

New, Bible-Validating Discoveries

Evidence From the Dirt

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I would like to update you a little bit on what's going on in the world of archeology and linguistics in terms of the Bible. There have been a couple of discoveries recently that help to prove the Bible. They really can't prove the Bible; what they do is they allow us to see that the things that they dig up in Jerusalem and round about actually support what the Bible says. And so, it is really nice to see that. It gives a little bit of a boost to our faith, and we can say, "The Bible is right. It's true." "It's got an increased historicity," the scholars would say, and we can trust it. That's how we see it. They do not see it that way, but we do.

Well, the one of the things that was recently found was a bulla. I think I mentioned bullae before, but a bulla is a clay seal impression. They took a seal, put it into a little damp piece of clay, and normally what they would do was this piece of clay tied pieces of string together over a shipment of something. So if you were going to send wine or oil or whatever it is to somebody, you would seal it with this bit of clay impression and they would know who it had come from and that it was guaranteed by this person.

These are found all over the city of Jerusalem, especially in the Old City of Jerusalem, because they were used quite a lot in the commerce of the time. Well, they found one that was almost perfect. It's about the size of a dime. You have to realize that these people were wearing rings. There was the seal, and the seal was in their ring, and so they would just put their ring onto this little piece of clay. And so it was only this big—big as a dime. Well, this dime-sized piece of clay that had been fired—most likely by the fires of Jerusalem back when Nebuchadnezzar came through—has lasted all of this time, 2700 years or so.

They found it while they were sifting through the rubble there, and what they found on the seal was the figures of two men facing each other in kind of a mirror image of one another. They had striped garments on—imagine, this is really small, but they were able to see these things, that they were definitely wearing striped garments. As in the story of Joseph, a multi-colored garment like that would have been someone of high respect. The clincher on all this was at the bottom of this little bulla was the Hebrew word that means "governor of the city."

This is significant because there is a group of archaeologists and historians—most of them are Jews—who call themselves biblical minimalists. They essentially believe just

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that—that the things that happened in the Bible were probably exaggerated or even made up. So, the Bible tells you the bare minimum of what it was like back then. They believe that the things in the Bible probably did not occur, and so they are always saying, "Well, there has not been one shred of proof that Jerusalem was big enough to have a governor [essentially a mayor] because it was a pretty much a backwater."

That's how they think of Israel and Judah—that they were backwater countries; they did not have very many people; they were not very strong; they did not have much money; and you could tell by the Syrians and the Egyptians and all these others going back and forth through their land.

Well, this bulla appears and it's got the seal of a man who was called the governor of the city. The reason why this is so significant is the Bible actually mentions the governor of the city. The clearest reference is in II Chronicles 34:8. This is during the reign of Josiah:

II Chronicles 34:8 In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God.

Josiah, during his reign, had someone governing the city of Jerusalem under him, and he was the governor of the city. This tells us that Judah was a fairly large and strong nation where they had levels of government, so that they had a king in Jerusalem as well as a governor of the city of Jerusalem. That meant that Josiah did not have to watch over the city of Jerusalem all that closely. He could take care of the affairs of the whole nation, the whole kingdom. So, biblical believers: 1; biblical minimalists: 0. So, we know that there were actually men who function as mayor or governor of the city of Jerusalem.

The second one was very interesting, especially to us in this particular church of God, because it has to do some something to do with the calendar. This particular find—discovery; however you want to put it—was actually made back in the '40s and the '50s, when they were finding the Dead Sea Scrolls. When you find a bunch of old documents, you are going to get these documents fragmented occasionally, because they just cannot last for thousands of years without something happening to them, even though they were kept in a very dry place—these caves in Qumran in the Negev.

These fragments have been sitting around for a long time, especially a particular group

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of fragments of either 60 or 90. They have just sat there. No one has tried to put them together and figure out what they say. Well, finally, two men—a doctor and a professor—got together, and they spent an entire year trying to put this jigsaw puzzle back together, and then once they got it together, to actually figure out what it says.

What they found when they put it together was that it was about a solar calendar—a 365-day calendar that the Essenes (they think) were using down there in the Negev, and they were using it to put holy days or festivals on this calendar. They mentioned there that there was what they called the "festival of wheat," and then there was a "festival of wine," and then there was a "festival of oil" that they kept throughout spring, summer, and fall. They said that they kept this festival of wheat, and then fifty days later they had a festival of new wine. And then fifty days later they kept a festival of new oil.

What is important here to us in particular is that they said specifically that the festival of wheat, which corresponds to the biblical festival of Shavuot (or Pentecost, we call it) occurred fifty days from the the day after the Sabbath after Passover. If we look at this and say, "They were right," this verifies what we have been teaching in this church about how to count Pentecost. They said it was specifically fifty days after the particular Sabbath after Passover.

You have got to understand that the Jews considered Passover to be the First Day of Unleavened Bread. So the Sabbath after Passover could not have been the First Day of Unleavened Bread, as some people are counting it today. It would have to be the Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread, or the first day after the Days of Unleavened Bread.

So I thought that was very interesting, that something would crop up in scholarly circles that would verify what the Bible has been saying all along. These Essenes, studying their Bibles, knew that that is how it should be kept—that you count Pentecost from the Sabbath after the Passover, fifty days after the Sabbath after Passover.

These are very interesting little discoveries that help us be more assured that the Bible is true and that we can take it in faith and follow it, and observe the things that it tells us to do, because we know that it is reliable for our learning and for our Christian lives.