



"The longer you can look back, the further you can look forward."
—Winston S. Churchill

22-Jun-12

Recent Finds

The insular world of biblical archeology always seems to be waiting with the proverbial "bated breath" for the next big find that will stun [the world](#). More than a hundred years ago, the great archeologists of the day publicly proclaimed that they undertook their expeditions to the then-remote and backwater Near East to "prove the Bible" to an increasingly skeptical world. By the middle of the twentieth century and down to our own time, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. Now some atheistic archeologists are bent on *disproving* the Bible—or at least minimalizing its influence on the field of archeology—even to relegating the biblical narrative to "unreliable" status as source material.

Before proceeding any further, we need to realize that no archeological find will ever prove the Bible. Should even the Holy Grail of biblical artifacts, Noah's Ark, be discovered and verified as the real deal, we could not say conclusively, "Now there can be no doubt that what the Bible says is true!" Such a find would certainly galvanize our confidence in Scripture, but such a find would not, by itself, erase all uncertainties. Finding Noah's Ark would prove that the biblical story happened—but few of its details, other than the Ark itself, would be authenticated.

Archeological finds may not prove the Bible to be true, but they do verify its historicity, that is, its general authenticity in reporting the events and culture of its day. To use a hypothetical example, a dig that uncovers a plethora of pig bones in a Philistine city and a nearby excavation of an Israelite city that finds few confirm the general historical understanding that the Israelites kept the food laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, while their neighbors, the Philistines, did not. If the pig bones are absent at the Israelite city in, say, an earlier Bronze Age layer rather than an Iron Age layer, it may indicate that the clean-unclean laws are older than some scholars have been willing to date them. Beyond that, the find may lend limited credence to the traditional view that the Pentateuch was essentially complete soon after [Moses](#) died.

However, such finds do not *prove* anything conclusively. Notice some of the words in the above paragraph: "general," "may indicate," "limited credence," and "essentially." These are hardly terms of complete confidence in the discovery and the deductions from it. Archeologists cannot honestly claim anything with certainty because so much of what they do is based on educated guesses. Sometimes they are not even sure of the name of the city they are digging into!

Archeologists meticulously measure and record where an artifact is found, but they may not be certain that it actually belongs to the layer it was found in (it could have slipped into a layer below its true provenance or someone may have dug a hole and placed it there). The layer itself may not be dated correctly, since most dating relies on matching pottery shards to "known" dates of other layers (but pottery styles can vary from location to location). And, of course, no artifact is going to be stamped with "© 857 BC"!

Archeological finds, then, even the most spectacular ones, are of limited rather than absolute value. They are similar to the circumstantial evidence in a murder mystery: While the clues by themselves mean little, together they have the potential of amounting to a fairly convincing case. A judge or jury may not be able to be absolutely certain that the defendant committed the crime, but the evidence points in no other direction. In this way, the bulk of archeological discoveries in the Near East and Egypt positively affirm the Bible's historicity.

There have been several finds over the last few years that have added to the already large mass of evidence for Scripture's [faithfulness](#) to history. Jerusalem is always a focal point of excavation, and lately, large-scale digs have taken place in the City of David. Dr. Eilat Mazar, granddaughter of famed Israeli archeologist Benjamin Mazar, has conducted several seasons of digs in this early-settled area of Jerusalem.

In 2005, she announced that she had discovered the foundation walls of the [ancient palace](#) of [King David](#), which is now skeptically called "the Large Stone Structure" by the scholarly community. Her find is a large public building dating to the tenth century BC, as well as pottery from around the same time, a copper scroll, and clay bullae (inscribed seals) from biblically known individuals. Some believe that the Large Stone Structure is actually the Fortress of Zion, which David captured early in his reign ([II Samuel 5:6-10](#)).

Mazar also claims that, in 2007, she found part of [Nehemiah's Wall](#) just outside the Dung Gate and the Old City walls facing the Mount of Olives. The wall, which was erected swiftly over 52 days ([Nehemiah 6:15](#)), dates to about 445 BC, when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem as the Persian Empire's governor of the area. Two years ago, Mazar announced that she had unearthed the remains of a Solomonic wall, an assertion that is contested by several of her colleagues. Even so, her discoveries have generally supported the biblical text.

The bullae may be the most fascinating of the finds, and many have been found in and around Jerusalem. Most of the time, these bullae were made when a lump of wet clay was affixed to an object (such as a cord that secured a lid to a pot), and then the face of a signet ring was impressed into the clay, identifying the owner, seller, or sender. These seals become especially important when they can be matched to an individual named in Scripture, and several of these have been found. For instance, the [seal of Jehucal](#) (also known as Jucal), who is mentioned in [Jeremiah 37:3](#)—"And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah . . . to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'Pray now to the LORD our [God](#) for us'"—has been identified.

Famed Israeli archeologist Yigal Shiloh discovered a number of bullae in the Babylonian destruction layer at Jerusalem, and one of them reads, "belonging to Gemaryahu ben Shaphan." This may well be the Gemariah mentioned in [Jeremiah 36:10](#): "Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe." These bullae verify that the Bible is telling the stories of real people in actual historical events.

Even finds outside the Middle East can be helpful. A recent discovery of [a trove of gold rings](#) in northern Germany may shed light on Israelite migration. The four pounds of gold, shaped into an early form of bullion, dates to about 1300 BC. Testing has determined that the gold originated in mines just east of the Caspian Sea, and scholars are wondering how the gold made its way to the North German Plain. While we cannot be certain that Israelites brought it with them on their westward journey, we know that it is at least a possibility.

These finds, though they are not conclusive proof on their own, give us additional confidence in the Scripture that has been transmitted to us down through history.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[A Christian's Greatest Trial](#)

by John O. Reid

Military strategists have long realized the key to success in the training of new recruits is to identify the danger they will encounter—in short, to know their enemy. Recruits to God's spiritual army also need to know their enemy and to make appropriate preparations for battle. Daniel 7:25 reveals the modus operandi of the enemy: a concerted effort of the Satanically inspired Beast to physically, mentally, and if possible, spiritually wear out the saints. Members of God's family should remember that: 1. trials help us to build

character 2. Because we stand in stark contrast to the world, we will be hated and persecuted. 3. We must seek the aid of Jesus Christ, who provides the pattern for enduring these pressures and hardships.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Importance of Dating](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Historical dating is not as easy as it may sound. Currently, several chronological systems are vying for predominance among scholars. What impact might this have on our biblical understanding of prophecy?

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