comments. Many of these contradictions appear in parallel accounts of the same events, such as within the gospels. Various scholars have already addressed many of these challenges of possible contradictions, and I feel that, in general adequate answers have been provided. A case in point would be the alleged contradictions between Genesis chapters 1 and 2 (see Younker 2000: 69-78). While the supposed existence of these contradictions continues to be pushed there are now numerous studies that show that these contradictions are really phantoms. This is not to say that there still are not issues that

could be addressed. However, the bottom line for me is that *none* of these apparent contradictions, nor those that are claimed for other portions of the Bible, affects its basic historicity.

Summary

In summary, we have attempted to describe the relationship of archaeology to the study of Scripture within a context that accepts the Bible as the fully inspired, authoritative Word of God that includes a truthful and accurate history of God's dealings with humanity from the time of Creation to the present age. Because the God of the Bible is the source of truth and justice, He invites us to test Him, to investigate His claims. This can be done through a number of disciplines including archaeology. However, before initiating such investigations, Scripture reminds us that the God of the Bible is the author of history and it has been His pleasure to cross into our time-space continuum, into our history. He has done this through His Word, through His son and through the events of history. It is, thus, through history that we meet God. Because God is the author of history, history can only be understood when the investigator is in a relationship with that Author. There can therefore be no genuine objective historical investigation apart from being in contact with God. Moreover, because the Bible is a revelation from God, who informs us that what He has revealed is true, the Bible-believing archaeologist does not use his/her discipline to stand to test the authenticity of Scripture's claims—archaeology does not stand in judgment of Scripture. However, it can be profitably used to clarify and corroborate the statements of Scripture; it can be used to edify believers; and it can be used to show the shortcomings of historical reconstructions that are in conflict with the claims of Scripture. Ultimately, its goal should be to bring humanity into a closer understanding of and a saving relationship with its Creator.

References

- Davidson, Richard M.
1995 *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Theological Seminary.
- De Vaux, Roland
1970 On Right and Wrong Uses of Archaeology. Pp. 64080 in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century* (ed. James A. Sanders).

- Dever, W. G.
1990 *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Free Joseph, P. and Vos, Howard, F.
1992 *Archaeology and Bible History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Hasel, G.
1985 *Biblical Interpretation Today*. Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute.
- Henry, C. F. H.
1976 *Revelation and Authority*. Waco, TX: Word Books.
- Hoerth, Alfred J.
1998 *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Lance, H. Darrell
1981 *The Old Testament and the Archaeologist*. Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press.
- Larkins, William J. Jr.
1988 *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Maier, Gerhard
1994 *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books.
- Millard, A. R.
1994 *Story, History, and Theology*. Pp. 37-64 in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, eds. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman. Winona Lake, In: Eisenbrauns.
- Miller, J. Maxwell
1976 *The Old Testament and the Historian*. Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press.
1992 *Reflections on the Study of Israelite History*. Pp. 60-74 in *What has Archaeology to do with Faith?* Philadelphia, PN: Trinity Press International.
- Miller, J. Maxwell and Hayes, John H.
1986 *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia, PN: Westminster Press.
- Moorey, P.R.S.
1991 *A Century of Biblical Archaeology*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Nash, Ronald H.
1982 *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan.
1983 *Christian Faith & Historical Understanding*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Price, Randall
1997 *The Stones Cry Out: What Archaeology Reveals About the Truth of the Bible*. Eugene OR: Harvest House.
- Thiele, Edwin, R.
1983 *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings (New Revised Edition)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- Weinfield, M.
1983 *Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 121-47 in *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (eds. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfield) Jerusalem: Magnes.
- Willis, Lloyd A.
1982 *Archaeology in Adventist Literature: 1937-1980*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press.
- Wiseman, D. J.
1983 *Abraham Reassessed*. Pp. 141-160 in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, eds. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman. Winona Lake, In: Eisenbrauns.
- Wood, Bryant, G.
1990a *Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?* *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/2: 44-58.
1990b *Dating Jericho's Destruction: Bienkowski is Wrong on All Counts.* *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/5: 45-49; 68, 69.
- Yamauchi, Edwin
1972 *The Stones and the Scriptures: An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Yunker, Randall W.
1997 *Late Bronze Age Camel Petroglyphs in the Wadi Nasib, Sinai.* *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 42: 47-54.
2000 *Genesis 2: A Second Creation Account?* Pp. 69-78 in *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary*, ed. John Templeton Baldwin. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.