

“ . . . I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40b).

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CHAPTER XI

THE RELATION OF ARCHAEOLOGY TO THE BIBLE

*By Allan A. MacRae, Ph. D.**

During the past century and a half a new world has opened up through the excavation and research of the archaeologist. Statues, bas-reliefs, foundations of houses, implements, pottery, inscribed tablets, and other evidences of human activity in ancient times, have been dug from the places where they had lain buried for thousands of years and have begun to yield their secrets to the patient toil and careful research of modern scholars.

Archaeology is a comparatively new science. Most of its techniques have been developed recently. The light which it sheds on the history and culture of ancient man was not available to us until a short time ago.

This does not mean, of course, that we knew nothing of ancient history before archaeological results began to be available in large measure. There was another source of such knowledge which had never been lost. It consisted of the classics and the Bible. The former gave us pictures of the history and culture of ancient Greece and Rome, while the latter told of many events in Palestine and other sections of the Near East. While both of these provided useful sources for knowledge of ancient history, they had the disadvantage of not being available to us in

*President and Professor of Old Testament, Faith Theological Seminary, Wilmington Delaware.

the actual documents prepared by their authors. As old copies had worn out, new ones had been made, and most of the classical or Biblical documents in existence today were copied many centuries after the time of their original writing.

The events recorded in the Old Testament occurred long before most of those mentioned in the classics. From Greek sources we knew a few facts about great empires existing before 500 B. C., but the material was not extensive, and much of it was considered highly questionable. The Old Testament stood almost alone in its picture of events during a period of over a thousand years. The other portion of the Bible, the New Testament, also dealt mostly with events of which little mention was preserved in the classics. Thus, before modern archaeology was developed we had practically no evidence from any outside source as to the truth or falsehood of the bulk of the history recorded in the Bible available to us.

Today, as a result of the development of archaeology, this situation has been vastly altered. Objects actually used by ancient men can now be studied minutely. The inscribed tablets which have been dug up in Mesopotamia can be read, and many additions to our knowledge of ancient life and culture secured from them. Great Egyptian monuments, whose hieroglyphic, picture-like signs had seemed mysterious and inscrutable for many centuries, now speak to us in comprehensible words, since the excavation of the Rosetta stone has furnished the key to their decipherment. Material objects and writings from ancient lands, buried or unreadable through the ages, now become useful tools for the increase of our knowledge of ancient history.

When we speak of the relation of the Bible to archaeology, we really mean its relation to ancient history, knowledge of which has been so greatly increased by archaeology.

Although the Bible is not primarily a book of history, since its purpose is not to present history but to teach religion, its contacts with ancient history are far more extensive than those with chemistry, geology, or any other scientific field. The result is, of course, that it is impossible in a short article even to mention the great majority of the contacts. All that can be done is to survey the field in general, to state a few important principles, and to illustrate these by examination of some particular instances.

I. PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL BEARING ON THE BIBLE

Egypt

The bulk of the archaeological material related to the Bible comes from three particular areas. One of these is Egypt, a land which looms large in the mind of every reader of the Bible because of the dramatic passages in the first half of the book of Exodus which tell of the forcible deliverance of the Israelites from oppression. This event was prominent in the thought of all subsequent periods and there are many allusions to it. Both earlier and later than the Exodus there were occasional historical contacts with Egypt, but comparatively little of the remaining Biblical narrative takes place in that country.

A century and a half ago Egypt was regarded as a land of mystery and of magic. Little was known about its history in ancient times. It was clear that a great civilization had once existed there, because of the great monuments which stood in various parts of the land. On many of these were long rows or columns of pictures of men, snakes, household implements, and other things, arranged in such a way as strongly to suggest that they formed inscriptions, but there was no clue as to how they might be read.

Then in 1799 Napoleon's engineers discovered in the Rosetta mouth of the Nile a large stone slab with an in-

scription in three different kinds of writing. The first of these, which was only partially preserved, was in hieroglyphic writing similar to that on the monuments.¹ The third type of inscription, most of which was intact, could be easily read, since it was in Greek. It contained a decree made by Egyptian priests in the second century before Christ, ending with instructions that the decree should be inscribed in hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek characters. This made it clear that the hieroglyphic inscription would parallel the one in Greek. However, it took many years of patient study before an article by a young Frenchman, J. F. Champollion, finally demonstrated, in 1822, that a correct interpretation of the meaning of many of the signs had been worked out and a foundation laid for studying the history of the ancient Egyptians.

Since that time many brilliant scholars have studied the hieroglyphic inscriptions, and other students have carefully excavated and studied thousands of objects throwing light upon various aspects of Egyptian history. Through the combined efforts of these two types of researchers, many aspects of the public and private life of the ancient Egyptians have become known to us. Thousands of inscriptions throw light on great events in ancient Egyptian history. Some of its periods are better known to us than many portions of the Middle Ages in Europe, but other periods remain comparatively little known.

The contacts between the archaeological material from ancient Egypt and the Bible are not as numerous as one might expect, in view of the great increase in our knowledge of that region. While at various points there are striking contacts, and considerable light is thrown on the Bible by a number of specific Egyptian discoveries, it is rather disappointing to Bible students to find that the definite contacts of Egyptian archaeology with the Bible are even

¹See monument with hieroglyphic writing pictured on Fig. 19.

less than the number of Biblical references to Egypt would suggest.

There are two principal reasons for this situation. The first relates to the source of our Egyptian archaeological material. Egypt is a land which is naturally divided into two parts. The northern section, known as Lower Egypt, is a wide delta of fertile soil. The other section, called Upper Egypt, follows the course of the Nile through the desert, south of the delta. The Biblical account of events in Egypt deals almost entirely with Lower Egypt, where, indeed, more than half of the great events of Egyptian history took place; but possibly nine-tenths of the archaeological material available to us has come from Upper Egypt, where the narrow strip of fertile land beside the river is only a few miles in width, and the desert edge beyond provided an ideal situation for monuments, temples, and tombs.² In the dry air of the region, these have been preserved remarkably well and tell us much about ancient Egyptian life and culture. So much remains in this area, easily accessible for study, that there has been little incentive to undertake the far more difficult and expensive task of excavation in Lower Egypt, where most of the ancient remains are buried under many feet of debris or of somewhat damp soil deposited by the river on its yearly overflow, and the water table has risen above much of the buried material. Most of the choice sites for excavation in Lower Egypt are under modern farms or towns, while in Upper Egypt they generally lie outside the narrow area of cultivation. Since many of the great dynasties came from families originating in Upper Egypt, it was their custom to build temples and set up great monuments in that region even when their activities centered largely in Lower Egypt. On these monuments they did not try to give a full or impartial picture of events, but simply to celebrate those matters which

²See monument at edge of Egyptian desert on Fig. 20.

gave cause for pride. While they give us much valuable information, it is all from a biased viewpoint and must be interpreted with caution.

This leads to the second reason why the proportion of the Egyptian material that bears on Biblical statements is much smaller than might be expected. A very large amount of our material from any part of Egypt consists of memorials, made by a king or by one of his nobles. From such material no complete picture can be expected. At the tomb of Napoleon in Paris special monuments record the greatness of many of that warrior's battles, but, naturally enough, the memorial contains no celebration of Waterloo! Since the outstanding reference to Egypt in the Bible deals with a deliverance of the Israelites from the power of the Pharaoh, it would hardly be expected that a great Egyptian monument would bear witness to it. There was little in the relation of Egypt to the Israelites which would give the Egyptians cause for boasting. One exception is the raid of Shishak through Palestine, described in I Kings 14:25, 26; and this we find celebrated on the wall of the temple of Karnak in Upper Egypt by a great inscription listing the conquered Palestinian cities.

Later on we shall mention a few other contacts between Egypt and the Bible under appropriate heads. Although the total number of such contacts is far smaller than one might wish, Egypt will always possess great interest for the Bible student, for one can never tell when some previously unsuspected portion of the great amount of available Egyptian material will be seen to bear an important relationship to something in the Bible, or when a new discovery from Egypt may be of superlative interest in this regard. Although the direct contacts of Egypt with the Bible are far less than those of Mesopotamia, Egypt was always a vital factor in the background of Palestinian life and culture.

