

APOLOGETICS April 14, 2010

Archeology

I hope you won't mind if I quote a few paragraphs from my wife's book, *Why I Believe the Bible is the Word of God*. She introduced it better than I could. So I quote.

"They lay on their stomachs in the desert, sometimes with nothing more than a brush in their hands carefully flicking away the sand. Who are these people? Some of them are devout Christians who love the land of the Bible. Others are simply seeking to uncover treasures of antiquity. All are servants of our Most High God — some knowingly and some unknowingly. In recent years He has been using these archeologists to confirm His Word and to silence the skeptic.

"During the last part of the nineteenth century when leading Christian scholars began to tear the Bible apart, there came a surge of archeology. Many archeologists were seeking to discredit the Bible. All failed.

"Grant Jeffrey in his book *Signature of God*, points out:

The entire basis for the faith and hope of Christians depends on the truthfulness of the historical records of the New Testament. Our hope for heaven and salvation itself depends on the accuracy of the words of Jesus of Nazareth and the apostles as recorded in the pages of the New Testament manuscripts. . . . Fortunately, the continued archeological discoveries during the

last century have provided an awesome amount of evidence that confirms the total reliability of the written documents that form the foundation of the Christian faith.

“The great archeologist Sir William Ramsay, who devoted thirty years of his life trying to disprove the book of Acts, was converted to Christianity as a result of his findings. This sounds like a fulfillment of the prophecy Jesus made in Luke 19:40. The Pharisees tried to get Him to quiet His disciples. “I tell you,” Jesus replied, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Surely the stones cried out to Sir William!”

I borrowed the preceding quotes from my wife’s book *Why I Believe the Bible is the Word of God*. I am sure that she won’t mind.

I, along with you, have probably wondered why in the face of the overwhelming evidence do the scientist and archaeologist resist the information found in the Bible. For example, “The truth is,” explained Rabbi David Wolpe in an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, that virtually every modern archaeologist who has investigated the story of the Exodus, with very few exceptions, agrees that the way the Bible describes the Exodus is not the way it happened, if it happened at all (Watanabe 2001).

The stakes are not small. If the narrative of the Exodus is not factual, then the trustworthiness of Biblical revelation is indeed seriously undermined.

I want to read an article we found in the Harpers Magazine. This will probably make your blood boil like it did me the first time I read it.

## **FALSE TESTAMENT**

Archaeology refutes the Bible's claim to history

*By Daniel Lazare*

Not long ago, archaeologists could agree that the Old Testament, for all its embellishments and contradictions, contained a kernel of truth. Obviously, Moses had not parted the Red Sea or turned his staff into a snake, but it seemed clear that the Israelites had started out as a nomadic band somewhere in the vicinity of ancient Mesopotamia; that they had migrated first to Palestine and then to Egypt; and that, following some sort of conflict with the authorities, they had fled into the desert under the leadership of a mysterious figure who was either a lapsed Jew or, as Freud maintained, a high-born priest of the royal sun god Aton whose cult had been overthrown in a palace coup. Although much was unknown, archaeologists were confident that they had succeeded in nailing down at least these few basic facts.

That is no longer the case. In the last quarter century or so, archaeologists have seen one settled assumption after another concerning who the ancient Israelites were and where they came from proved false. Rather than a band of invaders who fought their way into the Holy Land, the Israelites are now thought to have been an indigenous culture that developed west of the Jordan River around 1200 B.C.

Abraham, Isaac, and the other patriarchs appear to have been spliced together out of various pieces of local lore. The Davidic Empire, which archaeologists once thought as incontrovertible as the Roman, is now seen as an invention of Jerusalem-based priests in the seventh and eighth centuries B.C. who were eager to burnish their national history. The religion we call Judaism does not reach well back into the second millennium B.C. but appears to be, at most, a product of the mid-first.

This is not to say that individual elements of the story are not older. But Jewish monotheism, the sole and exclusive worship of an ancient Semitic god known as Yahweh, did not fully coalesce until the period between the Assyrian conquest of the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian conquest of the southern kingdom | of Judah in 586.

