

06.06.2020 THE BIBLE AS HISTORY

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt". Exodus 20:2, Deuteronomy 5:6

The Bible is primarily a book of salvation history. It tells of man as originally created by God, Man's fall and God's solution to the problem of sin.

And yet, the Bible is also a historical book. The history of God's dealings with men is given in a historical context. God personally acts in history. Ultimately, His Son Christ Jesus comes to earth and changes the history and destiny of mankind.

'Christianity is essentially a historical religion. God's revelation, which Christians cherish and seek to communicate, was not given in a vacuum but in an unfolding historical situation, through a nation called Israel and a person called Jesus Christ. It must never be divorced from its historical context; it can be understood only within it.' *John Stott*

Christian archaeologists have found much evidence of the truth of historical people, places and events described in the Bible. They say this proves the Bible is correct but this is not technically correct either. The Bible contains much information about God, the spiritual nature of the world, and the future of man that archaeology can never prove. The best archaeology can do is substantiate what the Bible says about the past, but the importance of that should not be understated. If, time after time, archaeology substantiates statements the Bible makes about the past, it would be logical to conclude that because the Bible is reliable historically, it must be reliable when it speaks of salvation, the coming of Christ, the Judgment, and everlasting life.

Many modern archaeologists do not believe archaeology substantiates the Bible; they say it disproves the Bible. In fact, most of the universities that offer degrees in archaeology are staffed by archaeologists who do not believe the Bible.

Ultimately, the Christian must believe that the Bible is a divine revelation from God, and believe the historicity of the Word of God, with or without archaeological evidence.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

David, Solomon, and the Monarchy

God promised that Messiah would come through the line of David. The Bible is filled with references to David, the King, the man after God's own heart.

Until 1993 there was no extra-Biblical proof of the existence of King David or even of Israel as a nation prior to Solomon. Then in 1993 archaeologists found proof of King David's existence outside the Bible. At an ancient mound called Tel Dan, in the north of Israel, words carved into a chunk of basalt were translated as "House of David" and "King of Israel". This proved that David was more than just a legend.

Khirbet Qeiyafa is an essentially one-period Iron Age site Sha'arayim, mentioned in the Bible in connection with the David and Goliath narrative,. It translates to "two gates," a feature consistent with the unique casemate fortifications at Qeiyafa. Recent excavations there revealed a massively fortified, garrison city from the time of Saul and David overlooking the valley.

Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. 1 Samuel 17:1-3, 52

In 2005 Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar found King David's palace relying on the Bible as one of her many tools.

Isaiah, Hezekiah, and Sennacherib

King Hezekiah of Judah ruled from 721 to 686 BC. Fearing a siege by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, Hezekiah preserved Jerusalem's water supply by cutting a tunnel through 1,750 feet of solid rock from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam inside the city walls. At the Siloam end of the tunnel, an inscription, presently in the archaeological museum at Istanbul, Turkey, celebrates this remarkable accomplishment. The tunnel is probably the only biblical site that has not changed its appearance in 2,700 years.

This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and ^Ubrought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David. 2 Chronicles 32:30

The Capture of the Kingdom of Israel

In 2 Kings 9–10, Jehu is mentioned as King of Israel (841–814 BC). That the growing power of Assyria was already encroaching on the northern kings prior to their ultimate conquest in 722 BC is demonstrated by a six-and-a-half-foot black obelisk discovered in the ruins of the palace at Nimrud in 1846. On it, Jehu is shown kneeling before Shalmaneser III and offering tribute to the Assyrian king, the only relief we have to date of a Hebrew monarch.