Mesopotamia

This leads us to the second great region from which archaeological material bearing on the Bible has come. Many passages in the books of Kings and Chronicles, and in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, refer to the series of westward campaigns which culminated in the conquest of Israel by the Assyrians, and of Judah by the Babylonians. These campaigns present just the sort of thing which we might expect the heathen rulers to celebrate by the erection of monuments, and our expectation is not disappointed. Although the great cities of Mesopotamia were farther from Palestine than was Egypt, the contacts between the two regions were just as frequent as those with Egypt, and, in addition, there was much more in the relationship which could be expected to leave definite evidence in the monuments. In a whole series of records by the Assyrian kings we find references to Israelite kings, and the number of incidental cultural contacts between Mesopotamian records and Biblical statements is very large.

A century and a half ago even less was known about ancient Mesopotamia than about ancient Egypt for here was found no great series of stone monuments and buildings to fire the imagination of the world. Here were no great pyramids. Nothing stood above the ground in Mesopotamia to compare with the Sphinx of Egypt. Greek sources bore witness that a great civilization had existed in that land but little was visible to thrill the traveller as in Egypt. This was due in large measure to the difference in building materials, for Egypt possessed a great quantity of fine building stone, but in Mesopotamia even important buildings were made of sun-dried bricks, whose outer surfaces tend in time to wash away or crumble. What large stone monuments had been erected lay mostly buried under heaps of debris or decayed bricks.

In Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, our knowledge of ancient history has come through two distinct, though related, lines of research. One has been excavation of the great mounds which covered ancient cities. This includes study of their architecture, statuary, pottery, implements, etc. The other has been the decipherment of the language and the study of the writing on the excavated tablets and monuments.³

In Egypt the great mass of writing was done on papyrus, a material about as durable as our best modern paper. Except for a comparatively small number of papyri buried mainly in tombs, the unimportant, day-to-day writings of ancient Egypt have perished. In Mesopotamia no such convenient writing material was available. A substitute was found in clay tablets, marked with wedge-shaped characters which we call "cuneiform."⁴ Although much less convenient than papyrus, these tablets have the merit of great durability.

The overwhelming mass of the writing of ancient Mesopotamia has been preserved in the ruins of its cities. It includes contracts and ephemeral writings of individuals, as well as important state documents. Several hundred thousand of these tablets have been excavated and brought to museums. From them it is possible to secure a far more precise knowledge of the culture and life of ancient Mesopotamia than can be gained from Egyptian writing for many aspects of the life of ancient Egypt. The only gap in this knowledge is the fact that in every age many of the most common features of daily life are so well known that no one takes the trouble to write about them. For the filling of this lack ancient pictures, bas-reliefs, and statues often prove very helpful.

³A fascinating account of the early steps of both phases of Mesopotamian discovery is contained in R. W. Rogers, *A History of Babylonia and Assyria*, (New York: 1900), Vol. I.

⁴For sample of a clay tablet with cuneiform writing see Fig. 21.

The cuneiform writing is a very complicated system. It was used to write many different languages. Its inventors were the Sumerians, a people speaking a language neither Semitic nor Indo-European. They controlled Mesopotamia during the major part of the third millennium B. C. Their language was taken over and adapted by the speakers of a Semitic language now generally called Akkadian,** which was spoken by the later Assyrians and Babylonians. This language became the *lingua franca* of ancient diplomacy, and clay tablets inscribed with letters in Akkadian were used for correspondence even between Pharaohs of Egypt and kings of cities in Palestine, although neither party actually spoke it. Several hundred such letters were found at El-Amarna in Egypt, and provide a source of information regarding early Palestine which is still far from exhausted. As in the case of all letters, much is taken for granted in them, and consequently any new information relating to the period from which they come may clear up difficult points in their interpretation, and may, in its turn, be explained by statements contained in them.

Thus not only is the material found in Mesopotamia itself often of great value in connection with Bible study, but much material found elsewhere is intelligible because of the knowledge of cuneiform gained from Mesopotamia. In the study of the contacts of Mesopotamia with the Bible there is much that is obvious, but still more that involves a great deal of careful study before it can be fully understood. For the Bible student there is no field of archaeological study which is more fruitful than that derived from Mesopotamia.

Palestine and Syria

The third region is Palestine and Syria. It is in Palestine that the majority of the events recorded in the Bible actually

**Sometimes spelled "Accadian."

occurred. As yet, however, there is less archaeological material from Palestine which has vital meaning in relation to the Bible than from Mesopotamia. The principal reason for this is that comparatively little written material has been found in Palestine. Being so near Egypt its people were able to secure ample supplies of papyrus, and only rarely used clay tablets; in the damper climate of Palestine the papyrus usually deteriorated rapidly. Palestinian archaeology would be in a very unsatisfactory condition if it had to stand entirely alone. Fortunately that is not the case. Palestine was on the high road of commerce between Mesopotamia and Egypt, and its ruins contain many signs of contacts with both lands.⁵ It is well that excavation was slower in getting started in Palestine than in either of these regions. Without the great help which inscriptional material would afford, it needed to profit by advanced methods of digging, and also by knowledge of the meaning of objects imported from countries whose cultural history was already worked out to some extent.

A great step forward was made in 1890 when Dr. (later Sir) William Flinders Petrie, already a veteran of Egyptian excavation, spent six weeks excavating in southern Palestine, and in that brief time discovered two principles which have been of incalculable importance in all subsequent Palestinian archaeology.

The first of these was the importance of the "tell." Previous excavators had frequently been disappointed by the fact that a place bearing the name of a Biblical city would prove to have no remains earlier than the time of the Roman Empire. Petrie found the reason for this. In early days in Palestine it was most vital that a city be capable of defense. Hence it was always desirable to build it on a hill, provided the hill had a good source of water. Here walls would be

⁵The Egyptian monument pictured on Fig. 21 was found in the heart of Palestine at Beth-shan.

built, and within their confines houses would be constructed, consisting largely of undressed blocks of stone, set in a mud mortar. Rubbish would accumulate in the streets, and would be covered over with dirt washed from the roofs or sides of the houses. When one of these houses fell, the projecting rocks might be pulled out, the rest of the ruin flattened off, and a new house built on top. Thus even in normal times the hill tended to rise appreciably.

Inevitably the time would come when an enemy would prove strong enough to conquer and destroy the city. It might have lasted as little as fifty years, or as much as five hundred. Eventually either the destroying people, or some later group would desire to build a city of their own in the neighborhood. Since the number of situations capable of good defense and containing a suitable source of water was limited, the same place was apt to be selected for the new city. The ruins would be flattened down, and new buildings placed on top of them. The same wall might be repaired and enlarged, or a new one might be constructed. Thus constantly the hill grew higher, and the inhabitants lived above the ruins of many previous settlements.

This continued until the time of the Roman Empire, when the legions put an end to banditry and established such peace and security as had hardly been known before. By this time the series of ruins had generally become quite high, and the daily trip down to the fields in the level country and back to the top of the hill at night was most irksome, particularly when the walls seemed no longer to be needed. Frequently the inhabitants of a town became so dissatisfied that they established new homes in the valley and carried the old name along with them. The hill was deserted and soon all appearances of habitation on it disappeared. Rain washed down its sides and in time it was completely forgotten that it had ever held a town.

The name might be preserved by a village a mile or two away, while the hill eventually received some nondescript name such as "hill of beans." Most of these names begin with the word "tell" which is modern Arabic for hill or mound. Hence, archaeologists use the term to designate an artificial hill which contains ruins of an ancient city. There are hundreds of these tells in Palestine, and their shape is so distinctive that often it is easy to recognize them even from quite a distance.⁶

This discovery solved the problem of places with ancient names but without early ruins. It gave the clue to the location of many an ancient site which otherwise might have remained undiscovered. It provided the archaeologist with the great privilege of beginning his excavation, in many cases, in ruins antedating New Testament times, without having to dig carefully and laboriously through later material. It provided important places for research where it was unnecessary to disturb modern houses in order to dig (though sometimes there is a Moslem shrine on the top of the tell, making inaccessible the very place where the city records would be most apt to be found). Finally, it showed that in many places a relative chronology could be easily established, since the later cities would naturally be above the earlier ones.

The second great discovery which Petrie made was the importance of pottery for dating. For many years other scholars questioned the value of this discovery, but now opposition to it has about disappeared. Petrie pointed out that pottery, or earthenware dishes, gave a remarkable criterion for fixing chronology. After the invention of pottery in prehistoric times, it was used wherever people lived. Once clay is baked into pottery, it is virtually indestructible. Even if broken into small pieces it is immediately recognizable as distinct from any natural material. Inevitably most dishes

⁶See picture of the tell of ancient Beth-shan on Fig. 22.

are broken in time. Once broken, the pottery would be very difficult to repair satisfactorily, while the cost of replacing it was not great. So wherever people have lived in Palestine, pieces of pottery are quite certain to be found.

