



Courtesy: Israel Antiquities Authority

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

By

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Archaeology is the study of material remains of past human life and activities. An archaeologist is the person who conducts the research of those material remains.

Here's what some of the great archaeologists and students of archaeology had to say about how material remains of past human life and activities affected the Bible.

1. Nelson Glueck - "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."
2. William F. Albright - "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament traditions."
3. F.F. Bruce - "Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record."
4. Merrill Unger - "Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and in a most astonishing manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of biblical backgrounds."

5. Miller Burrows - "Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal, artificial schemes of historical development ... The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural."

Archaeology and the Old Testament

1. Genesis derives the ancestry of Israel from Mesopotamia. Archaeology confirms it.
2. Genesis 11:1 reads that "The whole earth was of one language and one speech." God confounded the language in Genesis 11:9. Most philologists attest to the likelihood of such an origin for the world's languages.
3. In the genealogy of Esau, there is mention of the Horites (Gen. 36:20). Archaeology confirms the Horites were a prominent group of warriors living in the near East in Patriarchal times.
4. The Bible claims the walls of Jericho fell outwards. Critics scoffed because "walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards." Archaeology proved in the early 1930s that the walls of Jericho did fall outward, just as the Bible said.

5. One critic said the Biblical record of the laver made of brass mirrors was not an original entry into the Priestly Code. So, he dated the writing of the Law at 500 B.C. However, archaeology has since found evidence of such bronze mirrors in what is known as the Empire Period of Egypt's history (1500-1200 B.C.). That's contemporary with Moses.

6. A century ago such familiar Biblical cities as Jericho, Samaria, Bethel, Shiloh, Bethshan, Gezer, Nineveh, Babylon, Ur and many others were shapeless mounds. Critics scoffed at the Biblical record. Within the last 100 years, all of these cities have been uncovered. The importance of the discoveries is that the excavation has produced material which confirms the Scriptures point after point.

7. Excavations are dated on the basis of levels at which things are found. At Tepe Gawra, a few miles north of Nineveh, a seal was found which depicted a man, a woman and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a woman picking fruit from a tree. Behind the woman was a serpent standing erect. The seals were found in the level antedating 3000 B.C. It suggests that the story of the temptation is very old. It was known about long before Abraham and Moses. It was not some Hebrew fairy tale.

These are but a few of hundreds of confirmations of the Old Testament from archaeology.

Archaeology and the New Testament

1. Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. He believed that the Book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century A.D. (150 A.D.). He set out to prove it. However, after thorough research, he changed his mind. He became a firm defender for the mid-first century authorship of Acts.

2. For many critics the account of the birth of Jesus was held as ridiculous. They argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not Governor of Syria at that time and that everyone did not have to return to his ancestral home for a census. Archaeology has proven the critics wrong (again) ---
 - The Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and held censuses every 14 years. The procedure was begun under Augustus.
 - Quirinius was Governor of Syria about 7 B.C.
 - A papyrus found in Egypt gives directions for the conduct of a census. Families were to return to their own governments to complete family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands might retain those belonging to them.

3. Critics said Acts was unreliable because Luke wrote that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium was not (Acts 14:6). However, in 1910, Sir William Ramsay found a monument that showed Iconium was a Phrygian city. Later discoveries confirmed that.
4. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the city treasurer, Erastus (Romans 16:23). The letter was written in Corinth. Excavations of Corinth in 1929 found this inscription on a pavement: "Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense." The pavement dates from the 1st century A.D.
5. Many critics have blasted the usage of certain words by Luke.
 - Luke called rulers in Philippi "praetors." Scholars argued that two "duumvirs" would have ruled the town. However, archaeology shows that the title of "praetor" was employed by the magistrates of a Roman colony. Luke was right.
 - Luke called civil authorities in Thessalonica "politarchs." Critics said there was no such person. However, 19 inscriptions have been unearthed which use the title. Luke was right.
 - Luke called Gallio "proconsul." The Delphi inscription was unearthed which reads: "As Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and the proconsul of Achaia."

Sir William Ramsay wrote of Luke: "Luke is a historian of the first rank ... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

The Bible is to be trusted as an authentic Book of antiquity. Archaeology supports and confirms facts as stated in the Bible.

Read "An Introduction to Bible Archaeology" by Howard F. Vos (1956, Moody Press, Chicago, Ill., 125 pages) for some excellent basics to an understanding of how archaeology confirms the claims of Scripture.

You will enjoy reading the following books if you want to go deeper into the study of Biblical Archaeology.

- "The Philistines and the Old Testament," Edward Hindson, 1971, Baker Books
- "Archaeology and Bible History," Joseph Free, 1956, Scripture Press
- "Archaeology and the Old Testament," Merrill Unger, 1954, Zondervan Publishing
- "Highlights of Archaeology in Bible Lands," Fred Wight, 1955, Moody Press
- "Out of the Earth," E.M. Blaiklock, 1957, Eerdmans
- "Light from the Ancient Past," J. Finegan, 1959, Princeton University Press
- "Excavations in Palestine," F. Bliss and R.A.S. Macalister, 1902, Palestine Exploration Fund
- "The Old Testament in Modern Research," H. Hahn, 1966, Fortress Press
- "Archaeology and the Religion of Israel," W.F. Albright, 1942, John Hopkins Press
- "Archaeology and the Old Testament," J. Thompson, 1957, Eerdmans

- "Documents from Old Testament Times," D.W. Thomas, 1965, Harper & Row
- "Archaeology and the Ancient Testament," J. Kelson, 1968, Zondervan
- "Biblical Archaeology," G.E. Wright, 1960, Westminster

Two other excellent resource books for researching archaeological finds that support the Bible are: "Unger's Bible Handbook" (1967, Moody Press) and "Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible" (1973, Eerdmans).

Taking God's Grace to the World!

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