The Annals of Sennacherib: Among cities in ancient Judah, Lachish was second only to Jerusalem in importance. A principal Canaanite and, later, Israelite site, Lachish was 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, nestled in the foothills of Judah. The Annals of Sennacherib are in substantial agreement with the Biblical account regarding Sennacherib's devastating campaign in Judah: "As for Hezekiah of Judah, who did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to forty-six of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them ... I drove out 200,150 people" (see 2 Kings 18:13–16). The prophet Micah (1:10–15) lists the towns of the Shephelah, including Lachish, that Sennacherib devastated. Lachish was Sennacherib's field headquarters at the time of its destruction: "After this, while king Sennacherib of Assyria was at Lachish with all his forces, he sent his servants to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah of Judah" (2 Chronicles 32:9).

The Sennacherib Prism: After having conquered the 10 northern tribes of Israel, the Assyrians moved southward to do the same to Judah (2 Kings 18–19).

The prophet Isaiah, however, told Hezekiah that God would protect Judah and Jerusalem against Sennacherib (2 Chron. 32; Isa. 36–37). Assyrian records virtually confirm this. The cuneiform on a hexagonal, 15-inch baked clay prism found at the Assyrian capital of Nineveh describes Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BC in which it claims that the Assyrian king shut Hezekiah inside Jerusalem "like a caged bird." Like the biblical record, it does not state that he conquered Jerusalem, which the prism certainly would have done had this been the case. The Assyrians, in fact, bypassed Jerusalem on their way to Egypt, and the city would not fall until the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians in 586 BC.

Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Babylon

A king who was in doubt historically was Belshazzar, king of Babylon, named in Daniel 5. The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus according to recorded history. Tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son who served as coregent in Babylon. Thus, Belshazzar could offer to make Daniel "third highest ruler in the kingdom" (Dan. 5:16) for reading the handwriting on the wall, the highest available position. Here we see the "eye-witness" nature of the Biblical record, as is so often brought out by the discoveries of archaeology. The royal palace in Babylon where King Belshazzar held the feast and Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall has been excavated (Daniel 5).

That Cyrus released the Jewish exiles from Babylon is not only documented in the Bible (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-4), but also implied in the contemporary Cyrus Cylinder... "I (Cyrus) gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their habitations."

The first of three monumental tombs cut into a cliff near the Persian capital of Persepolis, Iran is that of Darius I. The inscription on his tomb reads, 'King Darius states: King, whoever you are, who may arise after me, protect yourself well from lies. Do not trust the man who lies. ... Believe what I did and tell the truth to the people.'

The Historical Jesus

"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Galatians 4:4, 5.

The best evidence for Jesus is the Bible itself. God Himself has revealed to us the Person and work of Christ Jesus and the time in history that He came to earth.

The literary form of the Gospels were unique in their time and was seen again only in the 18th century.

'As a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing...Apart from bits of the Platonic dialogues, there are no conversations that I know of in ancient literature like the Fourth Gospel. There is nothing, even in modern literature, until about a hundred years ago when the realistic novel came into existence.' *CS Lewis*

The first author outside the church to mention Jesus is the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote a history of Judaism around AD 93. He writes "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James."

About 20 years after Josephus we have the Roman politicians Pliny and Tacitus, who held some of the highest offices of state at the beginning of the second century AD. From Tacitus we learn that Jesus was executed while Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect in charge of Judaea (AD26-36) and Tiberius was emperor (AD14-37) – reports that fit with the time frame of the gospels.

Pliny contributes the information that where he was governor in northern Turkey, Christians worshipped Christ as a god... 'They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. That checked the pernicious superstition for a short time, but it broke out afresh-not only in Judea, where the plague first arose, but in Rome itself...'

Faith and History

Hebrews 11 is the roll call of the heroes of faith in the Bible. These men and women did not only believe the word of the Lord, they acted upon it. Noah believed God's word about a flood and built an ark. Abraham believed God and set out to a land he had never seen, living as a pilgrim and willing to sacrifice His son of promise.

These historical men and women of faith lived by faith in the future. They are an inspiration to us today.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, [They saw it in the future and they were sure of it]; and were persuaded [they were convinced, they were sure] of them, and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Hebrews 11:13

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith..." Hebrews 10:36-38