There are many ways in which pottery could vary from time to time. These include its general shape, the shape of the handle, the shape of the rim, the type of firing, the color of the dish, the type of decoration, the color of decoration, etc.⁷ There are so many possibilities of variation that styles constantly changed, sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly (in the latter case the coming of a new ethnic group is usually indicated).

As soon as a few mounds had been excavated and the pottery of the various strata arranged in sequence, it was possible to take bits of pottery from the side of an unexcavated mound and to make a judgment as to its equivalence with those from a particular level of an excavated mound. Specialists in Palestinian pottery have acquired sufficient skill to date many sherds within half a century and thus to know when a site was occupied, simply from examining the pottery strewn on its side or washed out by the rain. It is hard to overestimate the great importance of this discovery for the increase of our knowledge of the history of ancient Palestine.

From the excavation of Palestinian sites have come many discoveries of great importance to Bible students. Some of these will be mentioned later on.

Since the problems of excavation in Syria are quite similar to those of Palestine, Syria can be included under this head. However, a somewhat larger amount of inscriptional material has been found in the region north of Palestine. An outstanding discovery has been a large collection of tablets found at Ras Shamra in northern Syria

⁷See picture of samples of prehistoric pottery from a Mesopotamian site on Fig. 23.

containing a new type of alphabetic cuneiform writing. These tablets tell us much about ancient Canaanite religion, and throw light on the development of the Hebrew language.

While the great bulk of archaeological discoveries relating to the Bible have come from the three regions we have listed, it should also be mentioned that Asia Minor has furnished material relating to the Hittite Empire in early times, and to the journeys of Paul in the Christian era.⁸ Discoveries have also been made in Persia relating to the book of Esther.⁹

II. ASPECTS OF THE RELATION BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

General Corroboration

There are four ways in which archaeological material proves of special importance and interest to the student of the Bible. The first of these may be designated as general corroboration. Many parts of the Bible describe a life that is very different from that to which we are accustomed today. It refers to customs which are utterly unfamiliar to us. We read in it of places whose names we otherwise would not know and of people who seem very outlandish and strange to us. It is easy, therefore, for one to get the impression that the whole thing is simply a series of legends or that it is an artificial story constructed in order to present certain ideas.

In 1800, there was little external evidence available to counteract such an impression. Today the situation is entirely different. During the past century there has been dug from the ground a tremendous amount of material throwing light upon conditions in ancient times in Bible lands. From it we are able to reconstruct the history not

⁸Sir. Wm. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, (New York: 1896). For a more recent popular work, relying however on good sources, see H. V. Morton, *In the Steps of St. Paul*, (New York: 1937).

⁹For a good popular account of this material, see I. M. Price, *The Monuments and the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia: 1925), pp. 408-411.

only of the political events but also of the life and culture of those areas during long periods. A new world has risen from the dust and it is interesting to see how this world makes vivid and real the world described in the pages of the Bible.

For a brief idea of this particular type of approach to the Bible we might look at a few of the outstanding features of the general background of the Old Testament. Thus we find that most of the history in the Old Testament centers around the descendants of one man, Abraham. Abraham is described as living in a city called Ur of the Chaldees and as being called by the Lord to leave his environment and go out into a distant country which the Lord would show him.

How much more living and natural this account becomes when we learn that excavators in recent years have uncovered in Mesopotamia the indications of a great civilization stretching back thousands of years before the time of Christ and many hundreds of years before the time of Abraham himself. Beginning in 1918 a series of excavations at the site of Ur,¹⁰ in the southern part of Mesopotamia, gave evidence that it had been one of the most highly developed of the early cities of the region. In fact, the excavator, C. Leonard Woolley, declared that the standard of living at Ur in 2000 B.C., as evidenced by the quality of the houses of the middle class, was far above what one would have been led to expect by the type of houses used at Babylon at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, well over a thousand years later.¹¹

The book of Genesis states that Abraham left Ur with his family to go into the land of Canaan, but that he stopped at Haran in northwestern Mesopotamia and stayed there until the death of his father. Abraham had already covered

¹⁰Genesis 11:28; 15:7; Neh. 9:7.

¹¹C. L. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, (New York: 1930), pp. 164, 165.

half of the distance from Ur to Palestine. One wonders why he stopped at this particular town of Haran.

It becomes realistic to us when we learn that Ur was the great city of the cult of the moon god, and that the other city which ranked along with Ur as a great center for the worship of this particular deity was Harran.¹² It is easy to see that this would mean many points in common in the general culture and civilization of the two cities and probably also an interchange of population.

The writer was brought up in Calumet, Michigan, in a copper mining district. Once he made a trip to Butte, Montana, center of another of the three leading copper mining districts of the United States. He was much interested there to note the great similarity in the type of people in the two places; in fact, he felt more at home than at any place in the journey of over fifteen hundred miles between the two towns. An older companion stated that he could open the phone book in Butte and running through it could pick out the names of dozens of persons whom he had formerly known in Calumet. There would be far more interchange of population and far more similarity between these two towns than between either one of them and any other city equally remote.

It becomes easy then to imagine Terah when he reached the city of Haran and thought of the "wild west" which seemed to lie beyond, feeling almost as if he were at home again, perhaps meeting some of his old friends, and saying to his son, "This is as far as I am going to go. I am going to stay right here."

After the death of Terah, Genesis tells us that Abraham went on into the land of Canaan. We find him described as traveling up and down through the hilly backbone of

¹²The Akkadian writing has two "r's." Hebrew writing has not preserved the double "r," but it is kept in the New Testament reference in Greek in Acts 7:2,4. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, (Baltimore: 1946), p. 200.

that country keeping his flocks and herds. Occasionally we get glimpses of the active civilization of an area of city life and corruption down in the Jordan Valley. This is quite different from the situation in Palestine today, when the greater part of the settlements are in the hill country and the Jordan Valley is comparatively uninhabited. However, archaeology has shown us that the Jordan Valley was heavily populated in the time of Abraham, while the hill country was a more sparsely populated region in which nomads with flocks and herds could move north and south at will.

After the progress of Abraham from the highly developed city land of Mesopotamia to the more rural area of Palestine, the next great region that is mentioned in the account is Egypt, in which he sojourned during a famine. This becomes more realistic to us as we find remains of ancient life in the Nile Valley showing a prosperity and an outward civilization far beyond that of Palestine. A picture in the tomb of a noble from that early period shows that nomads from Palestine occasionally went down to sojourn there and inscriptions mention the great fertility of Egypt as contrasted with the comparative barrenness of the regions from which the nomads came. The Biblical picture of Egypt as the land of plenty to which people readily turned in time of famine in Palestine, finds vivid illustration in the remains from ancient Egypt.

The beginning of the book of Exodus gives a picture of an Egypt characterized by autocratic power and ruthless might. It shows a nation oppressing the foreigners who had come down to sojourn and treating them with great cruelty. This picture also is illustrated and generally corroborated by the remains of ancient Egyptian civilization. We find that among the Egyptians there was great national pride and an attitude of looking down on the people of other countries as inferior. In fact, the Egyptian symbol for a foreigner, which is used as a distinguishing sign even

before the names of prominent foreign kings, depicts a captive with his hands tied behind his back and blood streaming from a wound in his forehead. In pictures from the Empire period Pharaoh is depicted shooting arrows into a great masses of foreigners. Sometimes we find him pictured in colossal size, holding a number of the enemy in one hand and bringing down his fist upon them to crush them. Many signs of tyrannical power and of brutal hatred of foreigners are found in the remains of the ancient Egyptian empire and vividly corroborate the Biblical picture of Egyptian oppression.

The book of Joshua depicts the Israelites as entering the land of Palestine and dispossessing the previous inhabitants. From this time on, for many centuries, the hilly backbone of the country remained in Israelite possession, although sections of it were under control of other nations until the time of David, who conquered a foreign stronghold (Jerusalem) to make it his new capital city. Sometimes students read only the vivid accounts of great victories in the book of Joshua and ignore the sections which suggest that, even after the victories, there was still much land to be conquered. The Bible does not record that Palestine was conquered in a day, or that Israelite domination of the entire land was complete within a generation. But it does give a picture of the displacement of one population by another, and archaeological evidences of such a displacement are very numerous.