Some twelve to fourteen centuries of "Abrahamic" religious development, the cultural wellspring that has given us not only Judaism but Islam and Christianity, have thus been erased. Judaism appears to have been the product not of some dark and nebulous period of early history but of a more modern age of big-power politics in which every nation aspired to the imperial greatness of a Babylon or an Egypt. Judah, the sole remaining Jewish outpost by the late eighth century B.C., was a small, out-of-the-way kingdom with little in the way of military or financial clout. Yet at some point its priests and rulers seem to have been seized with the idea that their national deity, now deemed to be nothing less than the king of the universe,

was about to transform them into a great power. They set about creating an imperial past commensurate with such an empire, one that had the southern heroes of David and Solomon conquering the northern kingdom and making rival kings tremble throughout the known world. From a "henotheistic" cult in which Yahweh was worshiped as the chief god among many, they refashioned the national religion so that henceforth Yahweh would be worshiped to the exclusion of all other deities. One law, that of Yahweh, would now reign supreme.

This is not, of course, the story that we have all been led to believe is, at least to some degree, history. This is not the story told, for instance, in such tomes as Paul Johnson's 1987 bestseller, *A History of the Jews*, from which we learn that Abraham departed the ancient city of Ur early in the second millennium B.C. as part of a great westward trek of "Habiru" (i.e., Hebrew) nomads to the land of Canaan. "Though the monotheistic concept was not fully developed in Abraham's mind," Johnson writes, "he was a man striving towards it, who left Mesopotamian society precisely because it had reached a spiritual impasse." Now, however, we know that this statement is mainly bosh. Not only is there no evidence that any such figure as Abraham ever lived but archaeologists believe that there is no way such a figure could have lived given what we now know about ancient Israelite origins.

A few pages later, Johnson declares that "we can be reasonably sure that the Exodus occurred in the thirteenth century B.C. and had been completed by about 1225 B.C." Bosh as well. A growing volume of evidence concerning Egyptian border defenses, desert sites where

the fleeing Israelites supposedly camped, etc., indicates that the flight from Egypt did not occur in the thirteenth century before Christ; it never occurred at all. Although Johnson writes that the story of Moses had to be true because it "was beyond the power of the human mind to invent," we now know that Moses was no more historically real than Abraham before him. Although Johnson adds that Joshua, Moses's lieutenant, "began and to a great extent completed the conquest of Canaan," the Old Testament account of that conquest turns out to be fictional as well. And although Johnson goes on to inform his readers that after bottling up the Philistines in a narrow coastal strip, King David "then moved east, south and north, establishing his authority over Ammon, Moab, Edom, Aram-Zobar and even Aram-Damascus in the far north-east," archaeologists believe that David was not a mighty potentate whose power was felt from the Nile to the Euphrates but rather a freebooter who carved out what was at most a small duchy in the southern highlands around Jerusalem and Hebron. Indeed, the chief disagreement among scholars nowadays is between those who hold that David was a petty hilltop chieftain whose writ extended no more than a few miles in any direction and a small but vociferous band of "biblical minimalists" who maintain that he never existed at all.

In classic Copernican fashion, a new generation of archaeologists has taken everything its teachers said about ancient Israel and stood it on its head. Two myths are being dismantled as a consequence: one concerning the origins of ancient Israel and the other concerning the relationship between the Bible and science. Back in the days

when archaeology was buttressing the old biblical tales, the relationship between science and religion had warmed considerably; now the old chill has crept back in. The comfy ecumenicism that allowed one to believe in, say, modern physics and Abraham, Isaac, et al. is disappearing, replaced by a somewhat sharper dividing line between science and faith. The implications are sweeping—after all, it is not the Song of the Nibelungen or the Epic of Gilgamesh that is being called into question here but a series of foundational myths to which fully half the world's population, in one way or another, subscribes.

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Now does that make your blood boil like it does me?

OK, here is a bit of interesting trivia. Did you know that The Dead Sea Scrolls, considered to have the all time greatest Biblical impact, were discovered in 1947, that was just one year before Israel became a nation? God was getting down to serious revelation of end-time Bible prophecy fulfillment at that year!

In my last class in college I was studying the history and findings of the Dead Sea Scroll. That was in the late 50's and there was not a lot of information published at that time about how important these scrolls were. As you can imagine there was a lot of excitement about that find. And of course there were skeptics. So let's spent a little time on them.

Archeologist, Dr. Bryant Wood said, "Probably the Dead Sea Scrolls have had the greatest Biblical impact. They have provided Old Testament manuscripts approximately 1,000 years older than our previous oldest manuscript. The Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated that the Old Testament was accurately transmitted during this interval. In addition, they provide a wealth of information on the times leading up to, and during, the life of Christ."