Investigation of Palestinian remains shows clearly that a civilization of high material culture but of low ethical standards was displaced by one inferior to it materially, but far superior ethically. In some places the change occurs with startling suddenness, and occasionally a thick layer of ashes separates the two types of civilization. The later one begins from a rather low level of material culture, but steadily climbs until in time it reaches a level higher in

this regard than the one it had displaced. But never, even in its darkest days, do its ethical standards as shown by the material evidence drop as low as those of the Canaanites before their displacement.

According to the Bible, Israelite material prosperity reached a climax in the period of David and Solomon. It is interesting to find that archaeological remains and records show that both in Egypt and Babylonia there was a period of comparative weakness at this time, so that it is one of the few periods when such a strong power as the empire of David and Solomon could have developed in this area without quickly causing active interference on the part of one of the far greater empires. Examination of Palestinian mounds reveals striking material advance at this time. An outstanding example is the great series of stables at Megiddo, showing a large part of an entire city given over to the equipage of Solomon (cf. I Kings 9:15 and 19).

A few centuries later the Bible begins to refer to the coming of a great conquering power from the northeast, consisting of the forces of the Assyrian kings. Many passages in the prophetic books give us vivid pictures of the fear which was aroused as this great aggressor moved forward. About a century ago the palaces of many of the Assyrian kings were excavated. From hundreds of statues and bas-reliefs and thousands of inscriptions a vivid idea was secured of the brutal terrorism which was characteristic of these great conquerors. The picture in the Bible is made vivid and real as we see from these other sources the actual background into which it fits.

The Bible depicts the northern kingdom of Israel as carried away by the Assyrian invaders, and the southern kingdom as taken into captivity a century and a half later by their successors, the Babylonians. Again we find a burnt layer in many of the hills which mark ancient cities; city after city is destroyed and not rebuilt; a few show evidence

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of small settlements above the previous ruins. A great depopulation is vividly indicated in the archaeological remains and fits with the sad picture described in Kings and Chronicles and mourned in the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

After this the Bible presents pictures of the life of the Israelites under the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The picture in Daniel of Nebuchadnezzar looking out over his city and saying, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" is vividly illustrated by the excavation in Babylon of over a million bricks which had the name and titles of Nebuchadnezzar stamped upon each of them.

The Bible tells us of the conquest of Babylon by the newly rising Persian empire, and many clay tablets and physical remains testify to this sharp change in the control of the Near East. A collection of inscriptions on leather belonging to a Persian courier who carried communications between the emperor and his distant outpost as far west as Egypt has come to light recently. The picture in Ezra and Nehemiah of a people rigidly subject to orders which must be sought from a distant ruler corresponds to our evidence about the Persian Empire.

This hasty sketch gives a brief idea of the great interest of archaeology to the Christian from the viewpoint of general corroboration. A whole new world has risen from the dead through the work of the excavator and of the linguist; in the midst of this world we can see the background of the great events described in the Bible.

Special Corroboration

The second reason for interest in archaeology on the part of the Bible student is what might be designated as special corroboration. This differs from general corroboration in that it is not simply a matter of vividly presenting the background or showing the general fitting together of the two sources for reconstruction of history but is rather an

examination in detail of particular points. If the Biblical account represented the imagination of a later time or the attempt to support theories by making imaginary stories of the distant past, one would expect that at point after point minor details would be obviously in error. It is interesting to compare specific details contained in the Bible with specific points of archaeological background, and to see whether the Biblical accounts contain the marks of being late imaginary reconstructions or whether they have indications of verisimilitude that would be found in contemporary documents.

Here the most immediate observation concerns the many names of kings, both Israelite and foreign, contained in the Biblical story. We must remember that the Bible as we have it represents something that has been copied and re-copied many times. Under such circumstances, the preservation of names of a type no longer used is very difficult. When the Bible refers to an Egyptian or Mesopotamian king, there is the additional problem of the manner of writing a foreign name. This name might contain sounds unfamiliar to the Hebrew ear and be written ordinarily in an entirely different system of writing from that of the Hebrews. The carvers of the monuments had the same problem in reverse, when they dealt with Hebrew names but had to write them in their own system. Under these circumstances it would not be at all strange if the names in the Bible and the names on the monuments were to show little relationship to one another. Yet in dozens of instances we find names of kings in the Bible and on the contemporary records which are easily recognizable as being the same. They occur in the Bible in the chronological order which the monuments show to be correct. To realize how difficult it would be for this to occur accidentally, imagine the average American of today setting out to write a story of events, say in 1838, and correctly naming the governors

of half a dozen states at that time, without having access to modern reference books. It is doubtful if the average American could even be certain who were Presidents of the United States and of Mexico in 1838 without first using reference books of a type not available to the original writers of the Bible.

The similarity of the Biblical names to those used on the monuments, and the correctness of the order in which they occur, provide a striking corroboration of the general accuracy of the historical narrative. In addition, they give proof of the remarkable care that was taken by the Hebrews in copying and recopying the Old Testament. Careful examination of the many instances of this type, and comparison with the relatively poor preservation of names in many other ancient writings (as, for instance, the Greek translation of the Old Testament), provide a mass of material for study of the matter of special corroboration. While occasionally a problem in this field is as yet unsolved, the number of instances where the equivalence is certain is large enough to constitute a strong argument for the accuracy of the history involved.¹³

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Professor Dougherty of Yale University wrote a volume in the series of Yale Oriental Researches entitled, "Nabonidus and Belshazzar." In this book he examined all the cuneiform evidence and found that it proved that at this time Belshazzar was the actual ruler and commander of the army even though ranking as co-king along with his father rather than as sole king.

During subsequent centuries references to the destruction of Babylon make no mention of Belshazzar. Possibly he was the individual selected by the Persians as the target for their vilification, the one who was considered to be the incarnation of all the evils which they opposed, as is customarily done by nations at war, selecting some one of the opposite side to be the individual target for their hatred. At any rate, until the time of Josephus, who uses Daniel as his source, we have no other ancient record which preserves

the name of Belshazzar or the fact of his power in the kingdom.

Dougherty points out that the book of Daniel has accurately preserved the facts regarding his name, his power, and his death at the time of the conquest. In addition to this, he mentions that it has preserved the record of a dual rulership, in that three times in this chapter (Daniel 5:7, 16, 29) reference is made to the honor of becoming "the third ruler in the kingdom." In the opinion of Professor Dougherty, such an accurate representation of the actual situation in this point, which seems to have been forgotten otherwise, weighs strongly against the widespread theory that the book of Daniel represents the ideas of the Maccabean period four hundred years after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and suggests instead a much earlier date for the book.¹⁵

In the instance which we have just examined, the archaeological evidence at first seemed to point in the direction of a serious inaccuracy in the Biblical narrative, and it was only after additional evidence came to light that it was possible to see the matter as a whole and to realize that the Bible preserved historical facts which had been otherwise completely forgotten.

BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

Another striking incident, somewhat similar in nature, is connected with the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt. In Exodus 1:11 it is stated that the Israelites "built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses." In chapter 5 it is related that after Moses' request for alleviation of the oppression Pharaoh gave orders that it be made still worse. He declared that straw would no longer be given them; they must gather it for themselves and yet be held responsible for the same number of bricks as before (vss. 7-11). "So the people were scattered abroad throughout

¹⁵R. P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar*, (New Haven: 1929), pp. 199,200.

all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw" (vs. 12). Naturally they complained at this increase in their labors, but Pharaoh refused to listen to them, and declared his intention to treat them severely, saying, "There shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks" (vs. 18).

Over sixty years ago a bit of evidence came to light which seemed at first to give a remarkable special corroboration to the account. Professor E. Naville conducted excavations in 1883 at Tell el-Maskhutah in the Wadi Tumilat in north-eastern Egypt. It was his opinion that this was the ancient Pithom, which the oppressed Israelites had built.

His publication of the results quotes the following statement from Mr. Villiers Stuart, who had visited the site during the excavation: "I carefully examined round the chamber walls, and I noticed that some of the corners of the brickwork throughout were built of bricks *without straw*. I do not remember to have met anywhere in Egypt bricks so made."¹⁶ Evidently he felt that these were the very bricks which the Hebrews had been compelled to make without straw.

However, we must always be cautious, for the cause of Biblical knowledge is never advanced by hasty conclusions. The statement in Exodus 1:11 that the Israelites were forced to build the city of Pithom does not by any means prove that they were still working there when the incident recorded in Chapter 5 occurred many years later. Moreover, there has been grave question as to the correctness of Naville's identification of Tell el-Maskhutah, and most Egyptologists incline now to the opinion that Pithom was at Tell Retabeh, eight and a half miles further west. Thus it is by no means certain that the bricks which Mr. Stuart observed to be bricks from a city built by the Israelites, and the validity

¹⁶E. Naville, *The Store City of Pithom and the Route of the Exodus*, (London: 1903), p. 9.

partly made with straw and partly without are actually of the incident as a case of special corroboration becomes highly doubtful.

There remains, however, the possibility that it is a case of general corroboration, giving evidence that such incidents occurred in Egypt as Exodus 5 describes, though leaving the particularly instance without any specific evidence bearing upon it. Even this was strongly questioned by the late Professor T. Eric Peet of Liverpool University, who commented on Mr. Stuart's statement as follows: "It is almost inconceivable that any traveller in Egypt should make this statement with regard to the use of straw in bricks, for though straw has been used both in ancient and modern times, its use is somewhat rare, more particularly in ancient times. What is more, the writer of this passage in the narrative is certainly under some strange delusion as to the function of the straw when used. Its purpose is to bind the mud more tightly together, though as a matter of fact the Nile mud coheres so well of itself that no binding material is really necessary. Consequently the refusal of the task-masters to provide the Israelites with straw would not in the slightest degree increase the difficulty of their labours. As a piece of local colour the whole incident is unsatisfactory, and goes to prove the writer's ignorance of Egyptian customs rather than his close acquaintance with them, as is so often averred."¹⁷

When a noted Egyptologist thus believes the Biblical statements to be out of touch with reality, what is the correct attitude to take? Certainly the proper response is not one of two extremes. One should not proceed to vilify him or to question his motives. That is between him and God, who alone knows the inner motives and thoughts. An argument should not be constructed from motives except when the evidence for such a conclusion is complete and un-

¹⁷T. E. Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament*, (Liverpool: 1924), p. 99.

answerable. The cause of Christianity advances by careful consideration of facts and evidence, not by superficial conclusions or by substitution of name-calling for patient research.

On the other hand, one must not be too hasty about deciding that Professor Peet's conclusions on this particular point are right. Jesus Christ rested weighty matters upon quotations from the books of Moses, and always referred to them as authoritative and true. If His attitude was wrong, then all belief in His deity must be given up, and the very foundation of Christianity discarded.

The attitude of the one who truly believes in Christ as Saviour and Lord must be one of suspended judgment on the particular point involved, while seeking for more evidence. If there is no question of error in copying or translation of the documents, two considerations still remain: first, that Christians may have been in error in their interpretation of the meaning of the Biblical statement, and second, that further scientific evidence may come to light, either from archaeology, or from some other source. In this particular matter the writer was unable to answer Professor Peet's allegations. Consequently, he suspended judgment until 1946, feeling confident that when all the evidence was in, it would show that God's Word was dependable.

Strangely, the answer to the problem has come from modern chemistry. Dr. Irving A. Cowperthwaite, a Boston industrial engineer, formerly a member of the department of chemistry at Columbia University, gave a paper at the 1946 meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation, which called attention to the probable solution to the difficulty. Edward G. Acheson, noted American chemist and inventor early in this century, after his invention of "Carborundum," and his discovery that graphite could be produced artificially, became interested in the fact that American clays

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were considered far inferior to those imported from Germany, which possessed a far higher degree of plasticity and greater tensile strength, despite the fact that often their chemical composition was similar to that of the American clays. This problem aroused the inventor's curiosity.

Discovering that the best foreign clays generally came from a secondary source, to which they had been carried by a stream of water, he thought of the possibility that small amounts of organic matter suspended in the water might have profoundly altered the workability of the clay, even though so slight as to be extremely difficult to detect by chemical analysis. Testing this possibility by taking types of clay that were difficult to work and adding to them small amounts of various types of organic matter, he finally discovered a tremendous improvement when gallotannic acid was used. In this article in the *Transactions of the American Ceramic Society*, Vol. 6, p. 31 (1904), he added the following remarks:

"I made an effort to find in the history of clay-working some record of the addition of vegetable or organic matter to clay. Only one instance could I find, that of the Egyptians as recorded in Exodus 5. The accepted theory of using the straw fiber as a binding agent for the clay never had appealed to me, and it now seemed likely those ancient people were familiar with the effect I had discovered. I procured some oat straw, boiled it in water, decanted the resultant reddish-brown liquid and mixed it with clay. The result was like that produced with gallotannic acid, and equal to the best I had obtained. This explained why the straw was used, and why the children of Israel were successful in substituting stubble for straw, a course that would hardly be possible were the fiber of the straw depended upon as a bond for the clay, but quite feasible where the extract of the plant was used."

As a result of this Acheson concluded that "Egyptianized Clay" would be a fitting name for straw-treated earths.

The great increase in plasticity and workability which the straw produced in the clay makes it easy to see why

taking away the straw from the Israelites was, indeed, a means of greatly increasing the difficulty of their work. It also shows how even stubble could be useful to them. Moreover, it indicates clearly that the absence of visible marks of straw in an ancient brick is no proof that the brick was made without its help. An incident in the Bible which was difficult to understand becomes crystal clear on the reasonable assumption that the ancient Egyptians were already familiar with a practical scientific procedure which was completely forgotten until its rediscovery within the present century. Such an instance should also lead to caution about assuming that there is a mistake in the sacred narrative, simply because we may not yet be in a position to understand it fully.

The matter of special corroboration is a large subject. Numerous illustrations of it might be cited, for many remarkable correspondences between Biblical statements and archaeological discoveries have been found. Yet it is vital that its nature be properly understood. As we have already noticed, the Bible is not a book of history, in the sense that its purpose is to describe political movements and social conditions in the past. It is rather a presentation of religious ideas.

The Christian finds in the Old Testament the description of God's relation to the universe, and of His preparation for the coming of His Son to be the Saviour of the world. In the New Testament he finds the account of the One foretold in the Old Testament, and the presentation of His relation to those who believe on Him.

Thus ancient history is only partially presented in the Bible. The Old Testament does not attempt to set forth a full history of Israel, but rather a description of God's relations with the people which He chose as His instrument for giving His revelation and for bringing His Son into the world. Sometimes events of great importance in the political

or economic life of the Hebrews are scarcely touched upon, while great space is devoted to what was important for their spiritual lives.

It would be absurd to look for archaeological corroboration of every statement in the Bible. A large portion of the Book deals with matters which are not susceptible of archaeological confirmation. Nor can we expect that every important event in the history of Bible times will be described in the Bible, since that is not the purpose of the Book. Just as one could not write a handbook of chemistry or geology from the Bible, neither can one expect to write a full history of ancient times from it.

An interesting illustration of the fact that the main purpose of the Bible is not to present political or economic history is found in connection with I Kings 9:26-28, where mention is made of the building of Solomon's seaport at Ezion-geber on the shore of the Red Sea, but nothing is said of the great smelter or refinery which he built there to prepare the metals to be sent to Ophir on his ships.

Dr. Nelson Glueck, formerly Director of the American School of Oriental Research at Jerusalem, and now President of the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati, excavated at Ezion-geber in 1938-40. He found there a complex of industrial plants with air-channels connecting the rooms so arranged as to utilize the wind which blows steadily southward at that point. He says of it:

"The entire town, in its first and second periods, was a phenomenal industrial site. A forced draft system for the furnaces was employed, and later abandoned and forgotten, to be re-discovered only in modern times. Ezion-geber was the Pittsburgh of Palestine, in addition to being its most important port."¹⁸

Thus archaeological research has thrown light on a phase of the power and wisdom of Solomon not even mentioned in the Bible, and this discovery, like that of the true signi-

¹⁸N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, (New Haven: 1940), pp. 89-104.

ficance of the straw in Egyptian bricks, shows that much applied science which was known in Bible times has been lost and only recently re-discovered.

It is important for the Bible student to remember that archaeology also does not give a complete picture of ancient times. At best it is only a partial means for construction of such a history. A comparatively small portion of the material objects used in antiquity has been preserved, and their interpretation is often difficult. The inscriptions were not usually written in order to tell future ages exactly what happened, but to fill some present purpose. Even the historical inscriptions of the Assyrian kings cannot be accepted at every point as true history, since their purpose was to glorify the king, rather than necessarily to give a true history. Sometimes archaeologists find evidence that such an inscription deliberately lied. Reconstruction of ancient history from archaeological sources is often a long and difficult task.