Up until this time, the oldest manuscripts that were used were from the massoretic texts which were found around the 800-900 AD time. Now all of a sudden texts appear that have its origins that go back into the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Can you imagine what that has done to the skeptics that made fun of those that believed that the Bible is the Word of God? They all have had to take a second look at what they believed.

So let's spend a little time learning about this important find. I am going to quote an article that I read many years ago and I just found it again on the internet. Here it is.

*"Juma was beginning to get nervous. Some of his goats were climbing too high up the cliffs. He decided to climb the face of the cliff himself to bring them back. Little did Juma realize as he began his climb on that January day in 1947 that those straying goats would eventually involve him in "the greatest archaeological discovery in the twentieth century." Such thoughts were far from his mind when he saw two small openings to one of the thousands of caves that dot*

*those barren cliffs overlooking the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea.*

*He threw a rock into one of the openings. The unexpected cracking sound surprised him; what else could be in those remote caves but treasure? He called to his cousins, Khalil and Muhammed, who climbed up and heard the exciting tale. But it was getting late, and the goats had to be gathered. Tomorrow they would return—perhaps their days of following goats would come to an end once the treasure was uncovered!*

*Cave 4 at Qumran where approximately 15,000 fragments from some 574 manuscripts were found.*

*The youngest of the three, Muhammed, rose the next day before his two fellow “treasure-seekers” and made his way to the cave. The cave floor was covered with debris, including broken pottery. Along the wall stood a number of narrow jars, some with their bowl-shaped covers still in place. Frantically, Muhammed began to explore the inside of each jar, but no treasure of gold was to be found... only a few bundles wrapped in cloth and greenish with age. Returning to his cousins, he related the sad news—no treasure.*

*No treasure indeed! The scrolls those Bedouin boys removed from that dark cave that day and the days following would come to be recognized as the greatest manuscript treasure ever found—the first seven manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls!*

So if these boys did not consider their find to be a treasure, how did they get to be so popular? These boys could have destroyed the contents without knowing what they were doing. And it is only by the grace of God they did not. So what did they do with them? What is the story to follow could not be made up by any one. So let's follow their history.

Apparently they took the scrolls and hung them on a pole in their tent. I can only imagine how much damage occurred during that period of time. Then 7 of those scrolls were sold to 2 antique dealers. They thought the value was little so they got a pittance of what they were worth. Then 2 of those were sold to the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan at St, Mark's Monastery in the old city of Jerusalem. That is where the value of the scrolls increased. Soon the scrolls would be sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars. The poor shepherds who found the scrolls and sold them for little amounts of money were still poor while those that bought them became extremely rich. William Albright, a very famous archeologist, examined them and concurred that they were indeed authentic and did go back to the early 200 BC. This would make them the oldest manuscripts ever discovered in the Judean desert!

Three more of the scrolls were sold and they finally were put in Hebrew Museum. They were put on display and toured the US. Then they wanted to sell them but no one wanted to buy them. They were advertised in the Wall Street Journal and by accident Yigal Yadin saw the ad and soon the Prime Minister of Israel announced that his country had purchased them for \$250,000. Since then they have

become priceless. But that find was only the beginning. Other caves were explored. Fragments of every book in the OT except the Book of Esther were found in 11 caves. I understand that more than more than 600 scrolls have been found. One of the most important finds was the complete scroll of Isaiah. Another important scroll was recovered in 1967 underneath the floor of a Bethlehem antiquities dealer, which describes in detail the community's view of an elaborate Temple ritual. This has been appropriately called the "Temple Scroll."

As you can imagine, there were scrolls that were not included in the OT. Some of them simply talked about the life in the community and the rituals that they performed. They felt that the Jewish leaders of their day had fallen away from the original teachings of the early fathers. So they left the community and started their own with thoughts of purifying their Jewish heritage. In their teaching about the Messiah, they taught that there would be 3 messiahs-- one a prophet, another a priest and the third a king or prince. Little did they know that they were looking for the One who was all three—Jesus.

Now in spite of all the evidence we have covered, there are those out there that will still deny what is written in the Bible. However the tide of scholarly opinion on the Bible has shifted several times in the past centuries. During the later part of the 19th century there was much skepticism of the Bible, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, thanks to astonishing archaeological discoveries supporting the Scriptures, the tide has turned somewhat in its favor.

There is more so we will pick up later on this subject.