In addition to this, most of the inscriptional material has come from Egypt and Mesopotamia, lands far remote from Palestine. Often there are contacts between these lands and Israel, but we could hardly expect their statements to be identical even in references to the same event. Japanese and American war communiqués might sound very different, even when giving news of the same battle.

A unique feature of the Bible is that it contains denunciations of Israelite people and Israelite kings for their wickedness. Its accounts are far more objective than those from these other lands, which constantly reveal their political bias. It would be unnatural to expect verbal correspondence between the statement of an Israelite about a contact between Israel and Assyria, and that of an Assyrian. Each might know details which were unknown to the other. Each would select certain matters which he considered interesting and worth recording. Yet comparison often brings

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Help in Biblical Interpretation

The third reason for the Christian's interest in archaeology is in some ways more important than either of the two that have been mentioned thus far. The important thing about the Bible is not the particular sounds of its words, but the meanings which they convey. Most Americans read the Bible in an English translation which has little similarity of sound to the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek words which were originally written. Although its vital teachings are spiritual, they are given in human words, and against a background of material things. Anything that enables the Christian to understand these words better, or to have a clearer understanding of their background, is of tremendous importance. Since he does not accept the Bible upon a basis of human evidence, but because of the authority of his Lord, both general and special corroboration are comparatively incidental in their interest for him. It is often thrilling to see how new evidence fits in with the statements of the Scripture, and such material may be helpful in removing the difficulties of sincere inquirers, but for the Christian anything that gives him a clearer understanding of the Bible's message is of far greater importance.

As yet, the archaeological material which is outstanding in this regard is probably less in quantity than that which comes under the first two heads, and it is for this reason that we have given it the third place in our outline. Nevertheless, there are a great many points at which the historical statements and the teachings of the Bible are made far easier to understand in view of new light upon the meaning of the words or upon the nature of the cultural background.

As a vivid illustration of this, we may note how important it is for the study of certain Old Testament prophetic books to understand the nature of the Assyrian and Babylonian menace. One cannot fully understand the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah without a realization of this terrific

and brutal force which was bringing such tremendous fear to the nations of the west.

Some idea of this situation may be gained from the following typical passage from the annals of Ashur-nasir-pal II, an Assyrian king who reigned from 883-859 B.C.:

"I took the city, and 800 of their fighting men I put to the sword, and cut off their heads. Multitudes I captured alive, and the rest of them I burned with fire, and carried off their heavy spoil. I formed a pillar of the living and of heads over against his city gate and 700 men I impaled on stakes over against their city gate. The city I destroyed, I devastated, and I turned it into a mound and ruin heap. Their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire."¹⁹

After reading a few such statements it is easy to understand what the prophets became so excited about, and their allusions become much clearer.

Naturally certain points already mentioned under specific corroboration could well have been considered here. For instance, the statement that Daniel would be made the third ruler in the kingdom was not at all clear to us before the discovery of the fact that Belshazzar was the second ruler. Similarly, at many points where the Biblical statements are more clearly understood by explanation from archaeological discoveries, these discoveries serve as special corroboration of the accuracy of the Biblical narrative.

We have already referred to the fact that I Kings 9:26-28 states that Solomon built a navy of ships at Ezion-geber on the shore of the Red Sea. Until recently it was very hard to see why Solomon would care to build a fleet of ships so far away from Jerusalem. A long and difficult journey was necessary through the desert overland from Jerusalem to the northern end of the eastern branch of the Red Sea. Professor Nelson Glueck tells us that it took him thirteen

¹⁹D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, (Chicago: 1926), Vol. I, p. 156.

days on camel back to travel to Ezion-geber from the southern end of the Dead Sea, which is already a long distance over rough country from Jerusalem.

If Solomon wished to trade with Ophir, which probably included the shore of Africa and the opposite shore of South Arabia, it would have been much easier to have gone down to Suez by ship and then after a short portage to have continued by ship from there. This would have been far less expensive than to carry the products of Palestine over land all this long distance to Ezion-geber, although the return trip with the gold would not be so difficult, since gold is much more expensive in proportion to its weight and volume.

Dr. Glueck found the answer to this problem. In the desert not far north of Ezion-geber he discovered ancient copper and iron mines which had been worked in the time of Solomon.²⁰ This corroborated the statement in Deuteronomy 8:9 that Palestine was a land containing copper and iron, which had often been doubted in the past, since such mines had been unknown in Palestine proper. Here, however, was evidence of its truth and also explanation of the problem of Ezion-geber. It would be much more economical to carry the metal from the mines to the Red Sea, take it from there by sea to Ophir, and exchange it for the far more valuable gold, than to carry it over land to Jerusalem. Thus a reason is seen for building the port here. In addition, as we have seen, Glueck found evidence that Solomon built an elaborate copper refinery at Ezion-geber covering an acre and a half. Nothing like it has yet been found elsewhere in the Near East. This brief statement in the book of Kings gives us, in the light of the work of the archaeologist, a glimpse of the far-flung economic power of Solomon's empire. Thus archaeology sometimes provides a better understanding of the meaning of

²⁰N. Glueck, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 50-88.

Biblical statements or customs, and helps us to know their true significance.

RACHEL'S THEFT

Genesis 31 contains another instance where archaeological research has enabled us to understand a Biblical passage better. The chapter tells of the sudden departure of Jacob from Mesopotamia after he had spent many years with his uncle Laban, whose daughters he had married. Unknown to Jacob, his wife, Rachel, stole Laban's "teraphim" or household gods. Three days later Laban returned and found that Jacob had gone, taking with him Laban's daughters and grandchildren without ever having stopped to say, "Goodbye," to him. Jacob had also taken the great number of flocks and herds which he had acquired, leaving Laban far poorer than when Jacob's property seemed to be part of his possessions. All this made Laban angry, but it seems to have counted as nothing with him in comparison with the fact that the household gods were missing. He gathered an expedition and pursued Jacob seven days, right to the borders of Palestine.

This must have been quite an expensive undertaking. It would cost a good deal to feed and equip a large enough expedition to go so far and then be strong enough to strike terror to Jacob's heart, for Jacob must, of course, have had a large number of herdsmen to take care of all his flocks and herds. Laban's force was sufficiently strong to enable him to say to Jacob, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt" (vs. 29). Why was Laban so tremendously excited about these household gods? The explanation was not clear to us until recently.

It was suggested by some mediaeval interpreters that they might have been made of gold and that consequently, their value would account for Laban's great excitement. However, as we read the account we see that this could hardly have been the case. Jacob seems to have been as-

tounded at being accused of such a terrible thing. Vehemently denying that he had stolen anything that was Laban's, he invited his father-in-law to search all his property, declaring that he would kill anyone in whose possession these household gods might be found. After all the rest of the camp had been searched, Laban came to the tent of Rachel. Rachel sat on the teraphim, and her father did not suspect that they were underneath her. Under these circumstances it would hardly seem that the amount of gold which they could have contained would have paid more than a fraction of the cost of the expedition which Laban undertook in the hope of recovering them. Why then were they so important?

The whole story is rather incomprehensible without further information as to why Laban was so anxious to recover these teraphim. The fact that their importance is not explained is hardly compatible with the idea that the story might be the product of a much later period, when the custom no longer existed. In such a case the reason would certainly have been stated.

A novelist writing fifty years ago would hardly have stopped to point out the importance of parts of a harness or of a buggy, which would have been thoroughly familiar to any reader of his day. One writing such a novel today would be sure to explain these matters, since few people today are familiar with them. It is quite clear, therefore, that the original readers of Genesis 31 must have understood fully why the teraphim were so important, or the writer would have explained the matter. Probably, however, by the time of the Israelite kingdom the explanation had been completely forgotten, and it remained a mystery until recently.

Beginning in 1925 discoveries were made at the ancient town of Nuzi in northeastern Mesopotamia. Here were

found a great many legal contracts from a period a little later than the time of Jacob. These threw much light upon the life of the people there. A legal document from the area gave evidence that among the ethnic group which was dominant at Harran, the region where Laban lived, possession of the household gods gave a son-in-law the right to appear in court and claim the estate of his deceased father-in-law.²¹ Now it becomes perfectly clear to us why Laban was so tremendously aroused about the loss of these household gods! Jacob had already taken a great part of his possessions. He feared that after his death Jacob would take all the rest from his sons. It would seem very likely that this was Rachel's actual purpose in taking the household gods. It makes clear and understandable why Jacob and Laban put up a pile of stones and said over it the Mizpah declaration: "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another" (Gen. 31:49). They called upon God to watch that neither of them should cross over this boundary line in order to injure the other; that Laban should not come in order to bring physical injury to Jacob, and that Jacob should not go back with the household gods after Laban's death in order to defraud his brothers-in-law of the property which should belong to them.

We are glad to note that Jacob made no effort to use the household gods in this way. At Shechem he called on everyone in his party to take all the foreign gods which he might have and to bury them (Gen. 35:2-4).

Thus light from archaeology makes clear what was previously a rather obscure passage, and in addition, casts grave doubt on the theory of some critical scholars, that this passage originated many centuries after the events described.

²¹Sidney Smith and C. J. Gadd, *Revue Assyriologie*, Vol. 23, (1928), pp. 126, 127, and E. A. Speiser, *Mesopotamian Origins*, (Philadelphia: 1930), p. 162.

The Old Testament and the New Testament both deal with events which did not occur in a vacuum, but in the midst of a world of stirring life and activity. Fuller knowledge of the events and customs of their times enables us to understand their statements better, and thus eventually contributes even to our understanding of the spiritual message which is their real purpose.

Of course, caution is necessary in the interpretation of archaeological evidence. Science moves forward not only by gathering data, but also by forming hypotheses and carefully testing them to see whether they offer a true and adequate explanation of the facts. Care must be taken lest preliminary archaeological hypotheses lead us to hasty and erroneous explanations of Biblical statements.

Two developments from which great advances may be expected are the texts found at Ras Shamra in northern Syria and those found at Mari on the Euphrates. The first of these throws much light on Canaanite religion and may be helpful in securing more exact definition of rare Hebrew words and phrases. The latter, discovered by the French in their excavations shortly before the war, and now beginning to be published in full, will add greatly to our understanding of the times of the Patriarchs. Already most scholars have made almost revolutionary changes in their ideas of early chronology as a result of evidence from Mari. Yet in both these collections, the language is sometimes difficult, and the material is often fragmentary. Before it has all been sifted out and its meaning quite generally agreed upon, many tentative theories are sure to be put forward, and some of these will find a place in popular books written years after the theories have been abandoned by scholars.

The Problem of Derivation

The fourth reason why archaeology is of special interest to the Christian is because of its relation to the great

question of "derivation." An interesting incident will make clear what is meant by this term. Early in the present century Professor Friedrich Delitzsch, Professor of Assyriology at the University of Berlin, was asked to lecture at a series of meetings to raise funds for the excavations of the German Orient Society at Babylon. The lectures received special prominence because of the presence of an audience of internationally known figures. Professor Delitzsch pointed out the great contribution that excavations had made to the understanding of the meaning of Biblical terms; he showed that at many points the whole background of the Bible had become more real and vivid as the result of these discoveries; he indicated that at various specific points archaeology had demonstrated its accuracy.

He went on, however, to present what was then to the world at large a rather novel attitude toward the relation of archaeology to the Bible.²² He took the position that most of the elements in the religion of ancient Israel and most of the great events described in connection with the beginning of the world or of the Jewish nation were derived from Babylonian ideas or stories. In fact, Professor Delitzsch went so far as to suggest that at many points the Babylonian religion was superior to that contained in the Old Testament.

Great excitement was aroused throughout the world by these so-called "Babel and Bible" lectures, although most of the viewpoints which he presented were already known to the scholarly world. A large literature was produced as a result of his discussion, some writers maintaining that these stories and religious beliefs were original in Israel, and others claiming that they had been taken over from Babylon, from Egypt, or from some other ancient nation.

It is readily apparent what this discussion means to the Christian. Is the Bible giving us definite facts when it

²²F. Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible*, (Chicago: 1903:), 1st and 2nd lectures.

tells of a great event in the early history of the world, or is it simply repeating in a purified form a myth or legend which arose in Babylonia or in Egypt? Are the religious ideas contained in the Bible the result of a revelation from God, or were they taken over from some contemporary heathen nation?

It is interesting to note how far the ground had been prepared for this attitude by the statements of some of the first students of Biblical archaeology. As evidence on Biblical times began to come from the Near East, it became customary to seize on any similarity to a Biblical story or teaching, no matter how slight, and to adduce it as evidence of the truth of the Biblical narrative. Naturally enough, such an attitude prepared the way for an early reversal. If materials which were supposed to be related to Biblical teachings or stories were shown to come from a far earlier period, and to have a thoroughly heathen background, it would do much more to upset faith in Biblical authority than the original argument could possibly have done to produce it.

It is for this reason that it is very important that those who quote archaeological evidence in support of Biblical teachings be certain of their facts, and do not present material irrelevant to their purpose. Christianity is never advanced by unproved facts or shoddy inferences. Statements that go far beyond the evidence have a way of boomeranging and producing an effect opposite to that which their makers intended.

Probably the extreme of the "derivation" method was reached by Professor Jensen of the University of Marburg, who concluded a lengthy work on the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh with the assertion that the story of Jesus Christ is merely a modification of that of Gilgamesh, and

that Christians actually are not worshipping a historical character but merely a reflection of a Babylonian hero.²³

While the extreme views of Jensen have received comparatively little following among scholars, certain aspects of this position have come to be widely accepted. In almost any book written early in this century which deals with the first part of Genesis one may find the statement that Genesis 1 was derived from a Babylonian original. This was so widely stated that few students took the trouble to examine the facts carefully and to seek for positive evidence as to whether the account in Genesis 1 and the so-called "Babylonian Epic of Creation" were actually related or not. Instead of trying to determine what the facts are, it has been the usual course to assume the facts and then to argue about their interpretation. Thus the effort has been made to show that the Babylonian story, which was doubtless compiled many centuries before the time of Moses, either was later than Genesis 1 and derived from it, or that both stories came from a parent source.

However, if one would simply read the Babylonian epic, which scholars generally call "Enuma Elish" from its first two words, one could not but be struck by the fact that its whole literary structure is very different from that of Genesis 1. Actually it is a story of the gradual coming into being of two groups of antagonistic deities, and of the ensuing bitter conflict. The leading deity of Babylon heads the winning side, and therefore procures the outstanding position in the cosmos. More or less as a by-product of the action, he sets the sky in place, establishes the earth, puts the moon and stars in motion, and creates men to do service for the gods. The whole treatment is entirely different from the methodical and dignified action of Genesis 1, in which an infinite God proceeds to carry out

²³P. Jensen, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos in der Weltliteratur*, (Strassburg: 1907).

an orderly plan of creation. Careful examination of the Babylonian epic and of the story in Genesis 1 really shows very few points of similarity.

It is true that each of them tells about the creation of the sky and of the earth, of the moon and stars, and of mankind.²⁴ At first sight this looks like a formidable list of similarities. A little reflection, however, leads one to ask the question: "What sort of creation story could be written that would not contain these elements?" Anyone who set out to make a story of the creation of the universe would inevitably include most of these matters.

All that their presence really indicates, is that there is a more or less complete creation story contained in Enuma Elish, and that an account of creation is given in Genesis 1. To show that there was an actual relationship between the two stories we would need similarity of special details such as would not be included in the general concept of a creation story.

To put the idea a bit more clearly, a story of war in China would be quite sure to involve hurling of missiles, pain and death caused to human beings, bitterness and hatred raised on both sides of the conflict. A story of war between Rome and Carthage would be certain to contain these same elements. One might find many additional similarities between almost any two stories of war, but this would by no means prove that the two stories are related or derived one from the other. The actual details

²⁴It is often assumed that Enuma Elish also presents the creation of plants and of animals. While other Mesopotamian stories do contain such accounts, the parts of Enuma Elish which are as yet available to scholars do not contain any account of creation of vegetables, of animals, birds, reptiles, and fishes. Although it is not impossible that these events might be included in the portions of the epic that have not yet been recovered, it is far from certain that this is the case. Also Enuma Elish does not, like Genesis 1, describe the creation of the sun. It considers its outstanding deity to be the sun-god and designates him as such. This whole matter is treated, and a translation of Enuma Elish given, in Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, University of Chicago Press, 1942.

of Enuma Elish and Genesis 1 have little in common. In recent years Akkadian scholars have veered increasingly away from the idea that there is any actual contact between the two stories. Thus Professor Chiera, of the University of Chicago, in his book entitled, *They Wrote on Clay*, published in 1938, says on page 119:

"To start from the beginning, let us take the creation story in the first chapter of the Bible. In almost every book dealing with the subject, this story is immediately compared with the Assyrian creation narrative, and deductions are made. A considerable amount of erudition and ingenuity is generally expended on the work, and finally the responses will come in more or less these words: 'The similarities found are not sufficient to suggest either direct borrowing or direct relationship.'"

On page 122 the author continues, "It is useless to hope to get results by comparing a page from a book of philosophy with a drama born out of the passions and emotions of daily life. . . . But, by all means, let us stop wasting time in endeavoring to compare narratives which do not admit of comparison, and let us begin our research from another angle."

This is by no means to suggest that Chiera's book abandons the idea of derivation of Biblical doctrines and incidents from Babylonian sources, but simply to point out that in regard to one outstanding instance which has been presented in book after book as beyond all doubt, Chiera flatly rejects the whole idea of relationship between Genesis 1 and Enuma Elish.

During the past half century Babylonian, Egyptian, Canaanite or other origins have been suggested for hundreds of Biblical ideas and stories. It would be interesting to look at many typical examples, and to note the varying evidence. In the story of creation contained in Genesis 1, as we have shown, practically every element in common with the Babylonian account is one which would

naturally be found in any creation story, and there is no real proof of any relationship.

Quite a different situation exists in relation to the flood. A Babylonian story of a universal flood has been found, which contains many details that are similar to those in the story of the flood in Genesis 6-9. These similarities go far beyond what might naturally be expected in two independent stories of a universal flood.²⁵ They include not only the idea that there was a universal flood in which all mankind except one family perished, but also many other features. Both accounts describe this family as saved by means of a boat rather than by having previously made its way to the top of a very high mountain. Both say that a man was divinely warned in advance that the flood was coming, was directed to build a vessel of prescribed dimensions, and was told to pitch it within and without with bitumen. Both state that all sorts of animals were taken into the boat; both describe it as eventually resting on a mountain; both mention the sending out of birds to ascertain whether the flood had ceased; both declare that after disembarking, an altar was constructed and sacrifices were offered. There are other points at which similarities may exist, although decision on some of them would depend on the precise translation to be given the Hebrew or the Akkadian.

There are also various differences in detail, and entirely different ideas as to the cause and purpose of the events described. Genesis portrays the flood as a manifestation of the wrath of an almighty God against sin, and the preservation of Noah as part of His purpose; the Babylonian account represents the flood as the result of the temper of one god, and the deliverance as caused by the plans of another deity. The Babylonian gods were

²⁵For a summary of the Babylonian flood story see J. Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*. (Princeton: 1946), pp. 28-30.

terrified at the deluge, and crouched with fear or fled to the highest heavens; when the sacrifice was made they gathered above it "like flies."

The great similarity of many small details such as would by no means be necessary to every story of a universal flood suggests very strongly that the two accounts are related. The situation is altogether different from that of Genesis 1 and Enuma Elish. If the creation occurred as described in Genesis 1 it would hardly be expected that anyone living thousands of years later, after most of humanity had put God and His revelation out of their minds, would know its details unless they were received through divine revelation. If a universal flood occurred centuries after the creation, it would be natural to expect that all humanity would recall many of its details for a long time, even though some points would tend to become quite garbled, as people more and more forgot the cause and purpose of the catastrophe. If relationship between Enuma Elish and Genesis 1 were clearly provable, it would strongly suggest that one story was borrowed from the other: such relationship is not present. Extremely probable relationship between the Babylonian Flood story and that of Genesis means one of two things: either one story was borrowed from the other, or both show recollection of a great event which actually occurred.²⁶

It will be impossible within the limits of the present article to examine the many other instances of alleged derivation of Biblical events or doctrines from Babylonian, Egyptian, Canaanite, or other sources. Each instance must be examined on its merits. Such a case as that of Genesis 1, where practically all scholars formerly accepted rela-

²⁶It is an interesting fact that whereas many scholars today divide the flood story in Genesis into two different accounts which they say have been combined by taking a few words or sentences from each alternately, it requires the complete story as contained in Genesis to provide a full parallel to the Babylonian account.

1. Are religious beliefs which the Bible represents as being the result of revelation from God, actually derived from the beliefs of heathen nations?

2. Are events which the Bible presents as fact merely a development of heathen myths or legends?

In view of the wide-spread teaching of both of these ideas, Biblical archaeology is vitally important to the Christian. Only with its help can he carefully examine each suggested instance and determine the true situation regarding it.

III. CONCLUSION

During the past century and a half archaeology has brought to light a tremendous amount of material enabling us to see the Bible not as a book that stands entirely alone, but as one that describes events which occurred in the midst of a great world of many conflicting forces and tendencies. Our Christian denominations were founded by men who believed that the religious teachings of the Bible were revealed to its writers by the Creator of the universe. They believed that God supernaturally directed the writers in such a way that even though they would express their own personalities and use their own literary styles, their writings would be kept from errors of fact, of doctrine, or of judgment, and would present the ideas which God desired should be the basis of the religious life of His people through the ages.

The purpose of the Old Testament was to prepare for the coming of Christ and to lay the foundation for the great doctrines which He and His apostles taught. The purpose of the New Testament is to present and explain these doctrines and to show mankind how they may be saved from the darkness and misery which has come as a result of human sin.

Through the discoveries of archaeology we are in a position to understand many of the external features of the Bible far better than before. We are able to see the reality

tionship as a fact, although explaining it in various ways, but where today most first-hand scholars are coming to recognize that no real relationship exists, should make us cautious about accepting claims of relationship without very careful examination. There is always the possibility that familiarity with Biblical language has influenced the translator of the other story at a vital point, or has been used in the attempt to guess what formerly stood in a part of the narrative where the tablet has been broken. The elements of suggested relationship must be tested to see whether they really prove anything, or are such as might naturally occur in altogether unrelated materials. If relationship is proved, the question must be raised which of the two was borrowed from the other, or whether both show recollection of an actual event.

We must recognize, of course, that the great body of *cultural* features of Biblical history were taken from nations around them, and that such matters as types of literary style might freely come from various sources. It has never been the accepted view of the Christian Church that all the Scripture was dictated by God, or received by the writers through direct revelation. The view of Christians has been that God revealed certain sections of the Bible, and that these are usually labelled by some such phrase as "and the Lord said." The rest of the Bible has been considered to represent the observations and thoughts of the writers, guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and kept by Him from error as to fact, doctrine, or judgment. Thus the book of Luke begins with a statement that the author has carefully investigated and gathered the information in his book. A Biblical writer might secure historical information from a heathen source; the Christian would merely insist that such facts as the writer was led to include in the Scripture were true. The problem of derivation concerns itself properly with two questions:

of the general background of the Bible with a vividness which was previously impossible. We are able to test the accuracy of its particular statements at many points and to examine striking instances of special corroboration. Careful study of the archaeological facts makes it possible to determine what is the true situation in regard to the newer views which derive Biblical religious ideas from heathen sources rather than from divine revelation.

Archaeology is a long and arduous study. When its results are described in a popular lecture the impression is sometimes created of an entirely beautiful and romantic quest. Actually, there are long periods of arduous toil, gathering and seeking to understand material features or linguistic facts. This, however, is often enlivened by the discovery of matters of great importance in contexts where they might least be expected. It is indeed a hand-maid of Biblical study and one which should become increasingly known to the Christian Church.

THE AUTHORS

All of whom are members of the
American Scientific Affiliation

Frank Allen:

Dr. Allen has recently retired as Head, Department of Physics, University of Manitoba after 40 years active teaching. He received the B.A. degree (1895) and the M.A. degree (1897) from the University of New Brunswick, Canada, and another M.A. (1900) and the Ph.D. (1902) degrees from Cornell University. His publications number about 40 papers on vision, hearing, and other senses in about 12 journals in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. Dr. Allen is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and member of the Optical Society of America.

Edwin K. Gedney:

Mr. Gedney is a professor at Gordon College of Theology and Missions, Boston. In the university he specialized along the lines of geology and mineralogy and received the Ph.B. (1926) and Sc.M. (1928) degrees from Brown University and the M.A. degree (1930) from Harvard. He has presented several technical papers before national geological and mineralogical society meetings. He is a member of the honorary society, Sigma Xi (research), the Mineralogical Society of America, and the Boston Geological Society.

R. Laird Harris:

Dr. Harris is Professor of Biblical Exegesis, Faith Theological Seminary, Wilmington, Delaware. After an